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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Friends, I would like to begin by welcoming the French delegation, which will be with us for a few minutes.

I would like to welcome Ms. Vautrin and her colleagues.

Ms. Vautrin, perhaps you could introduce your colleagues to the members of the committee. We will take about five minutes for this. We will have to change our agenda slightly, but I think it's important to recognize your presence in Ottawa.

Ms. Catherine Vautrin (V.P. French National Assembly and its delegation, French Republican Party): Mr. Chair, thank you for welcoming us here.

We just attended question period, which was fascinating.

Our delegation includes French and European parliamentarians. Arnaud Danjean is a member of the European Parliament. His area of expertise is defence. Tokia Saïfi served as a minister and is now a member of the European Parliament who specializes in foreign affairs and circum-Mediterranean cooperation. Arnaud Robinet is deputy mayor of Reims, the champagne city. Franck Riester is deputy mayor of Coulommiers, which is known for its cheese, as Arnaud laughingly commented. I am just repeating what was whispered in my ear. Both Arnaud and Franck are members of the French Parliament. Maël de Calan is the elected representative of a department in a region in Brittany. He is from the Roscoff commune. I am the vice-president of the National Assembly and a member from Reims, alongside Arnaud Robinet.

We are very pleased that the Canadian government invited us to spend a few days here to learn about Canada's institutional systems and to talk about things that we have in common and that interest us. This morning, we listened to a debate on education and another on immigration that clearly raised some questions.

Mr. Chair, on behalf of our group, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to meet everyone here, and I thank you for welcoming us.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vautrin.

I will ask members of the committee to introduce themselves and tell us what region they represent. There are francophones and anglophones around the table, but most of the members are francophones from across Canada.

We will start with our parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank my colleagues from abroad for being here with us today. On behalf of the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Hon. Mélanie Joly, I thank you for being here with us.

I'm from Edmonton, the capital of Alberta. Alberta has a francophone community made up of over 80,000 francophones and 240 francophiles. We have francophones, francophiles and "franco-curious" people booming.

I am the first Franco-Albertan to hold a seat at the federal level in recent decades. I'm very proud to be here and honoured to meet you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Vandal, it's your turn.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): My name is Daniel Vandal. I am the member for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, a riding in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Winnipeg is in the middle of Canada. Actually, it is in the middle of North America. Saint Boniface—Saint Vital has a significant francophone and Franco-Métis population. Approximately 22% of the population speaks French.

I am pleased to welcome you to Ottawa.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Samson, it's your turn.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): My name is Darrell Samson. I'm an MP from Nova Scotia, and I'm Acadian. I'm sure you've met lots of Acadians. There are several in the room and around this table. I should also say that a third of Quebeckers are of Acadian extraction. As I'm sure you've observed, they are not only a happy people, but also an extremely proud one.

I'm sure you know who the Acadians are. We came from your part of the world and arrived in Acadia, which includes Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. We live all over the world now, but the important thing is that we came to stay.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Lefebvre, your turn.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): I'm not quite as colourful as Mr. Samson.

I'm originally from Kapuskasing, but I'm the MP for Sudbury, a city about five hours' drive north of Ottawa. People call my city the mining capital of the world because it has nine mines. It also has a university and two colleges. I'm originally from Kapuskasing, which is another five hours' drive north.

I am a member of the fourth generation, and we no longer know our Quebec cousins. We have lived in the north for several generations. We were raised in French. My children studied in French. I taught a tax law course at Laurentian University, also in French.

We live outside Quebec, but we live in French. That is our reality on all counts, from education to health to anything family-related.

Like everyone here on our side, I'm a new MP, and I'm very proud to represent my region.

I would also like to welcome you to Ottawa.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

Ms. Lapointe, it's your turn.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Hello, and welcome.

My name is Linda Lapointe. I'm the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles. That is in Quebec, and I live in French.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: That's a little easier. Anybody could do that.

Some members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Rivière-des-Mille-Îles is north of Montreal. It's a suburb that's home to about 100,000 people. It's a pretty suburb located along the Rivière des Mille Îles. If you've ever been to Montreal, you know that Montreal boasts three waterways: the St. Lawrence, the Rivière des Prairies, and the Rivière des Mille Îles. The Rivière des Mille Îles is to the north at the junction of my riding and the Lower Laurentians. It's a very beautiful riding.

I'm very happy to be here.

My ancestors are from Normandy, but we may have a little Acadian blood.

Mr. Darrell Samson: We're probably related.

Some members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Linda Lapointe: So, welcome.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

Mr. Arseneault, it's your turn.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Good afternoon.

My name is René Arseneault. I'm the MP for Madawaska—Restigouche, which is in a little maritime province called New Brunswick.

I am descended from proud Acadians. On my father's side, an Arseneault piloted Pierre Du Gua de Monts's ship, on which Champlain was travelling. On my mother's side, I am a Savoie. My mother is a Savoie, but from the crooked branch because we did not inherit any of the land that all the Savoies own in Europe.

Naturally, I'm proud to be Acadian. In Acadia, people speak French. As you know, Quebec is not the only place where people speak French. That is part of the beauty of Canada's cultural diversity when it comes to languages.

I'm proud to be here and to represent the people of my riding, 82% of whom are francophone. My home is not the Acadia of the sea. Traditionally, songs and poems about Acadia allude to the sea and to fishing. My Acadia is the land and the forest, particularly the lumber industry.

I welcome the French delegation.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. Choquette, you're next.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): My name is François Choquette, and I'm the MP for Drummond.

I'm a member of the Canada-France Interparliamentary Association, but unfortunately, I wasn't able to be there at noon, so I missed you, but I'll take a raincheck for another time.

Thank you for coming. It's very nice to have you.

Drummondville is in Quebec. It's in central Quebec, right between Montreal and Quebec City. Drummondville is the home of poutine, although some people think it's Victoriaville. It's a wonderful place, of course. If you have a chance to go to Quebec and you stop in Drummondville, I would be pleased to welcome you there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. Généreux, it's your turn.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to Canada.

My name is Bernard Généreux, and I'm the MP for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, which is a big riding that borders the St. Lawrence in eastern Quebec. I am honoured to represent the most francophone riding in Canada: 99.999% of the people there are francophone. My wife is the only anglophone in the riding.

Some members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Joking aside, we have special connections to Europe. A company in our area called Premier Tech, which specializes in water treatment, has branches in several places in France. The owner received the Legion of Honour from the president himself last fall, if I'm not mistaken. We are very proud of that.

