

# Changes in language behaviour at home according to the Canadian Social Survey

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## Close to one in six Canadians who only spoke a non-official language most often at home five years prior to the survey have since begun using an official language

Data from the 2022/2023 Canadian Social Survey allow us to observe the populations most likely to make a change in linguistic behaviour by introducing one of the two official languages at home. People who spoke only French or English most often at home were less likely to change their linguistic behaviour than people who only spoke a non-official language.

Among people who only spoke a non-official language, close to one in six people (15.5%) changed their language behaviours, compared with 2.1% of people who spoke only English most often at home five years prior to the survey and 2.8% of people who spoke only French most often at home.

In the general population, 1 in 20 people (5.0%) changed the language they spoke most often at home in the five years prior to the survey.

The [2022/2023 Canadian Social Survey](#) was conducted from April 2022 to June 2023. It is used to examine, among other things, the changes in language behaviours at home by comparing the language or languages spoken most often at home at the time of the survey and those spoken most often at home five years earlier among the population 15 years and older at the time of the survey. In this article, a change in language behaviour is deemed to have happened when the language or languages spoken most often at home are different between these two points in time. Changes in language behaviours include the following: dropping a language and adding another; adding a language to the one spoken most often at home five years earlier; dropping one of the languages spoken equally most often at home; and changes to the languages in a multilingual situation over time.

A change in the language or languages spoken most often at home over a five-year period happens relatively rarely in the population as a whole. Data from the Canadian Social Survey cannot be used to determine the net changes in language behaviour at the provincial level with a high degree of certainty due to sample size. Statistics Canada will conduct other studies on this topic using other data sources.

Changes to the language or languages spoken most often at home are a key input in the analysis of the language situation in Canada. They are often associated with changes in life circumstances, such as moving, migrating or starting a relationship with someone who speaks a different language. Such changes also reveal how official languages used in the public sphere (school, work, stores, etc.) influence the integration of these languages into the family sphere, particularly for individuals whose most spoken language at home is a non-official language.

## Roughly 13% of immigrants who spoke only a non-official language most often at home began using an official language five years preceding the survey

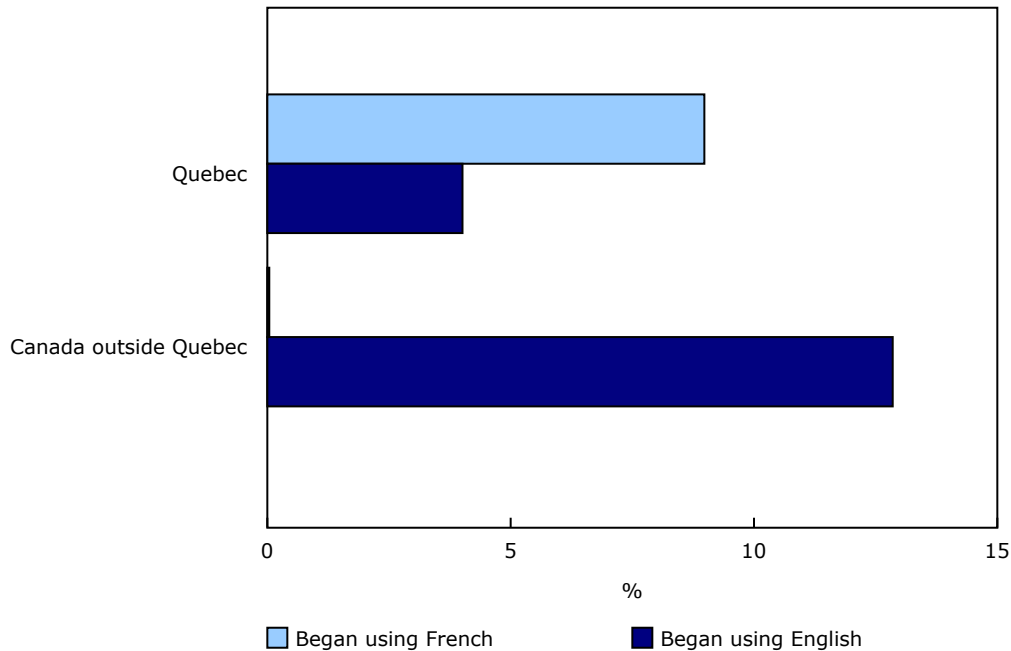
In Canada, 80% of the population who spoke only a non-official language most often at home five years prior to the survey were immigrants. Although immigrants represent 12% of the Canadian population, they accounted for 31% of the changes to the language or languages spoken most often at home in the five years prior to the survey.

In Canada outside Quebec, roughly 13% of immigrants who spoke only a non-official language most often at home five years preceding the survey began using English most often at home or speaking English at home equally with their non-official language, while less than 0.1% of immigrants began using French most often at home or speaking



French at home equally with their non-official language. In Quebec, 9% of immigrants began using French or added it to their non-official language spoken most often at home, while 4% began using English or added it to their non-official language spoken most often at home in the five years preceding the survey.

