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NEWS RELEASE

Immigrants' use of French about more than language laws

Newcomers must be integrated into Quebec society to embrace French

Montreal – Despite considerable progress in immigrants' use of French in Quebec, further advances require looking beyond explicit language laws, according to a new study published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy.

The study, "L'intégration linguistique des immigrants au Québec," by Michel Pagé in collaboration with Patricia Lamarre, concludes that what is needed for the successful linguistic integration of immigrants in Quebec is better economic and social integration into French culture and society, rather than tightening language policy.

"French workplaces in the province must be more open and welcoming to immigrants," notes author Michel Pagé. "It has to happen outside of the work setting as well. One frequently hears immigrants talk about the difficulties of forming meaningful social relationships with French-speaking Quebecers."

It would be more effective to focus on the application of the existing language law, rather than impose further legal obligations, such as mandatory attendance at French CEGEPs for students who have attended French high schools.

"Speaking French must be advantageous for immigrants in various facets of their lives," says Pagé. "It should provide better access to satisfying work and educational opportunities as well as a fulfilling social life. In short, it has to be worth it!"

The study paints a more nuanced portrait of language use among immigrants and their children than that provided by simple statistics on mother tongue. Among allophone immigrants throughout Quebec, 46 percent work primarily in French, whereas 33 percent work primarily in English and 12 percent use both languages on the job. In the Montreal census region, more than 50 percent work in both languages.

The study shows that the majority of immigrants use multiple languages, including English, on a daily basis, and given these realities, calls for a more holistic approach to the development of policies on linguistic integration.

"L'intégration linguistique des immigrants au Québec," by Michel Pagé in collaboration with Patricia Lamarre, can be downloaded free of charge from the Institute's Web site, www.irpp.org.

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