We would like to strengthen our connections with France. I'll be at the reception that our chair is hosting in your honour in his office this evening, so I look forward to seeing you again later.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Mrs. Boucher, it's your turn.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Good afternoon. My name is Sylvie Boucher. I'm the MP for the most beautiful part of Quebec, the riding of Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix. It's a very large riding that produces, hands down, the best cheese in Canada and—I should be careful here—one of the best in the world.

My riding has landscapes, water, and forests. The people are very welcoming. The vast majority of the people in my riding are francophone.

Welcome.

I'm also the rapporteur for the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, the APF. I'm the only woman representing francophones in the APF.

I'm delighted to have you here.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Boucher.

Mr. Nater, you're next.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is John Nater. I'm the MP for Perth—Wellington. It's a predominantly anglophone riding, but I'm here anyway. Perth—Wellington has a very strong agricultural sector. We have performances, arts and culture, such as Canada's Stratford Festival, the Drayton Festival, and the Stratford Summer Music Festival. It's a very diverse riding.

I'm proud to be here. You are welcome here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nater.

I'm pleased to welcome you here. I wanted everyone to have a chance to introduce themselves. You're also invited to the reception I'll be holding at 6 p.m. in my office, which is room 100 in the Justice Building.

Thank you very much.

We will take a break for a few minutes.

• (1540) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1545)

The Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we will resume our study of the Translation Bureau.

Before we begin, I'd like to mention that today is our friend Mr. Vandal's birthday. I think it's important to acknowledge the birthday of a committee member.

Today we have Michel Doucet, Professor and Director of the International Observatory on Language Rights at the Université de Moncton.

Welcome, Mr. Doucet. The floor is yours for about 10 minutes, and then there will be a discussion with the committee members.

Go ahead.

Mr. Michel Doucet (Professor, Director, Observer of International language rights, Moncton University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will try not to take the full 10 minutes and give my presentation as quickly as possible, so I can answer questions from Committee members.

Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, once again, thank you for welcoming me here today and inviting me to share my thoughts about the use of the Portage machine translation software.

First, allow me to introduce myself. I am a law professor with the University of Moncton's Faculty of Law, and I specialize in language law. In addition to authoring numerous papers, book chapters and books on language rights in Canada, I have also had the opportunity to pursue a highly active legal career in this field, arguing a large number of cases before the courts of various provinces, the Federal Court and the Federal Court of Appeal, as well as a number of cases before the Supreme Court of Canada. I also sat for 10 years on the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

Since 2010, I have directed the International Observatory on Language Rights at the Faculty of Law of the University of Moncton. The Observatory's mandate is to develop, support and promote language rights training and research in the programs offered by the Faculty of Law of the University of Moncton, as well as at provincial, national and international levels.

Since our inception, we have had an impact in a variety of ways. We have hosted a number of symposia on language rights, and I have also attended a significant number of symposia in Canada and around the world.

In keeping with our mandate to promote and research language rights, in 2014, we began publishing the *Language Law Review*, and in 2015 we launched our blog on language rights. In addition, we are about to publish a series of annotated language laws. We also have a "Legislation" section on our website with links to the constitutions of all states around the world as well as references to the various sections they contain that involve language rights. The site also features an interactive bibliography on language rights, annals of language rights, the newsletter, a research network, visiting scholars and guest speakers.

The Observatory also directed the third edition of *Language Rights in Canada*, a reference volume cited numerous times by the courts. I had the honour of co-editing it with the Honourable Michel Bastarache, a former Supreme Court justice.

However, I am not here today to speak about the Observatory, but rather to share my concerns about the decision to make the Portage machine translation software available to federal public servants. Whatever the reasons behind this decision or the software's intended application, I believe this sets a troubling precedent that could have repercussions on the legal and constitutional obligations of federal institutions with respect to official languages.

I am not dismissing the idea that technology can play a role in translation or that these technological tools can save time and money. However, use of these technologies must not come at the expense of the language rights set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Official Languages Act.

In Canada, outside Quebec, particularly at the federal level, French is generally a language of translation. Documents are mostly, if not exclusively, first written in English and then translated into French. Translators are often the ones solely responsible for the quality of French documents, and in instances where there is a dialogue involving both languages, translators can ensure the quality of English documents by identifying ambiguities that would probably not be apparent just by reading one linguistic version. Translators also make it possible for French to be a language of creation, not just a destination. Although machine translation software does have its place, it will never be able to ensure translation quality, since it can only blindly stick to the original text. In the past we have seen too many unfortunate cases where the translation was merely a poor approximation of what was written in the original language, thereby relegating the translated version to a secondary role.

Equality of official languages, a concept inherent to the language rights recognized by Canada, means that exercising these rights must not be seen as simply a response to a request for accommodation. Rather, the goal is to ensure that both official language communities receive service of equal quality in their chosen official language. The federal government's linguistic and constitutional obligations include the obligation to provide the public with services of equal quality in both official languages.

• (1550)

The requirement to have documentation from federal institutions equally accessible to English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians is an important one, given Canada's commitment to ensuring that both languages are of equal value and given their importance to the personal growth of all Canadians. Fully recognizing the equality of both official languages presumes not only that documentation produced by the federal government is available in both official languages, but that both versions are of equal value, meaning that there is not one version that is official and the other not official. In our view, this must be the case, since any other approach could end up placing one language above the other, which is contrary to the equality principle underlying the language rights entrenched in the Constitution of Canada, particularly section 16 of the Charter.

If both languages and official language communities have equal status, rights and privileges, then all members of the public should be entitled to receive equal treatment and not be put at a disadvantage depending on the official language they have chosen to use. Equal status of the official languages means that both official language communities must have access in their language to documentation that is equally authoritative and reliable.

For this to be possible, all political actors must adhere to the value represented by equality of both official languages. Taking a more dialogue-based approach to translation and giving authors greater responsibility for the translated versions of their documents are interesting avenues to explore. I am not satisfied that using translation software would achieve this. The time and money pressures given as reasons for using this software are just symptoms of a larger problem, namely that not enough importance is being placed on the quality of translations in Canada and the quality of services that must be provided in both official languages.

A bilingualism policy means respecting the principle of equality entrenched in our constitution. We must stop viewing one language as predominant and the other as simply an accommodation that can be satisfied by computer software. It is essential that federal institutions take greater responsibility for the linguistic versions of decisions.