**Chart 1**  
**Proportion of immigrants who only spoke a non-official language most often at home in Canada five years prior to the survey and have since begun using an official language or added it to their non-official language as their language spoken most often at home, Quebec and Canada outside Quebec**



Source(s): Canadian Social Survey (5354), 2022-2023.

**Immigrants who were admitted to Canada in the five years prior to the survey and spoke a non-official language most often at home were more likely than immigrants who have been in Canada longer to have begun using an official language**

The results of the Canadian Social Survey show that immigrants admitted recently to Canada are more likely to change their language behaviour. Approximately 23% of immigrants who spoke only a non-official language most often at home and were living in another country five years prior to the survey have since made a change to their language behaviour. However, some of these changes occurred before their admission in Canada. This proportion was lower among immigrants admitted to Canada 6 to 10 years prior to the survey (17%) and among immigrants admitted to Canada more than 10 years prior to the survey (9%).

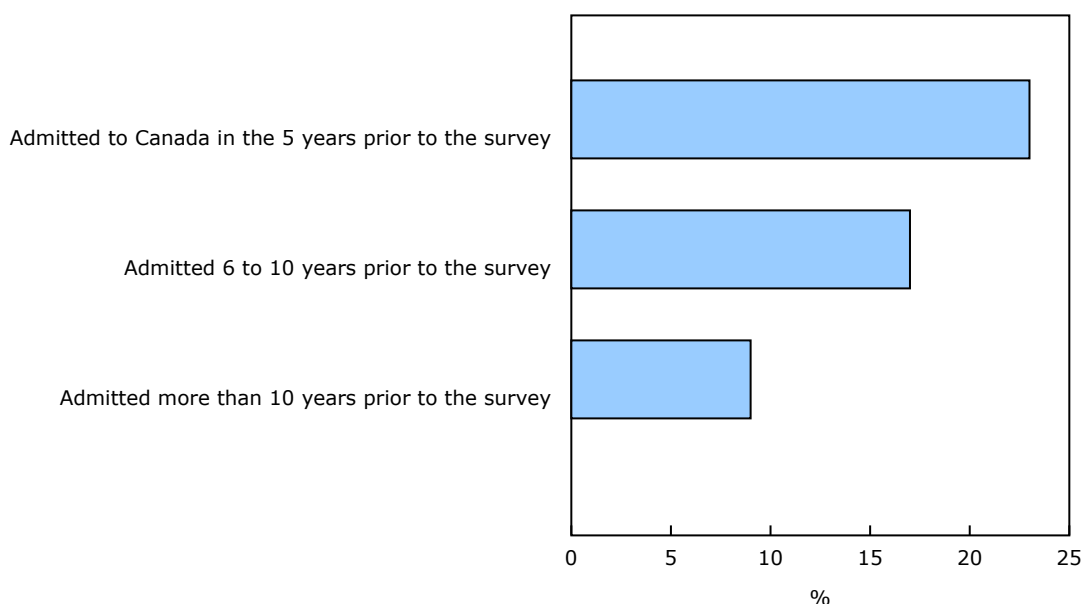
These findings suggest that most changes to language behaviours happen soon after immigrants arrive in Canada and become less common over the years.

**Chart 2**  
**Proportion of immigrants who only spoke a non-official language most often at home in Canada five years prior to the survey and have since begun using an official language or added it to their**

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## non-official language as their language spoken most often at home, by years since admission to Canada

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Source(s): Canadian Social Survey (5354), 2022-2023.

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### People who did not speak the language of the majority most often at home are more likely to have made a change to their language behaviour

The survey found that people who only spoke the language of the majority five years prior to the survey, i.e., English in Canada outside Quebec and French in Quebec, were less likely to have since made a change to their language behaviour.

In Canada outside Quebec, 1.8% of the population (around 340,000 people) who spoke English most often at home five years prior to the survey began speaking or added another language spoken most often at home. In almost 90% of cases, they began speaking a non-official language or spoke a non-official language along with English most often at home. Roughly 10% began speaking French most often at home or added French to English as their language spoken most often at home.

In Quebec, about 100,000 people (1.9% of the population) who spoke only French most often at home made a change to their language behaviour in the five years preceding the survey. In more than 60% of cases, they began speaking English most often at home, or added English to French as their language spoken most often at home. In more than 40% of cases, they began speaking a non-official language, or added a non-official language to French as their language spoken most often at home.

People who spoke only the official language of the minority most often at home—French in Canada outside Quebec and English in Quebec—were more likely to change their language behaviour in the five years prior to the survey.

In Canada outside Quebec, 13% of people (approximately 65,000) who spoke only French most often at home five years prior to the survey began speaking English or spoke it most often at home along with French.

Approximately 54,000 people (6.7% of the population) in Quebec who spoke only English most often at home five years prior to the survey began speaking French or spoke it most often at home along with English. Roughly 21,000 (2.5%) began speaking a non-official language or added it to English as their language spoken most often at home.

In both Quebec and the rest of Canada, the proportion of the minority language population who changed their language behaviour at home in the five years prior to the survey was higher than the proportion of the majority language population who did so. Similarly, people who speak a language other than English or French were even more likely to have made a change to their language behaviour (16.9% of people in Quebec and 15.3% in Canada outside Quebec).

