



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## **Standing Committee on Official Languages**

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LANG • NUMBER 004 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Monday, March 7, 2016**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Denis Paradis**



## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Monday, March 7, 2016

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)):** Welcome to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Let me say right at the outset that we must conclude the committee's work at 5:30, because someone else will need the room at that time.

Our agenda today is divided into two parts: first we will hear representatives of the Treasury Board Secretariat, and afterwards we will host representatives from the translation bureau.

May I welcome Ms. Sally Thornton, Assistant Deputy Minister, Governance Planning and Policy Sector, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer.

I also welcome Mr. Marc Tremblay, Executive Director, Official Languages Centre of Excellence, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer.

Lady, gentleman, welcome.

Let's get to work right away. You have the floor.

**Ms. Sally Thornton (Assistant Deputy Minister, Governance Planning and Policy Sector, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat):** Thank you.

I think you have all received the slides.

Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. We are pleased to be here.

As you know, our minister, the President of the Treasury Board, is responsible for some parts of the Official Languages Act. These are reflected in his mandate letter commitments, which have been made public.

Diversity is our strength, and we have a strong commitment to promoting official languages—both in the workplace and in the services that we provide to Canadians—not just from coast to coast to coast, but also overseas.

By way of opening remarks, we would propose an overview of the role of the Treasury Board Secretariat in the context of the Official Languages Act, touching on the legislative framework and key language provisions of legal instruments, as well as the data and the outcomes.

I would like to invite Marc Tremblay to walk us through the deck, and then we would be pleased to take questions.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay (Executive Director, Official Languages Centre of Excellence, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat):** I invite you to go directly to slide 2 of our short presentation, which gives you an overview of the legislative framework governing official languages. The Treasury Board Secretariat has certain responsibilities regarding this legislative framework which gives life to the programs.

Let's move on to slide 3.

As you know, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms gives equal status to English and French in all institutions of the Government of Canada. This is, among other things, the cornerstone of federal employees' right to work in English or in French.

The charter also gives members of the public the right to receive services from their government in English and French depending on the location and nature of the office, and where there is a significant demand for the services. The charter rights are further developed and entrenched in the Official Languages Act.

Slide 4 presents part IV of the Official Languages Act, one of the three parts of this act that are the responsibility of Treasury Board and the President of the Treasury Board. This part of the act sets out federal institutions' obligations related to providing communications and services to the public in both official languages.

As of March 31, 2014, there were, across Canada and overseas, 11,469 federal offices; more than 5,000 of these were post offices and Service Canada local offices located throughout the country. This includes Air Canada routes, telephone lines and websites. Of these 11,469 federal offices, 3,931 were bilingual and 7,538 were unilingual, still as of March 31, 2014. This means that 1,371 offices offered unilingual French services, while 6,167 offices offered services in English only. As of March 31, 2014, 34.3% of federal offices were required to offer bilingual services to the public and communicate with it in both languages.

Based on the reports that federal institutions submit to the Treasury Board Secretariat to show that they are complying with the requirements of the act, a strong majority of institutions indicated that in offices designated bilingual for services to the public, oral and written communications are in the official language of the public's choice.

As noted in the 2013-2014 “Annual Report on Official Languages”, we continue to work with institutions to update linguistic designations based on the 2011 Census. This exercise will continue into 2016-2017.

That was a very brief overview of part IV.

Let us now move on to slide 5, which discusses part V of the Official Languages Act, the language of work.

This part of the act makes English and French the two languages or work in federal institutions. The act gives employees in designated bilingual regions the right to use their official language of choice; to be supervised, to receive personal and central services, and to have access to work instruments in the official language of their choice. In unilingual regions, the language of the majority is generally the language of work.

May I direct your attention to a few key indicators which show that federal institutions have created work environments that allow them to meet their obligations to the public and to their employees.

The first indicator is the proportion of bilingual positions in the core public administration, which has steadily increased from almost 25% in 1978 to over 43% in 2014. The second indicator points in the same direction: the proportion of employees in bilingual positions who meet the language requirements of their position has steadily increased, from 69.7% in 1978 to 95.6% in 2014.