This is why I join with those who have already said it and recommend creating a task force to conduct a comprehensive study of translation and the use of language technologies in promoting language equality by federal institutions. This task force should focus on the big picture, including issues surrounding the privatization of translation services. The purpose of this would be to look at developing a system to guarantee that Canadians can access service of equal quality in both official languages at all times that is consistent with Canada's constitutional and legislative obligations.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Doucet.

We will move on to the first round of questions and observations right away, starting with Mr. Bernard Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Doucet.

From your paper, I think it is quite clear that your main concern is that respect for the French language, relative to the English language, would be eroded.

In your view and in actual practice, are the two languages currently equal in Canada? Let us forget the tool in question. I think that you do not consider the two languages to be on equal footing at this time.

• (1555)

Mr. Michel Doucet: If we look at the legislative and constitutional texts, we find that it is recognized that both languages should be on an equal footing. Both languages should be given the same consideration by federal institutions. Unfortunately, in practice this is not the case, and this is evident in the reports of the Commissioner of Official Languages. In other instances, we can see that very often French is the language of translation, in other words, it is not the original language of the texts. The French texts are translations of the English texts.

In that regard, it is reasonable to wonder about the equality of both languages within certain federal institutions.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Do you think that the problem is fundamentally that the world of public officials is too anglophone, relative to francophones?

Do you have any idea about why there would be more documents originally prepared in English, as compared to those originally prepared in French?

Mr. Michel Doucet: I think that is part of the culture, in a sense. Obviously, there are more English than French speakers in the public service. Moreover, there are probably more unilingual English officials in the public service than unilingual French speakers.

There is then a certain culture within the federal public service, and I would say that this is also true in my home province of New Brunswick, which is officially bilingual. In fact, we see that in this culture public officials often work in English. Although we recognize the right of employees to work in the official language of their choice, what we see is that very often the working language is English in many institutions.

I am not criticizing this situation per se; I am just saying that if the French language becomes a language of translation in certain institutions, we must ensure that the translated and the original versions of the documents produced are of equal quality.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I do not think anyone would question that. There are already other tools of that kind on the market. The Portage tool would possibly be installed in all departments. A very large number of pages are instantly translated by tools provided by search engines like Google, and it is clear that government staff is not alone in using these tools. Everyone does. We all agree that the quality of the result is very poor. I think that these tools were never intended to replace translators or produce results of equal quality to what we have now.

You say in your paper that this is truly a concern for you.

Mr. Michel Doucet: Yes, indeed.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You fear that things will come to that.

Mr. Michel Doucet: I worked at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal for 10 years. I remember very well that, at the time, when I wrote my decisions, if the case was argued in English, I wrote in English, and if it was argued in French, I wrote in French. The translator's contribution was invaluable in producing the final text. Indeed, what seems to be clearly articulated to us when we write in English or in French is not necessarily obvious to a person reading it or translating it. Here, I am talking about a dialogue-based approach. The translator very often helps ensure the quality of the text produced. The translation tool does not capture these deficiencies; it slavishly translates the original text.

I do not object to the use of translation technologies. I think they can be very useful in-house, in that they may help people understand a text. However, I am concerned about the texts that are supposed to go out to the entire population. I think we should be careful not to take the use of these tools too far when it comes to communicating with the general public.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Given what witnesses have said before this committee since the beginning of this study, I can assure you that everyone, both the people who are already in the translation field and all parliamentarians present here, understood that this tool will never replace translators. I think that is quite clear.

I share your concern about the quality of texts that have to be translated. They may first be translated through a tool, whatever that is, and then be refined later. That will speed up the process. Despite the staff cuts in translation services, they still manage to translate as much as before. Obviously IT tools have something to do with that.

I do not think that anyone wants to see the quality of the French deteriorate.

Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

• (1600)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Your presentation suggests that fundamentally the problem is not just about using the tool; it goes a lot deeper than that.

I hope that the questions will allow us to look into this issue. It would be interesting to come back to it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today, Mr. Doucet.

The Chair: He is your former professor.

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes, and he had a very good student. That said, there were 30 of us.

Mr. Doucet, I will continue along the same lines as our colleague, Mr. Généreux.

If I read between the lines, the real concern is that this tool will be used systematically and that French will become the secondary language.

Are you concerned that this tool will play too much of a role?

Mr. Michel Doucet: I have concerns about the message being sent to the public and to other outside institutions. We are talking about a federal institution that has always been the authority on Canada's language policy, and I worry that it is sending a message to the private sector and to other provincial governments, especially New Brunswick, that they can meet their language obligations through the use of a translation tool.

I am very happy to hear that that is not the objective, but I think that the message must be clear: the primary objective is to ensure that neither of the two official languages is put at a disadvantage when documents are being produced. We must ensure that both official languages are treated equally, that the quality is the same, regardless of the tools, and that the public and other governments are not getting the message that they can use a tool to meet their obligations.

The technological tool is a tool. It can be used in certain circumstances, but it must not be used for documents made available to the public.

Mr. René Arseneault: The developers of this tool came to speak to us and told us that all communications to the public must be done by a translator, through a real translation service. Users must acknowledge that condition before using the tool.

Based on your experience, have you ever heard of or seen any lawsuits or legal proceedings regarding a translation tool and the Official Languages Act?

Mr. Michel Doucet: I am not sure I understand the question.

Mr. René Arseneault: With respect to official languages, in other provinces, have you ever heard of—

Mr. Michel Doucet: —of software?

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes.

Mr. Michel Doucet: I have never heard of any.

The only province that has a law on official languages and that has a constitutional obligation is New Brunswick. I have never officially heard of the use of tools there, but I have gotten enough correspondence from the Government of New Brunswick to know that it may sometimes use a tool. I have had to ask public servants to send the original English version, because I did not understand the French version. This has happened to me a number of times with the provincial government, but never with the federal government. This has never happened to me with a federal institution, but it has certainly happened in New Brunswick.

Mr. René Arseneault: It happens in the federal government as well. We have heard about texts translated by machine.

Mr. Michel Doucet: I have been lucky with the federal government, but in New Brunswick, I have gotten communications from public servants that had been translated, not by Portage, but by another tool that is very well known but that I will not name. The French version was incomprehensible.

Mr. René Arseneault: If we look at the objectives of the Official Languages Act, how do you think we could make it harder to implement such a tool? Legally, in accordance with the Official Languages Act, could we issue a warning regarding the use of such a tool?

• (1605)

Mr. Michel Doucet: The Official Languages Act makes it clear that both official languages are equal. The equality of both languages is the basic principle or foundation of the Official Languages Act and the constitutional provisions, such as section 16 of the charter.

