

2011 Census of Population: Linguistic Characteristics of Canadians

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Wednesday, October 24, 2012

More than 200 languages were reported in the 2011 Census of Population as a home language or mother tongue.

One-fifth of Canada's population, or nearly 6,630,000 people, spoke a language other than English or French at home in 2011, either alone or in some combination with English or French. A full analysis is available in the report [Linguistic Characteristics of Canadians](#).

Of this total, 6,390,000 spoke an immigrant language at home, more than 213,000 people spoke an Aboriginal language, and nearly 25,000 reported using a sign language.

Also of this total, almost one-third or 2,145,000 people reported that the only language they spoke at home was a language other than English or French, that is, a non-official language. The remaining two-thirds spoke a non-official language in combination with either English or French.

The 2,145,000 people who spoke only a non-official language accounted for 6.5% of the population, unchanged from 2006.

In total, 58.0% of the population or 19,225,000 spoke only English at home, while 18.2% or 6,043,000 spoke only French. Both proportions were down slightly from 2006.

The use of multiple languages at home has increased. In 2011, 11.5% of the population reported using English and a language other than French, up from 9.1% in 2006.

Similarly, 1.3% of the population reported using French and a language other than English in 2011, up from 1.0%. Most of these people lived in Quebec.

Immigrant languages: Eight language groups have growth greater than 30%

The home languages showing the strongest growth between 2006 and 2011 were primarily Asian. The population that reported speaking the Philippine-based language Tagalog increased by 64%, the highest growth.

Nearly 279,000 people reported speaking Tagalog most often in 2011, up from 170,000 five years earlier.

Seven other language groups also saw their numbers increase by more than 30%. They included Mandarin (+50%), Arabic (+47%), Hindi (+44%), Creole languages (+42%), Bengali (+40%), Persian (+33%), and Spanish (+32%).

Four languages showed a slight decline in the number of people who reported speaking them most often at home. Three of them, Italian, Polish and Greek, are spoken for the most part by early immigrant groups and their descendants.

The fourth language that declined was Chinese, which mostly reflects a change in the way the census reports Chinese languages. For the first time, Chinese languages are being analyzed separately in the census. (The term Chinese, designated in this release as 'not otherwise specified,' or 'n.o.s.', refers to people who reported 'Chinese' in their response to the question on language spoken most often at home without specifying Mandarin, Cantonese or other Chinese languages.)

The top 10 immigrant languages spoken most often at home in 2011 were: Punjabi, Chinese n.o.s., Cantonese, Spanish, Tagalog, Arabic, Mandarin, Italian, Urdu and German.



Largest census metropolitan areas

Nearly 9 in 10 Canadians who reported speaking an immigrant language most often at home lived in a census metropolitan area (CMA). The majority (80%) lived in six CMAs: Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Ottawa–Gatineau.

In Toronto, 1,790,000 people reported speaking an immigrant language most often at home, 32.2% of the total population, the highest proportion among all CMAs.

Among those speaking an immigrant language most often at home in Toronto, 35.4% spoke one of five: Cantonese (8.8%), Punjabi (8.0%), Chinese n.o.s. (7.0%), Urdu (5.9%) and Tamil (5.7%).

In Montréal, 626,000 people, or 16.5% of the total population, reported speaking an immigrant language most often at home.

Among these, 17.2% spoke Arabic and 15.2% spoke Spanish. Others included Italian (8.1%), Chinese n.o.s. (5.7%) and a Creole language (5.4%). These five languages accounted for more than 50% of people speaking an immigrant language as their main home language in Montréal.

In Vancouver, 712,000 people or 31% of the population reported speaking an immigrant language most often at home. Of these, 17.7% spoke Punjabi, followed by Cantonese (16.0%), Chinese n.o.s. (12.2%), Mandarin (11.8%) and Tagalog (6.7%). These five leading immigrant home languages accounted for 64.4% of the overall population speaking an immigrant language most often at home.

Additional analysis can be found in the *Census in Brief* article, "[Immigrant languages in Canada](#)."

Quebec: Increased reporting of French or English in combination with a non-official language at home

As in Canada as a whole, there was an increase in the number of persons who reported speaking more than one language at home in Quebec.

The group that reported speaking French and a language other than English showed the largest gain. Their share of Quebec's population increased from 3.8% in 2006 to 5.0% in 2011, while the proportion that reported speaking English and a language other than French increased from 2.5% to 2.8%.

At the same time, the proportion of Quebec's population that reported speaking only French at home declined from 75.1% to 72.8%. The proportion that reported speaking only English fell from 6.6% to 6.2%.

About 4% of Quebec's population reported speaking only a non-official language in 2011, unchanged from 2006.

Nearly 600,000 persons reported speaking both French and English at home in 2011. They represented 7.6% of Quebec's population, up from 7.1% in 2006.

Montréal: Use of only French or English at home declines

In the CMA of Montréal, the share of the population reporting that it spoke only French at home continued the decline that began in 2001. The proportion fell from 59.8% in 2006 to 56.5% in 2011.

At the same time, the relative share of Montréal's population reporting that it spoke only English at home fell from 10.8% to 9.9%. The share that reported speaking only a non-official language remained practically unchanged at 7%.

However, more people in Montréal reported speaking French in combination with a language other than English at home. In 2011, this was the case for 8.7% of the population, up from 5.2% in 2001 and 6.7% in 2006. In 2011, more than 329,000 people in Montréal said they spoke French in combination with a language other than English, up from 239,000 in 2006.