I will now go on to slide 6, on part VI of the Official Languages Act, which speaks to the participation of English and French-speaking Canadians in federal institutions.

• (1535)

Anglophones and francophones are well represented across federal institutions subject to the act.

According to the 2011 Census, 23.2% of Canada's population is francophone. As of March 31, 2014, francophone representation in federal institutions was 26.5%, and 33% of executives in the core public administration were francophone.

I am coming to the end of my presentation.

Slide 7 sets out the responsibilities the Official Languages Act gives to Treasury Board and the President of the Treasury Board with regard to developing policies and regulations and tabling reports pursuant to parts IV, V and VI of the act.

The last slide presents a pie chart that provides a brief guide to the committee on understanding the numerous responsibilities of the various federal institutions with respect to official languages.

**Ms. Sally Thornton:** We continue to encourage institutions and public servants to participate in building the public service of tomorrow by affirming the importance of our two official languages at every opportunity.

This completes our opening remarks.

We would be pleased to take questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your presentation.

We will immediately begin the first round of questions with Ms. Boucher.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC):** Good afternoon.

Thank you for this fine presentation. It is always a pleasure to sit on this committee.

Social media are becoming increasingly prevalent in our environment, both here and in federal institutions. I would like to know what mechanisms you have put in place to comply with your language obligations. Have you put such mechanisms in place? Everyone is on Twitter and Facebook, and we need a structure.

• (1540)

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Overall Treasury Board official language policies state that all federal institution communications must meet the same requirements, and communications in social media are subject to the same rules.

In addition, policies on communications and the various guides on the use of social media contain more specific instructions to guide federal institutions and public servants who must or who wish to communicate through social media.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** So, our communications are subject to the same rules, even if social media are a new phenomenon.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** That is correct.

What most federal institutions do regarding the Twitter feed is that they have two accounts, one in French and one in English, that simultaneously broadcast tweets in both official languages.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** And do you ensure that the tweets say the same thing in both French and English? Sometimes, the translated comments do not necessarily mean the same thing.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** The institutions are required to ensure that their communications are of equal quality, whatever means are used.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Very well.

Thank you, Mr. Tremblay.

**The Chair:** You have two minutes, John.

**Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** I'd like to ask some questions on the use of French in the public service.

When I worked at the Treasury Board Secretariat, everyone was officially bilingual, but people generally spoke English. Is there an issue with public service culture that explains why English is used more often than French? How can we measure the use of both official languages in the public service?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Mr. Chair, once again, in this regard we need first of all to talk about the current situation. A very large proportion of the employees in bilingual positions meet the language requirements of their position, according to Public Service Commission tests. This is a noteworthy improvement over the situation which prevailed 10 or 15 years ago.

Being able to speak both official languages does not necessarily mean that you always use them. However, various methods are constantly being used to encourage the use of both languages and to remind employees that this is their right.

Good practices have been put in place in our institutions. For our part, we ensure that employees are made aware of them. This can be done simply through the use of posters reminding employees that they have the right, at meetings, to use the official language of their choice, or by using other similar methods.

[English]

**Ms. Sally Thornton:** If I may add, every three years we have a public service employee survey and we engage our employees on a range of issues, including a set of questions with regard to the use of official languages such as, “Am I free to use the official language of my choice in meetings or in written materials?” Generally speaking, the response rates to the use of official languages are high, but there is a difference in the response rates between anglophones and francophones. Generally speaking, the response rates from francophones are less satisfied; they're still high, but they don't have the same feeling of ease about using the language of their choice in meetings or in written materials.

**Mr. John Nater:** Just honing up a little bit, there's the bilingual bonus. It's my understanding that it's been fairly stagnant for a number of years. Is there any discussion being held on either increasing it or potentially doing away with it if it's no longer effectively achieving the purpose it was set out to do?