Equality does not mean that one group is treated better than the other. Equality means what it means. It means that both groups must be treated equally and no one should be put at a disadvantage as a result of the language they use. There is equality of status, equal rights and privileges. All decisions made by the federal government to release documents it produces must be based on the principle of the equality of both languages. In my opinion, there is no reason for one language to be less equal than the other or for one to be more equal than the other.

The principle of equality is at the heart of all texts that recognize language rights in Canada, and this principle must be guarded here. We must ensure that texts are of equal quality in both languages, in order to respect the principle of equality.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you very much.

Do I still have time?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. René Arseneault: I have 30 seconds.

I want to jump to another topic. During our committee meetings, I often hear the expression “linguistic duality”. I would like to hear your thoughts on this subject and hear the New Brunswick term that legally means linguistic duality.

Mr. Michel Doucet: There is always a debate on the meaning of linguistic duality.

I know that the federal government uses the expression “linguistic duality” to refer to bilingualism and the two official languages.

In New Brunswick, linguistic duality also has a political and administrative meaning, in that it designates linguistically homogeneous structures or structures that enable both linguistic communities to manage matters that affect them.

For example, in education, when we talk about linguistic duality in Canada, we talk about two school systems: the francophone school system and the anglophone school system. These are dualist systems, in the sense that both communities can manage their educational institutions.

In health, linguistic duality refers to recognizing the francophone community, with a hospital like Montfort Hospital in Ottawa or the Vitalité Health Network in New Brunswick.

Linguistic duality can also be administrative. It is not, strictly speaking, about bilingualism.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you.

Mr. Michel Doucet: There you have it, in 30 seconds.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Choquette, the floor is yours.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here today.

I have Q-53 from the order paper, which I asked to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, who is responsible for the Translation Bureau. I asked, among other things, what this tool would be served for. I was told, as we heard from Ms. Achimov, that the tool would only be used to translate short, unofficial internal texts, such as emails, as though it could be used to write.

What will this tool be used for? I was told that the launch of this new tool is an important step towards encouraging and promoting the use of official languages.

They are talking about promoting official languages with a translation tool. We have to wonder. In fact, a number of questions were raised about this. I am happy that you have suggested a task force. Linda Cardinal, who was here last week, made that suggestion as well. Even if we implement this tool, it will have to be monitored and assessed, to see how it impacts official languages and what risks it carries, as you said.

When I asked departmental representatives about their studies, they mentioned two foreign organizations: the Translation Automation User Society and the Common Sense Advisory. These two organizations are from the United States and Europe and do not seem to be experts on translation or on respect for official languages.

Do you think that the Commissioner of Official Languages could examine this issue to ensure that both both languages are being treated equally, as set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

Mr. Michel Doucet: Your question has several components.

With respect to the consultation of groups from outside Canada, we know that there are people who are very interested in translation in Europe and the United States, but not in the same context. They do not even have the same constitutional and legislative framework as we have in Canada. Our framework is rather unique.

In Europe, it is much more complex, because they use many more languages, but the framework here is unique. I think studies will have to be conducted in Canada.

Would the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages be the institution to do this? Yes, among others, but I think we need to expand the scope beyond the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. Senior Canadian public servants need to be taking a close look at this issue, to ensure that we do not lose sight of our official languages obligations and of our obligations under the charter.

When I mentioned a task force on language technology and the concept of equality of language communities and equality of language, I think we need to go much further than the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. We also need to seek outside experts who can enlighten us.

• (1610)

Mr. François Choquette: We have heard from many witnesses who spoke, in general, about the Translation Bureau, because our study is examining the Translation Bureau. These witnesses spoke about cuts, or, rather, attrition. They did not replace people who retired. If memory serves, a hundred or so translators will be leaving in the coming years, and they will not be replaced. No one is being hired.

Many people asked about knowledge transfer and expressed concerns about a loss of quality. It seems as though the bureau keeps trying to lower costs without considering the fact that it cannot compare itself to the private sector. The Translation Bureau provides many services, including terminology tools, such as Termium, and other linguistic services.

What do you think about that?

Mr. Michel Doucet: I find that dynamic quite worrisome. I will use the example of the translation of court decisions. The federal government has an obligation to translate court decisions. Obviously, as a francophone lawyer, I want to ensure that the translation of a decision is done by language professionals, because language is very important in the legal world. We also need to ensure that the deadlines are reasonable. Often, to save money, they will go elsewhere and use the private sector. The private sector may not have the expertise that the Translation Bureau has developed or that Canadian courts have developed in their translation services.

I think we need to be proud of this expertise. These people are in a position to produce high-quality texts. That is where I have some concerns. We are very aware of the need for quality in both versions, but in 5 or 10 years, the quality might not be there. I have some concerns about that.

Mr. François Choquette: Very good.

Still talking about the Translation Bureau and the approach it has adopted, the most important aspect is to consider the future of the bureau. You spoke a little about what was happening in New Brunswick. As you said, this situation is a signal for many, including New Brunswick.

Perhaps you could you add to this.

With respect to the task force you mentioned, I would like to know what groups or sectors you think should be represented.

Mr. Michel Doucet: Earlier, I talked about the message that the federal government was sending. My concern is that this message encourages New Brunswick to adopt the same approach and that the quality of the texts will suffer.

With respect to the task force, I think it should include language and translation experts. It needs to include senior public servants and people from federal institutions, but it should also include legal experts, to ensure that the process and all of the studies reflect the Canadian government's constitutional and legislative obligations. I think this is important.

It is not simply a translation tool. Translation is not done simply for the purpose of translation. It is done, in this case, to meet a constitutional and legislative obligation. We are talking about an obligation that has been recognized in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a very important document.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Choquette.

Thank you, Mr. Doucet.

Ms. Lapointe, you have the floor.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Good afternoon, Mr. Doucet. Thank you for being here today.

Mr. Choquette touched on an issue that interests me. You partly answered his question about the creation of a task force when you said who you thought should be included in one.

What files would you like the task force to study?

Earlier, you spoke about language technology and about the possibility of determining which texts are sent to the private sector for translation.

• (1615)

Mr. Michel Doucet: Those are the three themes that I looked at, but I would like to look beyond translation and also consider the federal government's obligations and what methods it could use to ensure that its communication with the public fully respects the constitutional and legislative obligations.

In other words, this is not just a matter of determining whether things are being translated. It is also a matter of ensuring that the final product meets the obligations regarding the equality of the two official languages. We need to go beyond language techniques, even though those are important. As I was saying earlier, we need translators, linguists, and senior public service officials, but we need to ensure that the legal content of what is produced meets the unique obligations of the Government of Canada.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

My colleague said that you were the founder of the Centre de traduction et de terminologie juridiques.

