

English- and French-speaking international graduate students' experiences with on- and off-campus employment in a bilingual context

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CAG 2021



International student mobility

Globalization & race for global talent

- The « mobility-higher education » nexus

In Canada, the number of international students rose:

- From 326,120 in 2014 to 494,525 in 2017 (CBIE, 2018)

Literature Review

- Main research focus tends to be on:
 - Language proficiency primarily in **English** (vs. other languages)
 - And in **unilingual** contexts – e.g., in Australia, Canada, UK, USA
 - Specific or relatively homogeneous groups of students (e.g., from China)
- Relatively less research on international students & **employment**

Research objectives & questions

Objectives

1. Examine how international students experience, perceive, and negotiate language in different spheres of life – academics, **employment**, supports & language learning
2. Shed light on the dynamics between space and linguistic capital

Questions

1. How do international students navigate and perceive the complex language geographies of the uOttawa campus / Ottawa-Gatineau region?
2. **How does the asymmetrical bilingualism of uOttawa/Ottawa-Gatineau shape their experiences in different spheres – especially employment?**
3. To what extent do they exercise agency in negotiating English and/or French language learning opportunities and barriers both on/off campus?

Linguistic capital

Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital

Linguistic capital: “acquired skill of speaking a dominant or ‘official’ language that embodies both economic and non-economic value” (Nawyn et al., 2012:258)

Power relations and agency

- **Economic value (e.g., employment)**
- Non-economic value (services, resources, networks, advocacy, belonging)

➤ **Role of context and spaces of everyday life**

Methodology

Qualitative ethnographic approach

Semi-structured personal interviews with a **diverse group of 19 international graduate students**

➤ Limitation: small sample

Campus ethnography:

Attending events, analysis of IO services & newsletter, social media, student associations, etc.

Interview themes:

- Pre-arrival awareness of the university & bilingualism
- Post-arrival experiences: languages/bilingualism, academics, employment, social connections, and support services on and off campus
- Post-graduation plans

Participants' profile

Personal characteristics

- Language: **13** EN-speaking, **6** FR-speaking
- Gender: **11** women, **8** men
- Age range: **18-23 (6)**, **25-34 (9)**, **35-54 (4)**
- Time in Canada: from **3 months to 8 years**

Academic profiles

- Level of study: **9** Masters, **10** PhD
- Faculty**: Arts (4), Education (2), Engineering (4), Health Sciences (1), Law (1), Management (1), Sciences (1), Social Sciences (5)
- Language of program: **French (6)**, **English (11)**, **bilingual (2)**

