

Francophonie: to the history of the French-speaking network

Francofonía: La historia de la red de franco-parlantes

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ABSTRACT:

The article deals with the history of the French-speaking countries and the francophone organization – Francophonie. The authors glance on the using the word francophonie, its interpreting. The aim of the article is to show the role of Francophonie in joining up the French-speaking world and developing its policies. The actual material is based on various works of French-, English- and Russian speaking scientists from all over the world.

Keywords: Francophonie, francophone, French language, French-speaking world

RESUMEN:

El artículo trata de la historia de los países francófonos y de la organización francófona – Francofonía. Los autores miran en el uso de la palabra Francofonía, su interpretación. El objetivo del artículo es mostrar el papel de la Francofonía en la Unión del mundo francófono y el desarrollo de sus políticas. El material real se basa en varios trabajos de los científicos francófonos, ingleses y rusos de todo el mundo.

Palabras clave: Francofonía, francófono, lengua francesa, mundo francófono

1. Introduction

Comparing French-speaking countries did raise some problems for scientists. For one thing, statistics on the English and French languages are somewhat crude. One reason is that it is difficult to define exactly what is a French speaker or an English speaker. Both are not only native languages but also important languages of choice in many other countries. The various people designing surveys don't always make the same distinctions between different types of speakers (native, partial or occasional, for example).

We use the terms anglophone and francophone for people who speak English or French,

respectively, in order to emphasize the fact that not all French speakers are French. We also often refer to both the Francophonie and the francophonie. The nuance is important. Francophonie with a capital F is the fifty-three-member International Organization of the Francophonie (= Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie), whose purpose it is to promote French. The small-f francophonie is the real planet of francophones. Countries such as Israel and Algeria, and the United States where 1.6 million speakers make French the third language after English and Spanish are not part of the capital-F Francophonie.

In 127 countries of the world, mostly outside the Francophonie, there are tens of millions of students, adults and children, learning French in one of the world's roughly 1,500 Alliances françaises and French lycées and colleges. An additional twenty million students are learning French in national education programs outside the fifty-three member countries (plus ten observers) of the Francophonie.

Not a bad performance for a language that ranks ninth in the world for number of speakers! And education is just one of the ways in which French has held on to its rank as the world's second international language. This is the story of how French became a global language.

2. Research Methods

Methods of the analysis are defined by objectives, a theoretical and practical orientation of the research, and a character of the presented material. In the work, various types of the analysis are implied: the intralinguistic analysis (identification of the general and national peculiar features in variation of language); the geolinguistic analysis (studying features of the geolinguistic typology which causes the process of geographical changing of language); the functional analysis (considering the ways of representation of variants of the language units in the French-speaking world).

3. Result and Discussion

Many scientists are still using the word francophonie (small f) in their works in reference to those who speak French irrespective of nationality. The other Francophonie (capital F) is considered as an institution that brings together the various organizations, associations and media outlets that promote French language and the development of French-speaking countries all over the world. The International Organization of the Francophonie (= Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie) serves the same purposes for the organizations of the French-speaking world as much as the U.N. is the flagship that makes up the system of international law of the world.

It is not a secret that the Francophonie is often compared to the British Commonwealth which started out in 1931 as an informal club to maintain links between Britain and its former dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Later this Commonwealth included the newly independent India. By 1957 the Commonwealth had got a permanent office and a budget and it was ready to welcome former British colonies as they became independent in the following years (Duby 1997).

The Francophonie was rather slower getting off the ground than the Commonwealth and didn't take any shape until the second half of the XXth century (Nadeau, Barlow 2006). This original idea came from a Quebec journalist, Jean-Marc Léger. This journalist had played a key role in creating the International Union of Journalists from the French-Language (= Press Union Internationale des journalistes de la presse de langue française) in the early 1950s. During the meeting with the French minister of foreign affairs of Quebec in 1953 he proposed creating a group of French-speaking states whose representatives would meet to network. He expected the countries exchanging knowledge and developing common policies. However, his idea was not supported. Later in 1954 he succeeded to found the French Cultural Union (= Union culturelle française).

In 1961 Jean-Marc Léger created a network of francophone universities – the Agence

universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) still exists today. At the same time the education ministers of fifteen French-speaking countries decided to establish their own permanent assembly. It was the first of kind of the French-speaking world group.

By the second half of the XXth century the word francophonie was not even in use. The French geographer Onésime Reclus had invented this term in 1887. In his work, he tried to describe everyone who spoke French, regardless of their nationality. The confusion of ideas – francophonie (small f) and Francophonie (capital F) – was eliminated and appeared a new idea of separating nationality and language. But the term was out of use until 1962 when the journal *Esprit* published a special issue ("French, a living language" (= "Français langue vivante"). Léopold Sédar Senghor and other high-profile intellectuals called for the creation of a "francophone" organization. They brought back to life the idea of Jean-Marc Léger.