Mr. Michel Doucet: Your colleague was mistaken. The Centre de traduction et de terminologie juridiques has been part of the University of Moncton's faculty of law since 1979. I am not the centre's founder.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Perhaps I am the one who used the word “founder”.

Mr. Michel Doucet: I worked very closely with the Centre de traduction et de terminologie juridiques or the CTTJ. The CTTJ created the French terminology for common law. When the University of Moncton opened its law faculty, that terminology did not exist in French. English had been used in common law for many years. Terminology had to be created; it was not just about translation. Neologisms had to be created, a new vocabulary, a new way of doing things, so that the legal institutions that were being set up were not just replicas of the existing civil law institutions in Quebec. That is a very good example of an effort to ensure a quality product.

The Centre de traduction et de terminologie juridiques translates all of the decisions of the New Brunswick Court of Appeal and any decisions of public interest. I must admit that, as a law professor at the university, the translated version of the decision is sometimes much clearer than the original. Translators at the CTTJ often ask the judge for clarification when they are translating decisions and they find the English version to be ambiguous.

That is just one example. It might be worthwhile for people who use legal terminology on a daily basis and who provide a very high quality service to be included in the process. We have lawyers, translators, and linguists. Obviously, if the University of Moncton's law faculty did business with the private sector, it would probably cost a lot less. However, the quality of the final product would not be as good. I do not think that any lawyer, including Mr. Arseneault, would want inferior service.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: From your answer, I understand that the equality of French and English set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms must be respected.

Mr. Michel Doucet: Absolutely.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: That is excellent.

We have met with a number of witnesses about the translation tool that has been proposed or that has already been implemented. Last week, we talked to Donald Barabé, the chairman of the board of directors of a technology centre that you are probably familiar with. He was saying that the translation tool should be used to help people understand texts and that users should be warned that the tool should not be used to translate texts that are being sent to other people.

Mr. Michel Doucet: I completely agree with that. It must be used as a comprehension tool.

I often get texts from colleagues in Germany or elsewhere. I use translation tools to understand what they are saying. However, I would never dream of using such a tool to produce texts to send to the public or to respond to my colleagues.

I have no objection to the tool being used for comprehension purposes, to allow someone who does not really understand French or English to better understand a text. Problems arise when such tools are used to translate information that is going to be sent out to the general public.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much for your answer.

Mr. Michel Doucet: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

Members will have three minutes for the next round of questions.

We will start with Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Doucet, we spoke about New Brunswick and its constitutional obligations regarding translation, since both official languages must be taken into account.

First, does New Brunswick have a translation bureau or is the translation done in each department? Second, how can we ensure that documents translated within government are good quality? I know that you do not represent the Government of New Brunswick, but you have a good understanding of the situation.

● (1620)

Mr. Michel Doucet: It is true that I am not speaking on behalf of the government.

However, I would like to point out that there is a translation bureau, but that it is also experiencing cuts. Attempts have been made to send the work to the private sector. However, I have to say that, when official documents are translated within government, the quality of the translation is excellent.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Is the work done by a translation bureau or within the departments?

Mr. Michel Doucet: There is a translation bureau.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Does the federal government have the right to use external translation services?

Mr. Michel Doucet: Yes, translation can be sent to an outside company. For example, court rulings are obviously not translated by the Translation Bureau. In New Brunswick, all of those decisions are translated in the private sector by the Centre de traduction et de terminologie juridiques, which is part of the faculty of law at the University of Moncton.

At some point, the government began privatizing certain services, which raised a lot of concern within New Brunswick's francophone community. The government would also like to privatize the translation of some court decisions. However, there are concerns about quality. Perhaps regular texts could be translated in the private sector, but legal documents are likely a bit more complicated.

Right now, attempts are being made and there is a desire to use private sector translation companies. However, New Brunswick's francophone community is very concerned about the quality of the texts.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Is a translation tool being used within the departments?

Mr. Michel Doucet: To my knowledge, no translation tool is being used within the Government of New Brunswick. If government employees in certain departments have to communicate with me by email to answer a question, for example, rather than sending their text to the translation bureau, they may use the translation tools that we are familiar with and that are easily accessible, but I must admit that the quality is not good.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Okay.

The expert who put the tool in place explained to us that it was for use within the government. For example, someone who receives an email in French can use the tool to translate the document into English and understand it better.

Do you think that the tool could encourage the use of both official languages if it is actually used for that purpose? For example, would a francophone who has to communicate with an anglophone feel more comfortable answering in French, knowing that his colleague can use the translation tool?

Mr. Michel Doucet: I think that people should already feel comfortable doing that. If I want to communicate with someone and I feel more comfortable doing it in French, I do not need a tool. I write the message in French and hope that the person receiving my message will find someone to translate it, if he or she does not understand what it says.

I do not see a problem with a tool that facilitates communication within the departments and that is used for comprehension purposes. As I already said, I sometimes use such tools to translate documents in other languages. However, I would never dream of using such a tool to translate documents for the public.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

I give the floor to Ms. Boucher, who will be followed by Mr. Choquette.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Hello and welcome. We are pleased to have you here with us.

Obviously, we are talking about translation. I was not here when the tool was implemented, but French speakers all shared the same concern.

There is a question that keeps coming to mind. Earlier, you spoke a lot about cost, which is supposedly the reason why public servants would turn to the private sector. You said that having documents translated by private sector companies was likely less expensive but that the quality might not be as good.

I would like you to explain your opinion on that. Some private sector translators might be just as good as government translators. What is the basis for your comments in that regard?

Mr. Michel Doucet: I was using that example particularly in the context of legal translation, the translation of court decisions. Earlier, I was asked a question about New Brunswick and the decisions of the Supreme Court, the Federal Court, and the administrative tribunals. Linguistic accuracy is very important. The translators there have developed an expertise that likely allows them to more easily detect ambiguities and find the exact terminology that should be used, unlike someone in the private sector who does not have that expertise.

People might say that it would cost a lot less to have New Brunswick's court decisions translated by a private sector company. However, I am not sure that such a company would have the necessary expertise or that the final product would be as good. I was using the example of cost in that context.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: This is mainly a matter of expertise or knowledge of the appropriate terminology.

Let us look at the following example. A person works as a translator but is not necessarily familiar with the legal field. That translator works in the private sector but does very little legal translation. However, another person who translates a lot of legal texts would have more expertise in that area.