Toronto and Vancouver: Use of only English at home declines

In the CMAs of Toronto and Vancouver, the share of the population reporting that it spoke only English at home continued the decline that began in 2001.

In Toronto, the proportion fell from 62.5% in 2001 to 59.1% in 2006 and 55.0% in 2011. In Vancouver, the proportions were 65.3%, 62.0% and 58.0%, respectively.

At the same time, the relative share of Toronto's population who reported speaking a language other than English or French in combination with English at home increased from 20.7% in 2001 to 23.0% in 2006 and 27.6% in 2011.

The corresponding proportions for Vancouver were 17.8%, 19.7% and 24.0%, respectively.

English-French bilingualism

In 2011, just over 5,795,000 people in Canada reported being able to conduct a conversation in both of Canada's official languages, an increase of almost 350,000 from 2006. These bilingual individuals represented 17.5% of the total population, virtually unchanged from 17.4% in 2006.

The increase of the bilingual population was mainly a result of the increased number of Quebecers who reported being able to conduct a conversation in French and English.

French in Canada

In 2011, nearly 10 million people in Canada reported being able to conduct a conversation in French, compared with fewer than 9.6 million in 2006. However, the proportion of those being able to speak French edged down to 30.1% in 2011 from 30.7% five years earlier.

From 1981 to 2011, the Canadian population increased by nearly 38%. By comparison, the population who reported being able to conduct a conversation in French grew by 30%.

Over the same period, the population whose mother tongue was French grew by 16%, while the population with French as their first official language spoken increased by 21%.

Additional analysis can be found in the *Census in Brief* article, "[French and the francophonie in Canada](#)."

Aboriginal languages

The 2011 Census recorded more than 60 Aboriginal languages grouped into 12 distinct language families, an indication of the diversity of Aboriginal languages in Canada.

More than 213,000 people reported an Aboriginal mother tongue in 2011. The Cree languages, Inuktitut and Ojibway were the three most frequently reported Aboriginal mother tongues.

Of all people in Canada who reported an Aboriginal language as mother tongue, the highest proportions lived in Quebec (20.9%), Manitoba (17.7%) and Saskatchewan (16.0%).

Additional analysis can be found in the *Census in Brief* article, "[Aboriginal languages in Canada](#)."

Note to readers

Comparability of language data between censuses of population

For the first time in 2011, three language questions (knowledge of official languages, home language and mother tongue) were included on the census questionnaire that was administered to 100% of the population.

Language data and analysis published for all censuses since 1996 have been based almost exclusively on responses from the long-form census questionnaire administered to 20% of the population.

All trend analyses presented for this release, and its accompanying products, compare 2011 Census data to previous long-form census data.

Evaluation of data on the knowledge of official languages and the first official language spoken indicates that these data are comparable to those of previous censuses.

However, Statistics Canada has observed changes in patterns of response to both the mother tongue and home language questions that appear to have arisen from changes in the placement and context of the language questions on the 2011 Census questionnaire relative to previous censuses. As a result, Canadians appear to have been less inclined than in previous censuses to report languages other than English or French as their only mother tongue, and also more inclined to report multiple languages as their mother tongue and as the language used most often at home.

It is not uncommon in survey research to observe changes in response patterns due to changes to a questionnaire and most particularly due to changes in the context in which the question is embedded.

Data users are advised to exercise caution when evaluating trends related to mother tongue and home language that compare 2011 Census data to those of previous censuses.

In the case of the mother tongue data, comparisons other than those done in the current analysis are possible depending on the needs of the user, given that mother tongue was asked on both the short and long-form questionnaires in previous censuses. Users should take into account the advantages as well as the limitations of each dataset.

Readers will find a complete analysis of factors affecting comparability of language results between the censuses in the forthcoming publication, [Methodological Document on the 2011 Census Language Data](#).

Census website

Also available today on the [2011 Census](#) website are various products and services from the [Language](#) release topic. The web page has been designed to provide easy access to census data, free of charge. Information is organized into four broad categories: Data products, Analytical products, Reference materials and Geography.

The *Data products* category presents language data for a wide range of standard geographic areas, available through the [Census Profile](#), [Topic-based tabulations](#) and the [Highlight tables](#).

The *Analytical products* category presents the language analytical document entitled [Linguistic Characteristics of Canadians](#). Additional analysis on various topics is available in the [Census in Brief](#) series. Data and highlights on key topics found in these analytical products are also available for various levels of geography in the [Focus on Geography Series](#).

The *Reference materials* category presents information to support users of census data including the [Languages Reference Guide](#) and new content from the [Census Dictionary](#).

Geographic products include [Thematic maps](#) showing data for a variety of standard geographic areas. [GeoSearch](#), an interactive mapping tool, also displays data and thematic maps for a variety of standard geographic areas.

A brief national portrait of the two fundamental dimensions of the language dynamics in Canada (Canada's linguistic diversity and English and French linguistic duality in Canadian society) is presented on [video](#).

Users are also invited to [Chat live with an expert](#) on October 26, from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3901.

The report *Linguistic Characteristics of Canadians* (98-314-X2011001, free) is now available from the *Key resource* module of our website under *Publications*.

Additional analysis is also available in the *Census in Brief* series (98-314-X2011003, free): "French and the *francophonie* in Canada," "Immigrant languages in Canada," and "Aboriginal languages in Canada."

For more information, contact Media Relations (613-951-4636; mediahotline@statcan.gc.ca).