➤ Pre-arrival awareness of bilingualism

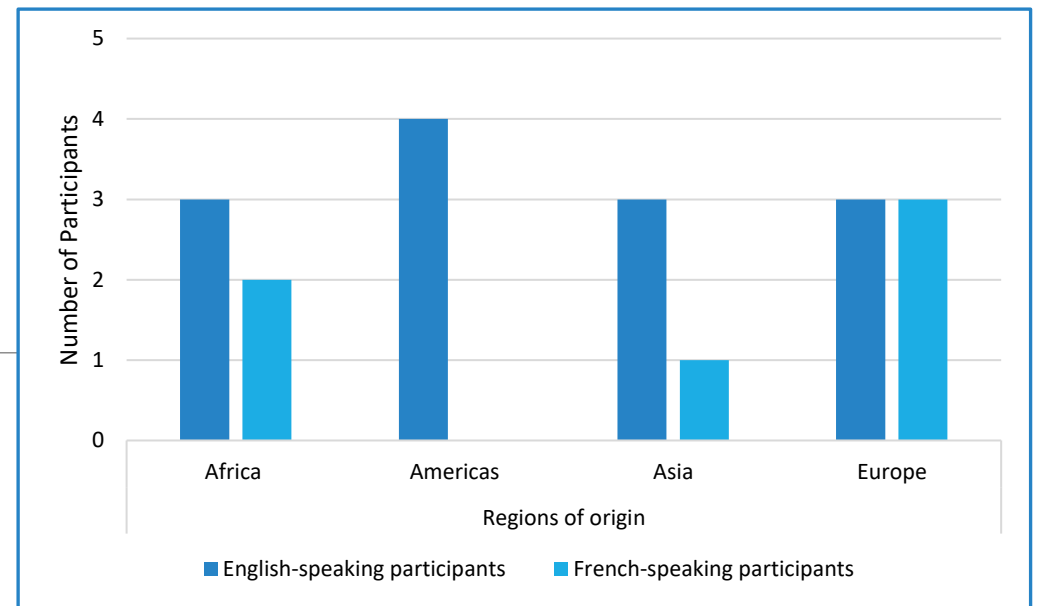


Figure 1. Region of origin of participants

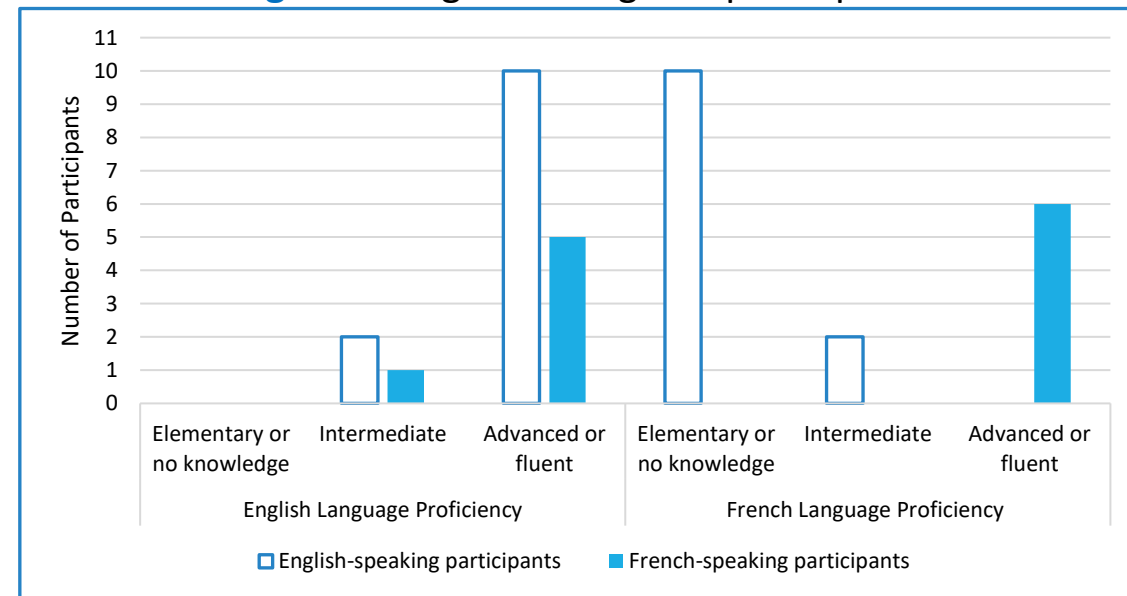


Figure 2. Self-rated language proficiency of participants

Employment situation

Table 1. Number of participants had on- or off-campus jobs

Employment Situation	English-speaking participants (n=13)	French-speaking participants (n=6)
On-Campus	5	5
Off-Campus	4	3

The University of Ottawa

BILINGUALISM MANDATE

Asymmetrical bilingualism for academic programs

- Diverse formats and experiences

Bilingualism promotion

- 1) French immersion programs
- 2) Differential tuition fee exemption for international students studying in French
- 3) Free ESL & FLS courses

All on-campus services in both languages

- **uOttawa's official designation as Francophone public institution**
- **Ontario's French language service act**

INTERNATIONALIZATION

Internationalization strategies

- 1) Recruiting international students from a wide range of countries
- 2) Increasing support for incoming international students

2009-2019

- International students' numbers grew from **1,929 (5.4%)** to **8,332 (19.3%)** (uOttawa, n.d.)
- **31.9% of all graduate students**
 - Over 90% were English-speaking

On-campus employment (1/2)

- Study-work permit limitations mean on-campus employment is more convenient
- Most on-campus jobs require bilingualism competency:
 - Library, services, mentors, etc.
 - **TA/RA job can be English- / French-only**

French-speaking IGS:

Bilingualism requirements favour Francophone students who are more likely to be bilingual

TA/RA positions in English can be stressful

C'est une chance pour **les francophones qui vont se mettre à l'anglais alors que les anglophones ne se mettront pas au français** ... quand on parle avec beaucoup d'employés sur le campus ... c'est souvent des francophones ... et très vite, si on a compris, on fait l'effort de maîtriser l'anglais. (female, Western Europe)