### **In Canada, one-third of the changes to language behaviours at home involved adding a language spoken equally to the one already spoken most often at home five years prior to the survey**

In Canada outside Quebec, 47% of the changes to language behaviours at home involved changing the language spoken most often at home—most often, shifting from a non-official language to English, the main language of convergence for non-official language populations.

More than one-third of the changes involved a language being added to the one already spoken most often at home; in most cases, English was added to a non-official language. However, in about one-sixth of cases, there was a decrease from two languages spoken equally most often at home five years prior to the survey to one language spoken most often at home. In these cases, English was dropped as the language spoken most often at home almost as often as a non-official language.

In Quebec, 59% of the changes to language behaviours at home in the five years prior to the survey involved changing the language spoken most often at home for another one—most often, from English to French.

Moreover, more than one-quarter of the changes consisted in adding a language spoken most often at home, with English primarily being added to French. In contrast, about one-seventh of changes involved one of the languages spoken most often at home five years prior to the survey being dropped. A non-official language was dropped almost as often as French.

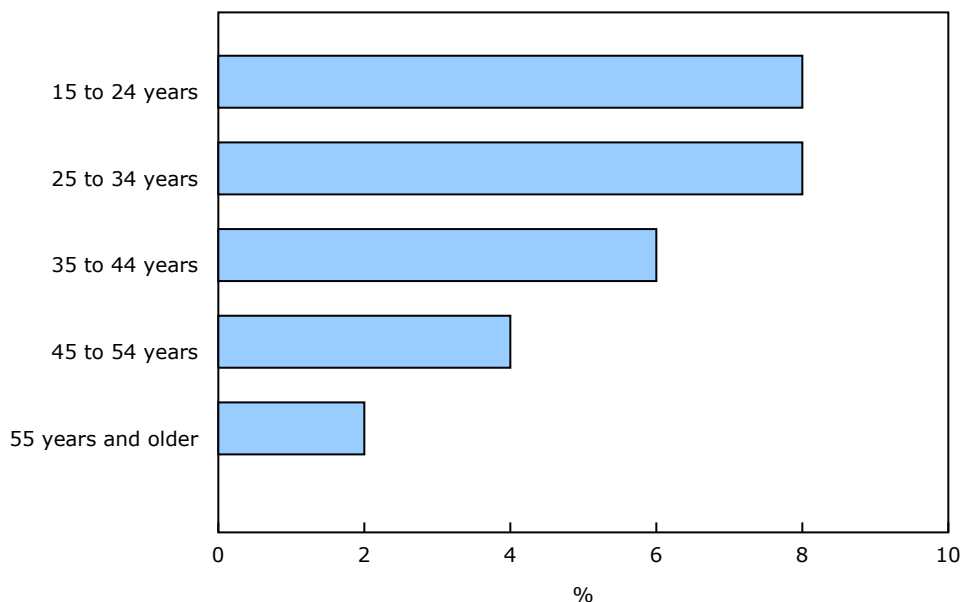
### **People aged 15 to 34 are more likely to have changed the language or languages they spoke most often at home**

The Canadian Social Survey also revealed that the likelihood to change the language spoken most often at home decreases with age.

The proportion of the population who changed its language behaviour at home is higher among young people, who are at a stage in life where many enter a relationship. In addition, a high proportion of this population leave the parental home. Many recent immigrants to Canada belong to this age group. Around 8% of the population 15 to 24 years and 25 to 34 years changed the language or languages spoken most often at home in the five years prior to the survey, compared with 2.3% of the population 55 years and older.

### Chart 3

#### Proportion of people whose language spoken most often at home changed in the five years prior to the survey in Canada, by age group



Source(s): Canadian Social Survey (5354), 2022-2023.

#### Note to readers

The results of the Canadian Social Survey allow the measurement of changes in the language or languages spoken most often at home. Respondents started by answering an initial question ("What language do you currently speak most often at home?"), followed by a second question ("What language did you speak most often at home five years ago?"). This question about the past helps to determine any changes in language behaviours over a given period, which is not easy to determine using census data.

The possible responses to these questions were "English," "French" and "Other." Respondents could choose more than one language.

The survey comprised many other questions, including about age, immigrant status and gender. The survey population targeted people aged 15 and older and did not include the territories. The questions on language spoken most often at home were included in waves 5, 6, 7 and 9 of the Canadian Social Survey, which were conducted from April 2022 to June 2023. These four waves were combined to increase the sample size to 36,763 respondents.

Statistical significance tests were done to ensure that the data quality was compliant with Statistics Canada standards. Estimates and proportions based on fewer than 10 people or with a denominator below 140 are not presented in this analysis.

For more information on the Canadian Social Survey methodology and concepts, please consult the [survey page](#) and questionnaires ([wave 5](#), [wave 6](#), [wave 7](#), [wave 9](#)).

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**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5354](#).**

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [infostats@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:infostats@statcan.gc.ca)) or Media Relations ([statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca)).