**Ms. Sally Thornton:** As you know, the bilingual bonus payment is governed by the directive, and the National Joint Council is responsible for the directive. It's an integral part of collective agreements, so subject to negotiations. What I would say is that since we've had the bonus in play, since 1977, at that time 69.7% of employees met their language requirements. Today it's 95%.

• (1545)

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.) (via text-to-speech software):** Have any translation bureau positions been eliminated over the past years?

What kinds of positions were eliminated, and how many?

Will more positions be eliminated in the near future?

What are the reasons for eliminating these positions? Has eliminating these positions affected the quality of the translation bureau's services?

How has eliminating these positions affected the ability of federal institutions to meet their linguistic obligations?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Mr. Chair, several of these questions could be put to our colleagues from the translation bureau, who will be appearing during the second hour.

Some questions involve compliance or quality assurance. Without saying that we play a role in quality assurance, I would say that Treasury Board policies demand compliance on the part of institutions. They require that the institutions offer the public a product of equal quality, simultaneously in both official languages,

when bilingualism is required. That is what must be done, whatever the method that is used.

For its part, the Treasury Board Secretariat is responsible for monitoring execution. Consequently we ask the institutions to ensure that they continuously meet the requirements of the policies and that they respect the equal status of French and English when they communicate with the public, in particular.

**The Chair:** And how do you monitor that quality?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Every year institutions receive a questionnaire in which we ask them a series of questions on the various requirements of the Treasury Board policies. Indeed, according to Treasury Board requirements, the deputy minister must constantly monitor his or her organization's compliance and report on it when the Secretariat asks him to do so. Ultimately, the annual report of the President of the Treasury Board sets out the performance of the institutions with regard to their obligations.

**The Chair:** So this is based on the deputy minister's report.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** It is based on the deputy minister's report, which is submitted to the Treasury Board Secretariat.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you very much, Mauril.

Linda, you have the floor.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.):** Good afternoon. Thank you for being here with us this afternoon.

Ms. Thornton, a bit earlier you referred to surveys taken to determine, among other things, the level of satisfaction public servants feel with regard to the language spoken at meetings. You said that francophones seemed less satisfied with regard to the language used.

Given the results of these surveys, what are you doing to correct the situation?

**Ms. Sally Thornton:** After receiving the results of these surveys, every department creates an implementation plan. We set priorities and we implement an action plan.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** We will report on our activities to follow up on the results of the 2014 survey in the 2014-2015 “Annual Report on Official Languages”, so stay tuned.

Basically, our role is to ask the questions, analyze the replies and transmit the results to the individuals who are responsible for official languages, the champions among others. In this way they are made aware of the results for their organization as compared to the overall results for federal institutions, and of whether their performance is better or worse on any given question.

Afterwards, when we have identified certain issues, for instance the official language used during meetings, the official languages centre of excellence organizes meetings. Working groups attempt to identify the best tools and practices to be shared with all of the institutions. We may, for instance, ask those who have had a good performance rating what they have done to obtain these results and how other institutions could learn from their experience.

•(1550)

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** You spoke about 2014. Has this been done for 2015?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** The survey is only administered every three years.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** It is done once every three years?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** There was a survey in 2011.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** I understand.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** The results of the 2014 survey are known, of course. We are going to highlight them in our next annual report.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** If the 2011 survey allowed you to find potential improvements, and if your champions explained to the others how to adopt better practices, did you see an improvement between 2011 and 2014 with regard to the language spoken by public servants?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** We did not see a marked improvement. There may be different explanations for that. One of them is that our capacity to analyze the results in a more systematic way has improved considerably. I am talking about the official languages centre of excellence, the Secretariat of the Treasury Board and of the institutions. Today, we are better able than three years ago to make diagnoses and obtain more precise figures for a given organization, or even a given sector. This may have improved the capacity of institutions to determine where their real weaknesses were. We are better equipped today.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Tremblay.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

**Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here.

My question is about the fact that the Liberals said they would respect the Official Languages Act and that they were going to make this a priority.