...c'était pas ma langue première, ça me mettait beaucoup de pression car j'évalue des travaux, je fais des corrections, des commentaires et c'est pas ma langue première et je parle à des étudiants dont c'est la langue première et ça me mettait beaucoup de pression. Je voulais que tout soit parfait, pas faire une erreur et tout ça. (female, Western Europe)

On-campus employment (2/2)

ENGLISH-SPEAKING IGS

Bilingualism requirements prevent many English-speaking IGS from accessing on-campus jobs

Even for TA / RA jobs in English, French competency is an advantage

...with TA positions it's always better if you know both languages because some courses are offered only in English, **but students might prefer French to speak to you**. So, I had a situation where a student would come to my office hours, and their English is ok, but they would feel much more comfortable in French, so that would be nice if I could speak French as well to actually better connect with the student.” (male, Eastern Europe)

I can't apply for any mentorship [jobs] here [at uOttawa] because they need someone with French language. [...] you have other languages like, Russian and Belorussian. **[But] those aren't mainstream languages here.** (female, Eastern Europe)

The discrimination shouldn't be that, if you don't speak the two languages, you should be rejected for work (...). So it's ok for me in the academic sector but **it's very bad for me in terms of working on campus,** it's very very bad for me. (male, West Africa)

Language geographies of Ottawa-Gatineau

Canada

- 2 official languages & official language minorities

Ottawa-Gatineau

- Ontario/Quebec interprovincial border
- Asymmetrical, fluid bilingualism
- Ottawa (ON): English as dominant language & significant Francophone minority
- Gatineau (QC): French as dominant language & Anglophone minority
- Changing demographics & language geographies: growing foreign-born population

➤ **Canada's capital + Federal government = bilingualism requirements in local labour market**

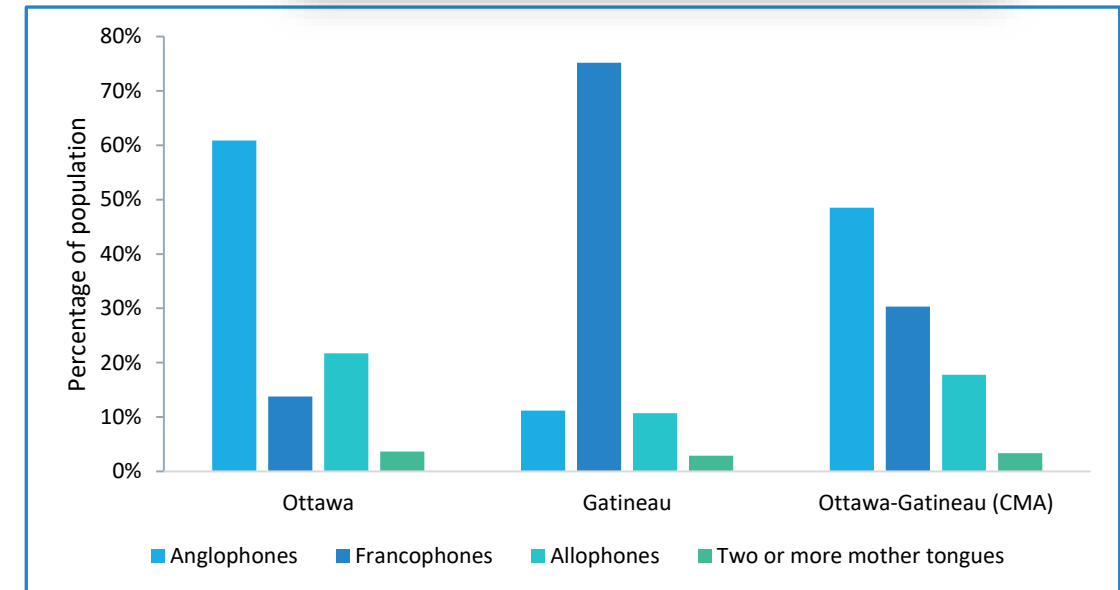


Figure 1. Percentage of population who identified as Anglophones, Francophones, Allophones, or having two or more mother tongues, in Ottawa, Gatineau, and Ottawa-Gatineau (CMA) in 2016 (source: Statistics Canada, 2017)

Off-campus employment (1/2)

