

Linguistic (in)security, we have to talk about it...



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Following the Education Summit (4-5-6th of May in 3 areas in Edmonton, Ottawa and Moncton), I allow myself to also talk about linguistic (in)security, since it was a hot topic presented by the youth representatives, and worthy of special attention.

Good French. Regional expressions. Français. Acadian. Chiac. Creole. Latin. Formal French. Colloquial French. Spoken French. Written French. Grammar. Number and gender agreement. Liaisons. Conjugations. Contextual language. Education. Correcting people. Feeling uncomfortable. Assimilation.

All these words have a common theme: linguistic (in)security. I have attended many meetings and assemblies and this seemed to be a recurring topic. How many people have we met who feel reluctant to speak French because they

feel that their French isn't good enough? Where does this happen? The answer: EVERYWHERE! It's a social phenomenon that affects everyone in various ways: at home, at school, at college or university, in vocational training, at work, in regional and community activities, and so on. It's this kind of thinking, or situations in which they feel ill at ease or uncomfortable, that drive Francophones to other languages, other causes, other institutions and services.

I'm sure that most Francophones in Ontario (or at least a majority of them) have had experiences where they've felt as if their French wasn't good enough, or that their accent was "too pronounced." Most of the time they receive comments, mostly negative, from the people around them, which discourages them from communicating in French.

I put myself in the shoes of kids who,

at school (including university and college) or at home, get told over and over: no, in French you pronounce it this way; or, no, that isn't good French. They see it as a criticism. We should let our kids express themselves freely as long as they do so in French. Take social media, for example, where contractions or icons are used. The message gets through; we understand what they mean! (Ok, it may take me sometime, since I often feel like I'm from the dinosaur era) Yes, as parents, we want our children to express themselves in good French. Let's find the right time to say it, but with humour or discretion, and above all, let's be creative. For example, send them a GIF!

This linguistic insecurity is experienced by another group as well: newcomers. Some of them come from countries where French is the common

language, and some where French is the only mother-tongue of the citizens. Just as we all have accents, so newcomers to Canada and Ontario have different words to express themselves or get their message across, which can result in discomfort or miscommunication.

Regardless of where you come from, where you live, what level of language you use, or how well you know the language, we have to change our ways of thinking and especially of judging, and try to use creative tactics to encourage the people we know to speak French freely, even if there are errors in what they say. The language lives in various forms, dialects and accents, and it will continue to evolve in the future especially considering that French is the 5th most widely spoken language in the world, and it just keeps growing. Let's encourage our children, our co-workers and our friends to put aside their insecurity by making them feel good about speaking French as often as we can.

For the ministries and other government agencies, on the other hand, allow me to be less tolerant... especially in writing! ■



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