Did ministers Joly and Foote make recommendations to you concerning the new directions your work might take with respect to official languages?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** The Treasury Board Secretariat works very hard to always respect instructions and ensure that Treasury Board policies are complied with, particularly in communications and services. It verifies compliance with those requirements through the reviews and annual reports we have just talked about.

As I mentioned earlier, we are also completing the review of the linguistic designation of positions. This will be another important factor to continue to ensure full compliance with part IV of the act regarding communications and services, since we must review the linguistic designation of all of our points of service every 10 years.

As for the other measures, we are working in close cooperation with Heritage Canada to develop the horizontal initiative for official languages. The department representatives mentioned it a few days ago. When we have the results, we will be happy to come and discuss them with you.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thank you very much.

Last January, the Commissioner of Official Languages, Mr. Graham Fraser, published a document entitled “Audit of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat within the context of the 2011-2012 Strategic and Operating Review”. In it, he severely criticizes non-compliance with part VII of the Official Languages Act. He states that nothing indicates that the government had a strategy to ensure the respect of official languages in its expenditure review. He mentions that there are consequences to this, and uses the term “collateral damage”. I expect that you have read this report, that you immediately took it into consideration and that you have begun to make improvements.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** You probably know, since this was published in the audit in question, that the Treasury Board Secretariat accepted the recommendations of the commissioner and that it is working to improve things.

It was suggested that an accountability framework be developed in order to better reflect the roles and responsibilities of the various entities for the different parts of the Official Languages Act. We also want to disseminate certain analysis tools that were considered to be effective. We have to ensure that these are distributed in due time, so that in future when institutions review their expenses, they take into account not only part VII, but also parts IV, V and VI, which are of particular concern to us.

•(1555)

**Mr. François Choquette:** Of course. Thank you very much for this very relevant reply.

The chief executive officer of the translation bureau will be with us later today, but I would nevertheless like to discuss this briefly.

There is now a cost recovery system to make the translation bureau financially independent; I think those are the terms that were used. However, in this calculation, “additional factors” are added, which a private translation company would not have to include. Concerning terminology, there is for instance the Termium tool, which is well-known and recognized and appreciated in many places around the world.

Why do we need to include that tool? Why are certain elements not excluded to ensure that there is a balance regarding translation and competition with the private sector? Why did you proceed in this way? Why not remove the “additional factors”?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** I think the translation bureau would be in the best position to answer that question.

**Mr. François Choquette:** It is incumbent upon the Treasury Board to provide guidance, particularly on how money will be spent. It is also its duty to see to it that institutions comply with the Official Languages Act. You are saying that you are totally excluded from the cost recovery calculation. You gave no advice and you received no requests for guidance in that regard.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** That is not the mission of the official languages centre of excellence. There are other sectors within the Treasury Board Secretariat that can manage expenses and to whom the departments must submit their business plans.

Regarding official languages, the expenditure modes or cost assignment for translation is not a consideration that is directly related to the implementation of parts IV, V and VI of the Official Languages Act. These modes are not a part of those obligations. For us, what matters is—

**Mr. François Choquette:** I have one last question, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** You can get back to it later.

**Mr. François Choquette:** That's fine, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):** Good afternoon. I thank both of you for your presentations.

Ms. Thornton, I appreciate the fact that the text of your presentation was also given to us in French, but there is no French version of the other two documents your office distributed. I only have an English version.

**Ms. Sally Thornton:** I am sorry, but both documents are in English and French.

**The Chair:** It seems to me that they are indeed in both languages.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Mine is in English only.

**The Chair:** The clerk will give you a French version.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you very much.

I should perhaps know the answer to this question, but I would like to know how you determine that a region is bilingual.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** I suppose you are referring to the regions that are designated bilingual for language of work purposes. That is generally how it is formulated.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** That is correct.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** The 1988 Official Languages Act included for reference a list of regions that had been designated pursuant to a Treasury Board directive. The list includes the national capital region, some eastern and northern Ontario regions, as well as the west of Quebec, the Island of Montreal, the Eastern Townships, Gaspé and New Brunswick. That list is an integral part of the act.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Can you send us a copy of the list? My colleague here is quite excited. He would like to know if Manitoba includes such regions. I would also like to know if there are any in Nova Scotia. I would like to know if we are on the list, and if so, which locations are designated.

**Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.):** What year was the list created?

**An hon. member:** In 1988.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** My next question concerns your roles, duties and responsibilities.

Part IV is entitled “Communications with and Services to the Public” and part V is entitled “Language of Work”. According to several reports, it is clear that we are far from having attained our objectives. We often hear it said that the number of complaints about the language of services is continually increasing. It is also said that French remains underutilized and that this is also the case for English in Quebec.

You said that follow-ups were done. However, what I see in the reports leads me to wonder whether these follow-ups are effective.

What measures are you considering in order to bring about changes, or to review things so as to ensure that there will be real changes on the ground?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Ensuring that institutions respect their obligations is an ongoing challenge. We are talking about far-reaching obligations. Treasury Board policies are designed to ensure that institutions have a common understanding of the scope of their obligations.

The purpose of regulatory compliance review is to make sure that offices required to deliver services in both official languages are clearly designated as bilingual. That's an important element.

Clarifications made to Treasury Board policies over time have paved the way for tremendous progress. The fact that more people in bilingual positions meet the language requirements of those positions attests to the fact that institutions have a greater capacity to respect official languages obligations than they used to.

Is the work done? No, and that's why we continue to support institutions, by determining what their challenges are and endeavouring to identify how each of them can improve their performance.

● (1600)

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I appreciate that process. But as someone who comes from the education sector, I can tell you that efforts are made to improve the situation when something isn't working.

What I'd like to know is whether the situation has improved over the last three years in the regions where problems had been identified.

I have another question for you.

What can we do to make sure that language minorities feel comfortable speaking their first language in the workplace?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** According to the public service employee survey, francophones may be less comfortable doing so in some cases. We talked about that earlier.

What are we doing to improve the situation? It's really important to take steps in every single workplace. I don't think issuing a centralized directive is the way to change workplace psychology so that every person feels more comfortable speaking their native language.

As the Commissioner of Official Languages often says, it's really a matter of having every organization demonstrate leadership. First, our role is to ensure that organizations dealing with challenges are aware of the situation. Then, we have to determine whether some organizations are doing better than others, and whether they have best practices to share with those in need of help. Lastly, we see to it that the performance of each institution is always getting better.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** My last question has to do with Bill S-209, which has now been introduced in the Senate four times.

If the bill is passed, what impact do you think the changes will have?

**Ms. Sally Thornton:** I think the bill is at second reading in the Senate, so we'll have ample opportunity to discuss it.

It would have fundamental repercussions. It would change how we determine which segments of the population can receive services in both official languages.

• (1605)

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You said that regions designated as bilingual had been listed in the act since 1988. Does that mean a legislative amendment would be necessary to add or remove designated bilingual regions in the country?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Yes. Specific provisions in the act govern the list of designated regions, and any changes to add or remove regions would have to be made through the regulatory process.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Dan, over to you.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Thank you for your presentation.

I'd like to know the total budget for your official languages activities.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Are you referring to the total budget of the official languages centre of excellence?

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** I'm referring to everything you do in the official languages sphere.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** The official languages centre of excellence has an annual budget of \$3.4 million, and that includes funding for 23 positions.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Do you also have a hand in evaluating departments' official languages performance?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Within the secretariat, our unit is wholly responsible for overseeing the implementation of parts IV, V, and VI of the act.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** What's your total budget?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** It's \$3.4 million.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Fine.

That was for 2015?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Yes, for 2015-16.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Has your budget gone up or down over the last six to eight years?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Off the top of my head, I would say that the budget has been \$3.4 million since 2013-14.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** So it went down.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** I'm not saying it went down. I'm simply saying that's the number I can give you today. If you'd like us to go back further and check previous years' expenditures, we would have to provide you with that information at a later time.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Could we get a list of your total budgets for each of the past six years?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Yes, okay.

