”Le symbole de mes racines” – but what about the future? Quebecers’
attitudes towards French compared to English

Ruth Kircher
Liverpool Hope University, United Kingdom

Quebec is Canada’s only province with a francophone rather than an anglophone majority. However, unlike the rest of the province, which is rather homogeneously French-speaking, Quebec’s urban centre Montreal is home not only to many francophones but also to comparatively large communities of anglophones and allophones – that is, those who have a mother tongue other than French or English. This paper begins by tracing the linguistic tensions that have existed in Quebec, and particularly in Montreal, since the 1960s, thereby showing how the roles of French and English in the province have changed over time. Subsequently, the paper presents the findings of a recent study that employed a questionnaire to elicit attitudes towards French and English from over 500 respondents. Unlike most previous research, this study gathered data not only from respondents in multilingual Montreal but also from respondents in the more monolingual rest of Quebec, thereby allowing for a comparison of language attitudes in very different linguistic spaces. In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of language attitudes in the province, the questionnaire elicited qualitative as well as quantitative data pertaining to both the status and the solidarity dimension. The findings suggest that attitudes on the status dimension are comparatively uniform, with a preference being exhibited for English – which is interpreted as a result of the importance English holds as the language of upward mobility in the rest of Canada and as the global lingua franca of our time. However, significant attitudinal differences appear to exist on the solidarity dimension, not only between Montrealers and those from the rest of Quebec but also between different age groups and different mother tongue groups. These differences are interpreted as reflections of different types of social identities, including a Montreal-based identity as well as an international youth identity.

Keywords: social identity, language attitudes, Quebec.