- Some participants found off-campus employment through the uOttawa CO-OP program
- Study- work permit limitations make off-campus employment less convenient
- English and French skills are more valuable than proficiency in other languages

I really think **bilingualism is a kind of tokenism** because there are apparently many more languages that are minority languages, not only French. Chinese has a big population or even German ... Why only promote French and not Chinese? (female, East Asia)

FRENCH-SPEAKING IGS

Bilingualism requirements (esp. in government & service sectors) favour Francophones

- Surrounded by English, more likely to be bilingual

Donc, c'est que **le bilinguisme, ça joue et que j'ai beaucoup d'opportunités.** (female, West Europe)

- But even in bilingual workplaces, English is the majority/default language

Des fois je vois des employés ou des collègues qui sont **francophones mais parce que leurs collègues ne parlent que l'anglais donc il doit comme transférer de parler l'anglais avec eux, même si leur anglais n'est pas bon** mais c'est rare de voir les anglophones essayer de parler français avec les collègues francophones. (female, East Asia)

Off-campus employment (2/2)

ENGLISH-SPEAKING IGS

Jobs in Ottawa often have bilingualism requirements

But certain fields and occupations do not have bilingual requirements

- Technology, engineering, multi-national companies

➤ Overall, language requirements are less limiting in off-campus employment

I'm a Ph.D. student studying grand philosophical theories and **I probably cannot get basic kinds of employment because they tell you “you need to be bilingual.”** (male, Central America)

I thought that the government jobs might require French, to be bilingual. [...] **I was interested in a government job but that was English.** ...I was always under the impression that to get a government job you need to be fully bilingual, **but that's not the case.** (female, South Asia)

Becoming bilingual/multilingual

Short-term needs to become bilingual: opportunities vs. constraints (e.g., time)

Long-term plans to become bilingual: bilingualism skills perceived as advantageous for broadening employment opportunities (in Ottawa-Gatineau) and thus facilitating PR applications

...just the classes have taken me by storm to the extent that I haven't had the opportunity to start learning French. I've been so preoccupied with finishing my degree **but it's in the plan for sure.** If I stayed in Ottawa, if I stay in Canada it's going to be one of the priorities, to learn French in an acceptable way, to at least communicate with people in French.
(male, Eastern Europe)

It's great to be able to learn a foreign language on your own terms but it becomes a very different experience when you're saying to me "if you don't do this there are going to be repercussions," almost or "you're going to be at a disadvantage." (male, Central America)

Discussion and conclusions

IGS' experiences with bilingualism in employment are shaped by their **linguistic capital** in interaction with the language dynamics in **different social spaces** (on/off campus, Ottawa, Gatineau)

- **Experiences of English- and French-speaking participants vary significantly**
- The uneven and fluid language geographies of Ottawa-Gatineau and uOttawa present **unique linguistic challenges and opportunities** for accessing employment
- **Agency & structure:**
 - Value of official language bilingualism vs. plurilingualism
 - Institutional discourse about added value of bilingualism vs. English-language dominance
 - IGS face complex constraints, but they are aware of the value & advantages of bilingualism and are strategic in their long-term plans

Acknowledgements

We thank our community partners, research participants & research team

- Christina Gabriel & Louise Cockram (Carleton University)

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through the Building Migrant Resilience in Cities Partnership

- *Preston, V. PI, Belkhodja, C., Gabriel, C., Lochhead, C., Douglas, D., Dyson, D., Zikic, J., Hennebry, J., Shields, J., Veronis, L., Hynie, M., Mandell, N., Bhuyan, R., Ghosh, S. and collaborators. Migration and Resilience in Urban Canada - Immigration et résilience en milieu urbain (BMRC-IMRU): Discovering Strengths and Building Capacity, Partnership Grant. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, SSHRC#896-2016-1004, \$2,499,525, 2016-2021.*



For more information on the project: <http://bmrc-irmu.info.yorku.ca/>



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

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Thank you!