**The Chair:** Kindly send the list to the clerk.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Very good.

Now I'd like to know what your strategy is for the next six years to deal with the challenges faced by the departments?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** We underwent an internal evaluation at the end of the last cycle, and it was recommended that we adopt a multi-year plan. So we have such a plan, and it calls for us, as a centre of excellence, to carry out our mission on a number of levels. First and foremost, we are a policy centre. We develop policy instruments for Treasury Board. We provide guidance to institutions. We organize events. We measure performance.

Our plan addresses each of those activities. Ultimately, what we are trying to do through the plan is use these methods to ensure that institutions are meeting their obligations fully. So we adopt policies that clearly set out institutions' obligations, we provide guidance, and we ensure oversight.

**Ms. Sally Thornton:** I can answer your previous question about the budget.

[*English*]

In 2009-10, the budget for the official languages centre was \$2.777 million. It's been fairly constant. In 2013-14 it went to \$2.4 million.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** From \$2.7 million to \$2.4 million?

**Ms. Sally Thornton:** Yes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** That's good for now.

**The Chair:** It is now over to Mr. G n reux.

**Mr. Bernard G n reux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivi re-du-Loup, CPC):** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. My apologies for being late. I hope you'll forgive me.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. Tremblay, I'm going to start with you.

You are clearly a leader given the job you do at Treasury Board. It takes a certain amount of leadership to be in your position. I commend you for that.

A few moments ago, you spoke of the leadership throughout the entire department and across all departments. You talked about the importance of implementing the roadmap and all the elements set out in the act. Since you are someone who understands the need to demonstrate leadership personally, how would you rate your department's leadership as well as that of every other department right now?

By all accounts, I would say it's applied on somewhat of a sliding scale. As you mentioned, some departments have had great results, and others, not so much. I think that's always been more or less the case.

First of all, where do you stand on the level of leadership currently being demonstrated? Second of all, how can those same leaders ensure that best practices are shared between departments?



●(1610)

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Thank you for your question.

I would begin by saying that the assistant deputy minister committee on official languages meets regularly. The officials from the Department of Canadian Heritage may have talked about that when they were here. Headed by the department's deputy minister, the committee brings together the key players from all federal institutions, a dozen or so assistant deputy ministers. It ensures the necessary horizontal coordination in order to provide momentum and leadership for the official languages program. So it's an important committee.

I'd also like to talk about the official languages champions, who form a meaningful network spanning the 200 or so federal institutions. If you'd like to take a break from discussing translation bureau matters, you can discuss the network with translation bureau CEO and chair of the Council of the Network of Official Languages Champions, who will be appearing after us. The champions play a crucial role in implementing policy requirements and Official Languages Act obligations within each of their organizations. They are highly motivated. It is usually thanks to the official languages champions that we can ensure tangible improvements are made in all organizations, once best practices and key issues have been identified.

The last thing I would mention is the key leadership competencies profile. It's quite a technical tool. The key leadership competencies developed by our Treasury Board Secretariat colleagues take into account the importance of linguistic duality, which depends precisely on leadership. In our view, a leader in the federal public service is someone who promotes and supports these values, and makes sure to integrate them into each of their responsibilities.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Would you say that some leaders in some departments have weaknesses or, at the very least, demonstrate less leadership than others in other departments? After all, some are doing better than others when it comes to compliance with the act and the use of official languages.

On the topic of best practices, I'd like to turn the clock back a few years. I was on this committee from 2009 to 2011, and we had the opportunity to talk to the champions about these issues.

Let's compare the situation in 2009, or 2010, with the situation today, in 2016. Would you say the level of leadership and the use of official languages in each department have improved or stayed the same? How would you assess the situation over the past six years?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** "Assess" is a technical word, but I think Treasury Board policies provide an important indicator. During the 2012 policy review, the role of champions was entrenched, policy-wise.

I'm going to give you my personal view. Since that milestone, champions have had a more visible role and profile within their organizations. They are more engaged, when it comes to exercising their role. How do we assess that? We assess it on the basis of their actions. Champions have a comprehensive action plan. They are more involved than ever, for example, in terms of proposing detailed projects to the clerk as regards blueprint 2020 implementation. We're seeing new-found enthusiasm.