It is very interesting that by 1965 a lot of French-speaking countries of Africa wanted to form their own group on the basis of French which they considered as a shared language. The government of Quebec supported all these countries and in 1966 the President of Niger, Hamani Diori, showed the blueprint for a multilateral organization for the cooperation of French-speaking states in front of French President de Gaulle.

No doubt that most of French-speaking countries wanted this blueprint and supported it. Despite the reticence of France on this idea, in 1969 formal talks began in Niamey, the capital of Niger. The negotiations were very complex and it was too early to speak about any shape of Commonwealth. The problem would not be resolved for nearly twenty years.

The word francophonie at the same time was used informally. There were no official documents of the Francophonie until 1996. We suppose that it was linked to the fact that the French language never accepted the created term. Some countries associated it with former colonialism, especially sub-Saharan and North African countries. Even the French President de Gaulle pronounced this term never in public and very seldom.

According to our observation France was more willing to get involved in the creation of a French-speaking commonwealth. The main thing complicating negotiations between countries was the permanent quarrel between the governments of Quebec and Canada (Conlogue 2002). From the beginning Quebec had been very enthusiastic about the idea of a francophone organization. As for Canada, its government refused to let Quebec participate in this activity. But French diplomats were sure that the Francophonie could not become Commonwealth without Quebec (Johnson 1999). Finally, France proposed to include Quebec as a participating government. This appeased a bit Canada.

In 1970 representatives from twenty-one French-speaking countries and governments gathered in Niamey and created the Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation (ACCT) (= Agence de coopération culturelle et technique). Jean-Marc Léger was appointed general director. But the word francophonie was still absent from the new agency's name.

So, the ACCT was meant to be as a stepping stone to francophonie summits of heads of French-speaking states. But in reality, there was no summit for the next fifteen years. The main problem was again the ongoing quarrel between the governments of Quebec and Canada. In 1976 things got even worse because Quebec elected a separatist government. This new government saw the ACCT as an ideal method of projecting Quebec as an independent state. The problem was not resolved until 1985 when new governments in both Ottawa and Quebec reached a compromise.

In 1986 Paris hosted the first Summit of Countries That Have French in Common (= Sommet des pays ayant le français en paratage). Again, the term francophonie was absent, regardless of the fact that all countries considered the meeting as the francophonie summit.

The Francophonie throughout its development was overwhelmed by two main problems. The first was how to define its membership criteria. Some obvious francophone countries such as Algeria have never joined. Zaire (now Congo) was also wary about the colonial connotations of the organization and only joined because Canada was a member and Belgium was not in. Other

countries including Cambodia and Laos had reservations and eventually joined the organization. On the other hand, Egypt was admitted in 1983 and even at the time its membership seemed not evident as only some part of society spoke French. Moreover, this country was never a colony of France or Belgium. Nowadays Egypt's membership is a stretch compared to that of Romania and Moldova that joined the organization in the early 1990s. In both mentioned countries, the French is much alive, even after more than thirty years of communism.

During the 1990s the Francophonie started accepting candidate countries French status in which is not evident – Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria. Such choices were all the more surprising given that because some very francophone countries (for instance, Israel, which is over ten percent French-speaking) are not members.

The Francophonie continued to have difficulty defining its purpose. It hesitated between being an organization of nonaligned states, a French U.N., a French UNESCO. Until the middle of the 1990s Francophonie summits were mostly spent deciding on the date of the next summit. But gradually members came to agree that the meetings had to produce some concrete results. In 1987 the leaders of Quebec and Ivory Coast convinced their peers to create an institute to help poorer members to develop energy policies and energy-production techniques adapted to local conditions and resources – Institut francophone pour l'énergie et l'environnement (based in Quebec). Members also decided to put under its authority some existing francophone bodies such as the TV5 channel and the Agence universitaire francophone.

In 1993 at the summit in Mauritius member countries adopted their first common position on a matter relating to international trade. The policy stated that cultural goods and services could not be regarded solely as merchandise and was meant to influence the outcome of negotiations of the World Trade Organization. This resolution contained much of the ferment for the Francophonie's future political actions.

From 1987 member countries began inviting to the summits governments, jurisdictions or international organizations that were not members but were considered sympathetic to the cause of French. During those years, France, Belgium and the sub-Saharan countries lobbied hard to get the organization to assume its true vocation and to adopt an easy, catchy official name La Francophonie. In 1995 the ACCT became the Agence internationale de la Francophonie. At the 1997 summit in Hanoi, Vietnam, the Francophonie chose Boutros Boutros-Ghali as its first secretary-general. The Francophonie was split into two bodies: a political head office, the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, and the Agence internationale de la Francophonie, which managed subsidies and budgets. In 2005 these two bodies were finally merged into a single Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

Throughout the last thirty years dozens of activists created their own francophone associations for lawyers, dentists, members of Parliament, union leaders, sociologists, economists etc. One of the largest, the International Federation of Teachers of French (= Fédération Internationale des professeurs de français) includes about seventy thousand teachers of French from 200 associations in more than 100 countries. All of these organizations are international and people exchange ideas and ways of doing things. Many organizations are dedicated to the promotion of French in scientific circles – the Poincaré Network for French as a Language of Science (= Réseau Poincaré pour le français langue de science), the Quebec-France Centre for Inter-university Cooperation (= Centre de coopération interuniversitaire franco-québécoise) etc.