Mr. Michel Doucet: Translators can develop terminological expertise. However, they also need to know what to look for in order for the decisions to be well translated.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Everyone says the same thing. The person who came to present the Portage tool mentioned that it was designed for personal use. For example, if I want to write to my colleague next to me in French, I can use the tool to make sure I use the proper terms.

I am now a member of the opposition, but I was once a government member. When I was a parliamentary secretary, I would get texts back from translation and my assistant and I had to rewrite them. She is here today and she can confirm that. I did not take any courses in translation. I used to wonder how I was going to get everything done. I had to carry out my duties as an MP and as parliamentary secretary, and on top of it all, I had to rewrite texts that I had gotten back from translation. The Portage tool did not exist at that time. The translators must have been using a different software.

• (1625)

The Chair: I would ask you to keep your comments brief, Mr. Doucet.

Mr. Michel Doucet: Yes.

I also worked for the Parliament of Canada in the 1970s, and I was often called upon to translate texts. I hated it because translation was not part of my job.

I do not think that anyone could object to a tool designed for personal use that would allow people to understand texts. That is not what I am concerned about. I am concerned about communication with the public.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Okay.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Boucher.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor for three minutes.

Mr. François Choquette: You probably cannot answer my questions, but I am going to try asking them anyway.

We spoke a lot about cost. Are you aware of any studies that have been done on the cost of translation for departments and agencies that use private translation companies?

Mr. Michel Doucet: Unfortunately, I cannot answer that question.

Mr. François Choquette: That is a good question. Recently, I asked the government Question No. 53 on the Order Paper in which I indicated that there seems to be some uncertainty regarding how effective it is to use external suppliers. I wanted to find out whether it costs less or not. I am going to examine this issue more closely before I ask you about it again.

We have talked a lot about the use of this tool for reading texts, for example. I think it could be useful for someone who already has a rather good knowledge of the other language. It could even be used to write short emails or things like that. However, we have been told that it should never be used for writing even if it is just a short email. This brings us back to how a bilingual person could use the tool compared to how a unilingual person might use it.

In your opinion, should the tool be used differently by someone who is bilingual than by someone who is unilingual, or should the tool never be used to write a text?

Mr. Michel Doucet: I cannot make any assumptions about how people will use the tool. That is why it is important to seriously examine the issue and to have very clear directives and guidelines. People need to understand that the tool must not be used to communicate with the public or even to communicate with other people within the public service.

However, as it has been said many times, this is a comprehension tool. If that is what it is used for and if there are clearly defined and well established guidelines, then I think that excessive use could be prevented.

Mr. François Choquette: That is why I think that your idea of creating a working group is a really good one. Linda Cardinal, a professor at the University of Ottawa, submitted the same idea. That would allow people with the necessary skills to set limits and establish guidelines on how this work tool is to be used.

In closing, you mentioned that translators make it possible for French to be a language of creation, not just a destination.

Mr. Michel Doucet: Yes.

Mr. François Choquette: Can you speak to the importance of the translator in achieving official language equality?

Mr. Michel Doucet: You will recall how laws were drafted bilingually in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s. They were written in English and the translator had to slavishly translate the English text. He or she did not take part in the process at all.

In the case of a dialogical translation, the translator participates in the process and guides the author of the text to ensure that both versions ultimately are creative and very clear.

The translator plays an important role in the development of legislation in a bilingual system of official language equality like Canada's. If every parliamentarian and every official were bilingual, we would not need translation. However, I do not believe that will ever happen in our lifetime.

The translator plays a very important role for unilingual people, bilingual people, and for the Canadian public as a whole. People can rest assured that the texts they receive are of very high quality.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. Doucet, I have a question for you.

From a legal standpoint, can this translation tool be subject to the Translation Bureau Act or the Official Languages Act?

Mr. Michel Doucet: Obviously, if someone receives a text that they consider to be of lesser quality, then that person can always file

a complaint with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. That has been done in the past. The fundamental principle of the Official Languages Act is the equality of both official languages, as I have said. We do not have a main language and a secondary language. Both languages are equal.

In my opinion, the communication of documents to the public falls under the Official Languages Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The Chair: Could someone complain about the fact that a translation was done by machine and turn to the courts?

Mr. Michel Doucet: It seems unlikely that this would be taken to court right away. However, if the person felt that the text he or she received was not of the desired quality, then they could certainly file a complaint with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and ask for an investigation. Ultimately, this could end up in court. We have seen people sue institutions because bilingual texts were not produced on time or were not of similar quality to the original texts. It can come to that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you for your presentation. Thank you very much for your answers to the questions. On behalf of the Standing Committee—

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, it isn't over already, is it?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's good for my colleagues who had a chance to speak, but it seems that—

The Chair: Do you want to take three minutes, Mr. Samson?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes, I would very much like to.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Doucet. I really appreciate you taking the time to be with us.

As you know, we receive a wealth of information at this committee. However, we do not work directly on the ground, as you do. To have you here truly allows us to expand our knowledge and enrich the debate, with a view to submitting a report that could lead to changes within Parliament and elsewhere. It is essential work.

You said that in the federal context, French is generally a language of translation. I love when Anglophones ask for a copy of a document that was written in French. I am pleased to tell them that it has to be translated.

You also talked about documents that have to have the same authority in both official languages. That is a very important aspect, but I do not know how that can be achieved. I quite like the idea of a working group. Let us not forget that world wars have started over bad communication.

I am worried about the rules of law in Canada. We have common law, which relies on precedents, but if the translation of those precedents are not the best quality, the meaning of the text can truly be diluted.

Could you elaborate on that?

Mr. Michel Doucet: As far as legislation is concerned, we have to keep one thing in mind, that federal legislation is no longer translated. Laws are now co-drafted. In other words, two groups of law clerks draft the text at the same time.

Translation is still used for rulings and can be of very good quality. However, no matter how carefully the translators go over the texts, we still find ambiguities in the translations. When we read two texts side by side, quite often we see that they do not say the same thing even if the translation was done by a translator. In that case, at least we are dealing with human beings who may have detected these ambiguities and limited them as much as possible. My concern about software is that we do not have this human aspect that can clarify these ambiguities.

From a legal standpoint, I always come back to the basic principle, and it is what I teach my students, that what the Canadian government adopted in terms of official languages is equality of the two languages. We must ensure that no one feels disadvantaged because of the language in which he chose to read a text.

•(1635)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Doucet.

Unfortunately, we must stop there.

Thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Michel Doucet: I am the one who should be thanking you.