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Recommendations

- Provide I.S. with clear information regarding linguistic capital requirements
 - Academic programs, employment opportunities, everyday social interactions
 - Improve informed decision-making, adequate preparation for program requirements, more realistic expectations regarding employment prospects, choice of residence (e.g., Ottawa vs. Gatineau)
- Support development of I.S. linguistic capital
 - Consider barriers, challenges, conflicts, priorities
 - Flexible and less time consuming opportunities:
 - French/English learning mini-workshops, a conversation program for language exchange, free access to language learning apps, and increase bilingual signs on campus

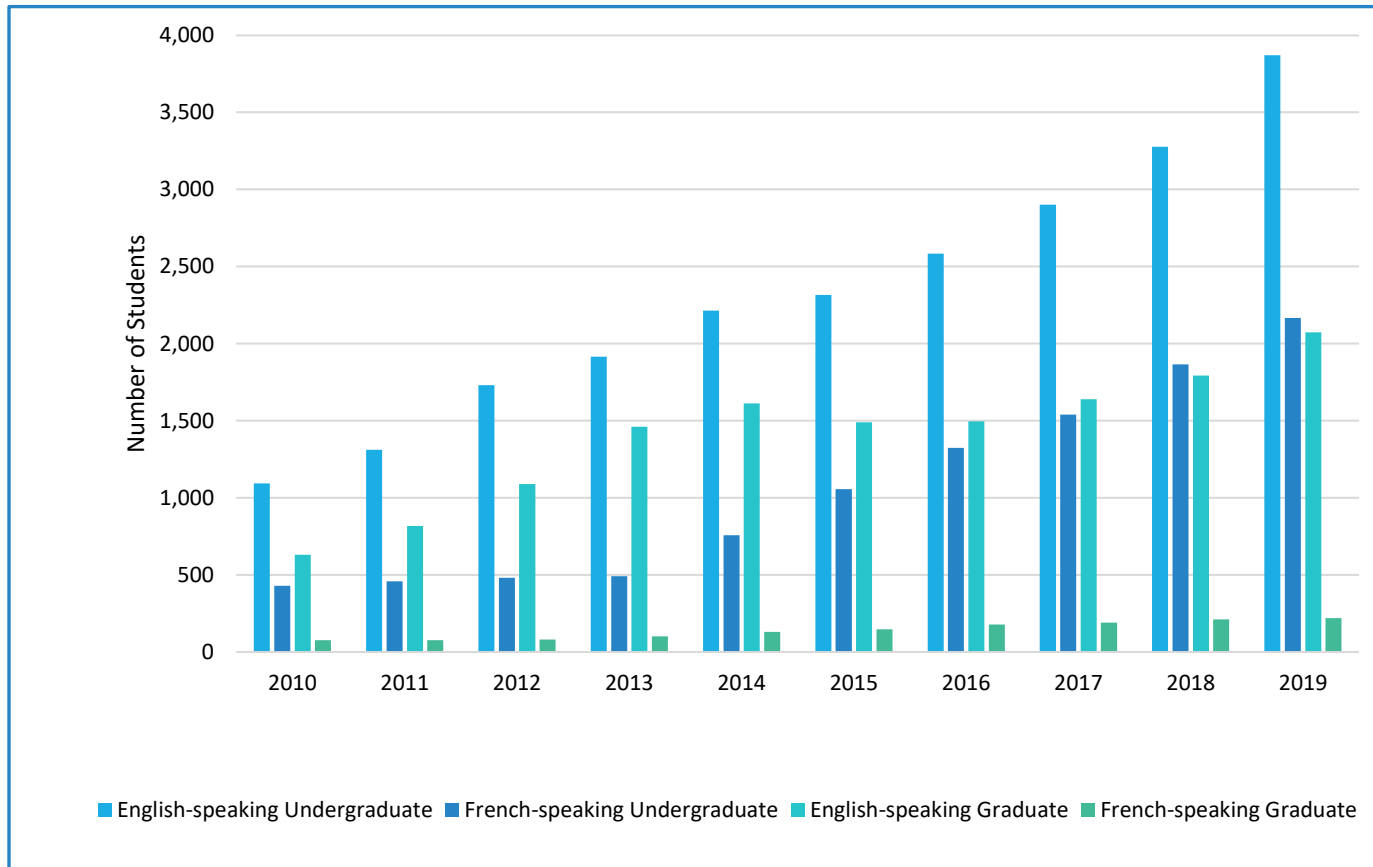


Figure 3. Number of international students enrolled at uOttawa from 2010 to 2019, by language and level of study.

Source: uOttawa. (n.d.). [Student registrations by level of study, attendance status, student's gender, language in use, immigration status, and co-op enrollment.](#)



Figure 4. A bilingual sign on the uOttawa campus