There are in fact so many French-language organizations that another association was created in 1975 to network the networks – the Francophone Association for Friendship and Liaison (= Association francophone d'amitié et de liaison). Now it has more than 150 francophone associations as members.

TV5 and the Agence universitaire francophone became "two bright lights in this nebula of francophone organizations" (Nadeau, Barlow 2006). The authority of the Francophonie summit now operate through both. And both have had an impressive result in promoting French language and French culture.

The oldest star among francophone organizations is the Agence universitaire francophone. Founded in 1961 by Jean-Marc Léger to link thirty-three universities in Canada and France. The AUF has expanded into a network of more than 500 universities from sixty countries. Part of the AUF's success dates back to the 1960s when the rector of the University of Morocco, Mohammed El Fasi, proposed that the AUF extend membership to universities that operated only partially in French.

Nowadays many researchers French work together in some eighteen sectors range from engineering to linguistics, demography, agronomy and genetics. The AUF grants about two thousand bursaries a year, as well as awards to researchers such as Van Ga Bui of the University of Dasang in Vietnam, an engineer who designed a new computer model to measure pollution from diesel motors.

The AUF's achievement has been to stimulate research in French and even raise the demand for French at some university campuses, notably in Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. French is still strong among the intellectual elite of Hungary, largely because of the AUF's work. In Southeast Asia the number of Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian university students who learn French or learn in French had risen to forty thousand in 2003, and the increase was due largely to the work of the AUF, which runs the Technology Institute of Cambodia, among other things.

When you visit Beijing, Tokyo or London, your hotel TV will likely receive a French channel. And chances are it will be TV5, the world's most successful French cable channel, to which 160 million households and three million hotel rooms subscribe worldwide.

TV5 was created in 1984, when five TV channels (three French, one Belgian and one Swiss) decided to pool their programs into a sort of international TV digest – a collage of their best shows. Firstly, TV5 had trouble sticking to a schedule and the programming choices were not as good as people expected. But the shows got progressively better as other TV channels joined in Canada's National French-language network.

The channel invested heavily in subtitles in English, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Dutch and Swedish to reach audiences outside the French-speaking world. Today, among international channels TV5 ranks third behind MTV and CNN, and ahead of BBC World, Aljazeera and Deutsche Welle. In Europe ninety million homes receive the French-language channel. In Algeria alone, two million people watch TV5.

TV5 also has an educational wing that produces a full range of services for French teachers abroad. Every month some forty thousand French teachers tap into TV5's documentaries and series by consulting eight hundred thousand videos online, and dozens thousand teachers are registered in TV5's "Teach and Learn" program.

In Africa, where infrastructure is always a problem, TV5 is shown in ten télé-café's called the Maisons TV5. These were created in Burkina Faso in 2001 and later spread to Benin and Senegal. TV5 is considering expanding the initiative to all developing countries, not only in Africa.

TV5's mission has always been to break the quasimonopoly of Anglo-American news images and content. Part of its success in doing so has come from the way it has positioned itself as an alternative media source between American news and Aljazeera. This approach is paying off.

Since 2005 TV5 has gone its politics by relabelling itself TV5 World (= TV5Monde). The late Serge Adda, head of TV5 until his death and the main brain behind the channel's renewal, had been adamant about what he called the *décloisement* (decompartmentalization) of cultures. He did not want an African film just to be for Africans. He supposed that the African cinema must be seen in Hanoi, Tokyo, Rio, Dakar, Cairo, and conversely.

It is evident that the role of term francophone has changed. Now people and even countries understand that the Francophonie are to be considered as the Francophone Commonwealth. Many countries are ready to contribute the organization to spread its influence on different

spheres of human life. Today French language rivals with English and this completion is not finished yet. Much depends on whether francophones are able to capitalize on their situation and summon up some ambition.

4. Conclusion

Thus, we see that the story of French world has been, and will continue to be. Spoken on many continents by relatively few people, the French language is distributed more widely than Spanish, Arabic or Portuguese.

Outside of France, only minorities speak French. More often than not. Outside of France, Belgium, Switzerland and North America, French is learned as a second language rather than a mother tongue, and most of the French-speaking elites are in fact bilingual, if not multilingual. Because of this precarious situation, French could be wiped out within several generations. But it also could mean that French is in a better position to reach out and spread its influence almost everywhere on the planet.

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