The Chair: Thank you for the clarifications you provided to the committee.

•(1640)

We will now suspend the meeting for five minutes.

•(1640)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1640)

The Chair: Take your places, please.

We have to resume our deliberations. I am told there is a reception at 6 p.m.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As you know, I tabled a notice of motion calling on Minister Judy Foote to appear before the committee. I will wait until the end of Wednesday's meeting to move the motion. I think it is extremely important.

I received an answer to my question number Q-53 in the Order Paper. I had it sent to the committee. You all should have received it. The document is thick, but quite interesting nonetheless.

I would like Mrs. Judy Foote or a representative from the Department of Public Services and Procurement to address some of our questions and tell us where things stand at the translation bureau

with the Portage translation tool. If the committee agrees, it would be important for the Order Paper question to be tabled so that it can be incorporated in the study. I am talking about government information about the translation bureau, the translation tool, and the translation that is sent out to the private sector. All this data has been made public.

Does the committee agree to have this document included in the study? You should all have a copy.

The Chair: Are there any comments?

Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Choquette, when should we have received this document? I didn't get it.

Mr. François Choquette: My assistant tells me it was sent to the clerk. If you agree, the clerk will get it to you. You could take a quick look at it and then we could come back to it.

The Chair: I am told that everyone received a PDF version of this document.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Excuse me. I haven't read it and neither have my colleagues. Perhaps we could wait until everyone gets it and reads it and then go over it on Wednesday.

Mr. François Choquette: I agree.

The Chair: We will come back to it.

Speaking of our agenda—

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I won't be here on Wednesday.

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Nater, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. John Nater: Yes. Very briefly, on Mr. Choquette's motion, I think we'll discuss it on Wednesday, but at that time, there might hopefully be agreement to have a friendly amendment to it, to perhaps include representatives from the National Research Council, whether a project manager or someone from the design team who actually worked on the Portage tool.

I think it would be worthwhile for the committee to have some interaction with the tool, see exactly what it is and how it was designed. Perhaps at that time, a friendly amendment—

The Chair: You understand that we will be back to that on Wednesday?

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, absolutely.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Are we talking about the motion?

The Chair: Are there any comments?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes.

I want to receive the documents properly. We can start there and then move on to the next steps.

•(1645)

The Chair: Okay.

Agreed?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes.

The Chair: I will tell you the dates for our future work. I contacted the chief justice of the Superior Court and talked to him about the problem of rulings in French and in English in Quebec. We could arrange to have a meeting at dinner time, since that is when he is available. I do not want to address the issue of separation of power or anything like that. I will organize a meeting at the parliamentary restaurant. He and I agreed to have the meeting on Tuesday, May 3. The members of the committee could come have their meal at the parliamentary restaurant with the chief justice of the Superior Court.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: Which Superior Court are you talking about?

The Chair: The Superior Court of Quebec.

Mr. René Arseneault: Who is the chief justice?

The Chair: His name is Jacques Fournier.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: What is the purpose of this meeting?

The Chair: As the former president of the Quebec bar association, it has been a long time since this has bothered me. I will give you an example. In criminal law, judges in Quebec will usually refer to jurisprudence from other Canadian provinces, especially jurisprudence available in English, but the opposite is not true. In other words, judges from the other provinces will not refer to a ruling drafted or made by judge in French since, quite often, they cannot read French. That is the problem that Justice Fournier would like to raise with us.

I would like our group to hear him out in camera and then, if it is appropriate, I would like us to invite representatives from the Quebec bar association to come make more informal comments.

Yes, Mr. Lefebvre?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Arseneault wanted to speak before I did.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: We will be talking strictly about criminal law. Is that what you're saying?

The Chair: We will talk about criminal law, bankruptcies, and other areas under federal jurisdiction. I would say this affects all rulings. We have a bilingual system in Canada: common law and civil law.

Mr. René Arseneault: Indeed. I am not saying there is no value in looking at what is happening in Quebec. For 23 years, I practised law 99% in French. However, when we look at common law, we look at the legal precedents of common law. On the other hand, you are right about criminal law. I believe that if this is strictly what we are talking about, Quebec rulings are consulted just as much as rulings in British Columbia or New Brunswick. It depends on the specifics of the case.

The interesting thing, and it is a sensitive topic, is the tools we have to use now as lawyers. Mr. Lefebvre could elaborate on that. The companies that supply the jurisprudence on our computers — there are two main companies — decide where to get the court decisions from. That is very important.

The Chair: The idea is that there is no fixed topic for discussion. We will decide when we get there. I just wanted to confirm the date, Tuesday, May 3. I will ask the clerk to organize the meal at the parliamentary restaurant.

Mr. René Arseneault: That's it.

The Chair: Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: As far as our study on the translation bureau is concerned, I feel like we have been discussing this for a number of meetings now. That is good, but we should start thinking about drafting our report and moving on to something else. There are a lot of other things to address.

The Chair: I will get to that.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I think it is a good topic of discussion, but there are many others as well. We have looked at this issue from every angle.

The Chair: Dates have already been set. The Commissioner of Official Languages will appear before us on May 2.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes, that's perfect.

The Chair: Treasury Board representatives will be here on May 4.

I would also like to suggest two dates, May 9 and 11, for report writing.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: All right, thank you.

The Chair: That is my suggestion. I believe that Ms. Forget sent us a document, a draft report of sorts.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I did take note of Mr. Lefebvre's comments. He is right. We have just about finished our study. Still, I agree that the Commissioner of Official Languages should appear before us. We probably will talk to him about more than just the Translation Bureau. We could also ask him many questions about different subjects. Our meeting will not be about just the Translation Bureau. It is worthwhile having him with us for at least two hours because he has a lot to say.

The Chair: Yes, quite right.

Mr. François Choquette: He could advise us on what studies we might like to do. We could ask him one or two questions about the Translation Bureau, but the meeting will not focus on that subject alone.

As for the Treasury Board representatives, we could certainly ask them questions about the Translation Bureau, but I don't believe that is the only subject that will be discussed at the meeting. We could ask them general questions about the work of the Treasury Board as it pertains to the application of the Official Languages Act.

Perhaps I am repeating myself, but I would like to remind the committee that the Translation Bureau reports to Public Services and Procurement Canada. We have never had the opportunity to have the minister appear before our committee. I understand that she may not be available. However, we should at least invite the senior officials in order to finish the study since the Translation Bureau falls under that department.

Furthermore, I agree with my colleague, Mr. Nater, on the importance of meeting with the people who created the translation tool. I believe it might be possible to add, after the Treasury Board representatives, the two groups mentioned above, Public Services and Procurement Canada and the NRC, if my memory serves me well. That is what I will be moving next Wednesday in order to complete our study. I agree with Mr. Lefebvre. After all that, we will have looked at it from every angle.

• (1650)

The Chair: All right.

Mr. François Choquette: I will officially move my motion on Wednesday, but I would like you to think about it and decide if you agree.

The Chair: It's all good. We will talk about it later.

The Clerk mentioned that another date, June 1, has been set aside already. We will be hearing from representatives of the Association franco-yukonnaise, I believe.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: What will the topic be?

The Chair: We will be talking about the linguistic minority in the Yukon.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Did the association ask to appear before the committee or did we invite the association?

The Chair: I had suggested it to the Clerk, but it is the association that would like to meet with us.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: The Association franco-yukonnaise serves a territory, just like provincial associations serve their provinces. I am wondering if this is the right time to hear from these people, or if we should perhaps wait until we study the Roadmap.

The Chair: You may be right.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: We should perhaps postpone their appearance, unless they have already planned their trip to Ottawa and do not intend to return in the near future.

The Chair: I understand.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Georges Etoka): They will be in Ottawa on that date.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I see. We should perhaps discuss when will be a good time to meet with them.

The Chair: Mrs. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It seems to me that we are not very focused. We start one thing, but don't finish it, and then we move on to another. Could we focus on one subject and then move on to the next?

Right now, we are all over the map and don't know what we will be doing next.

The Chair: That is not necessarily the case.

In fact, with respect to the Commissioner of Official Languages, we do not really have a choice.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I understand that, however—

The Chair: In fact, on June 1, when we could hear the Yukon witnesses, our study of the Translation Bureau will be finished in theory. The report will have already been written.

I am trying to plan. I suggested using May 9 and 11 to write the report, but that could change. In theory, we should be finished with the witnesses regarding the Translation Bureau. After mid-May, we will have breathing room.

I will give you an example. We have already talked about inviting the Mayor of Quebec City, Mr. Labeaume, to talk about his idea of making Quebec City the capital of the Francophonie in America.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: With all due respect to Mr. Labeaume, what does that have to do with us?

The Chair: Don't get me wrong, this has nothing to do with translation.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I am not talking about translation, but about official languages. We are the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That means that all mayors that have a project pertaining to the official languages—

The Chair: No.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Please understand, I myself am from Quebec City. If you invite Mr. Labeaume once, you might have to invite him often after that.

The Chair: Instead of having the steering committee prepare an agenda, we are trying to come up with one together. I would like to wrap up the study of the Translation Bureau by mid-May and come to an agreement about writing the report. That is my objective.

After that, discussions on the Roadmap may not start right away. We could address subjects that we find worthwhile for the remainder of May and in early June. As of mid-May, there will be about four weeks' of activities. Is it worth starting the study of the Roadmap before the House adjourns for the summer? I don't know. I am asking you to think about it.

Mr. Choquette, I give you the floor.

• (1655)

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to add something very pertinent to what Mr. Lefebvre just said about the remaining motions to be debated. For example, there is Mr. Vandal's motion, and there will probably be others.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I, too, will have another one.

Mr. François Choquette: Mrs. Boucher will also be moving a motion.

Groups usually ask to appear before the committee. They are all important and we would like to invite them eventually.

Before we do so, we should perhaps reflect, as we have been for the past few weeks and even months, on what will be our priority for the month of June. We could all agree to do a short focused study.

We could definitely meet with the group from the Yukon when we study the Roadmap. It will also be extremely important to meet many others.

However, we should perhaps not accept requests to appear before we decide what direction we would like to take. That is how I see it.

The Chair: I don't have a problem with what you are saying. I think that the representatives of the Association franco-yukonnaise will definitely be returning to Ottawa. We do not have to have them appear during the week of June 1. We can tell them that there are other priorities on the agenda. I don't have a problem with that.

You may be right to say that when we start meeting with representatives of francophone minority communities outside Quebec, we have to have a comprehensive plan for the Francophonie across the country.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Chair, I would like to say something.

Perhaps we could discuss Mr. Choquette's and Mrs. Boucher's motions on Wednesday.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Since I won't be at the meeting on Wednesday, I will table it so that we can study it when I am present.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: All right. I believe that Mr. Vandal will also be absent.

We could all discuss this at the same time. Perhaps that is when we could also discuss these issues and the work that we will be doing until the end of June.

Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I am being reminded that Minister Joly will appear before us on Wednesday, and that the meeting will be televised.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Okay.

Will the meeting with the Minister last one hour?

The Chair: The meeting with the Minister will last one hour. In the second hour, we will meet with the departmental officials.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: All right.

Mr. Choquette, do you still want five minutes to move your motion?

Mr. François Choquette: Yes, five minutes.

The Chair: All right.

We have tentative dates for report writing. I mentioned that it would take place on May 9 and 11. On May 4, Treasury Board representatives will appear before the committee. We will see if we have enough time between May 4 and May 9 and 11.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, with respect to the tabling of the report, will we be doing the analysis here as a group? Is that how it works?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Will we also discuss the report's recommendations?

The Chair: Yes, exactly. The report will be drafted.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: A first draft has been tabled.

The Chair: I believe that Ms. Forget has already given us a plan and that you have received it.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: In fact, we have received some things.

The Chair: I invite you to start thinking right away about any comments you may have about this plan. We are going to spend two meetings writing a solid report on this subject. It is really important to do so. Then we will have to table the report before the end of parliamentary business, that is before the summer recess.

Is that acceptable?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Therefore, we will wait until Wednesday to discuss the motions.

As for the representatives of the Association franco-yukonnaise, we will tell them to wait a little because for the time being we are taking a more comprehensive approach.

At this point, we know that we will be meeting with the judge on Tuesday, May 3, at a dinner.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't believe I have the dates for the appearance of the Commissioner of Official Languages and the Treasury Board representatives. May I ask the Clerk to update the calendar, or have you already sent it?

• (1700)

The Chair: I think it would be appropriate to do so in order to refresh everyone's memory.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you in advance, Mr. Clerk.

The Chair: The Clerk can send the calendar of upcoming and already scheduled work. All of you will receive these documents.

Are there any other questions or comments? Apparently not.

Thank you very much.

I would like to invite all of you, if you so wish, to join the French delegation. The meeting will be held in my office. Cocktails will be served from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. in Room 100 of the Justice Building.

Thank you very much and see you on Wednesday.

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