●(1615)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

We will now move on to Ms. Lapointe.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Mr. Tremblay, I'd like to pick up on my colleague Mr. Vandal's earlier question about budgets. You said your budget was \$3.4 million. Is that correct? Did I hear you correctly that that amount funded 23 positions?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Yes, you heard correctly. It funds 23 positions.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** How do you spend that \$3.4 million representing 23 positions?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Are you asking how we spend the \$3.4 million?

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** No. You're saying that's the cost of 23 positions. I'd like you to explain that to us.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** A federal organization's budget covers the cost of office space, employee benefits, computer equipment, office supplies such as pens and paper, as well as wages. Our \$3.4-million budget allows us to hire employees at different levels. The members of my team range from AS-1 analysts all the way up to executives, including my position, and the levels of pay vary as well. The \$3.4-million budget is broken down as follows: approximately \$2.4 million is spent on wages, and goods and services, and about \$1 million is spent on other costs such as benefits, pensions, and office space.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Thank you.

Now I'm going to come back to the topic of champions. Earlier you talked about a more visible profile. What does that mean to you? Could you define that for us? Does it mean the person is treated better or has more benefits?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** In 2012, Treasury Board's official languages policy stipulated, for the first time, that deputy ministers had to designate champions to support them in implementing the requirements of the act. Every deputy minister is advised of their official languages responsibilities, which include appointing an official languages champion. And that person can now perform their role more fully than in the past.

Previously, institutions were simply asked to have a champion. It's something we asked of them, but they didn't have to have one. It wasn't a policy requirement.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** I'm not so sure that there's still a benefit to having a champion. I'm not convinced. Earlier, I gathered that a champion demonstrated leadership and advised others of best practices. Let's say you've designated a champion in your organization, what advantage does that person offer? Is it sharing their expertise to benefit others?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** The champion advocates for better compliance with the Official Languages Act and related policies. As a member of the senior management team, the champion is at the table when the deputy minister and senior managers are discussing and deciding matters. The champion is therefore in a position to point out, when appropriate, the potential impact on official languages of proposals under consideration. The champion helps the deputy minister make better decisions by highlighting the official languages component and the need for alternatives.

• (1620)

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

Mr. Samson, it's your turn.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Given your description of a champion, I would say that Nova Scotia is home to many of them.

My question pertains to practices on the ground.

Say an employee who wants to improve their second-language skills goes to talk to their supervisor. It could be a francophone wanting to learn English or an anglophone wanting to learn French. What suggestions or supports would the supervisor give the employee? The employee may not even speak the second language, which is all the more problematic. What is available to help that person?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Mr. Chair, that's a pretty broad question.

Since our policy review and the introduction of new systems at the request of official languages champions, our performance management regime has included official languages considerations. They help to stimulate discussion between supervisors and employees about language training requirements, in particular. Under the policy, this discussion should happen twice a year but, at the very least, once a year. That's already embedded in the systems. Supervisors have no choice but to address the issue and consider training requirements.

As regards the training methods available, I would say they are countless. The Canada School of Public Service makes a host of online training tools available to employees, as well as the general public. Federal public servants and members of the public have access to training tools to help them learn a variety of languages.

Employees can take advantage of a number of other measures, such as assignments in primarily French-speaking units, or vice versa, to improve their second-language skills. Lunch-and-learn presentations on work-related topics are another language-learning opportunity, where all participants agree to use the specified language, either English or French.

In order to practice their second-language skills, some employees wear little signs that say, "Help me practice speaking French or English" or "Don't switch". There's a culture among public servants of speaking to someone in their first language as soon as they notice that the person is speaking their second language or has a slight accent.

Many such tips and tools corresponding to best practices are available. Champions have compiled several dozen such practices. Every department and organization adopts a certain number of them,

trying new formulas every year and introducing novel approaches on a rotating basis. The idea is to use slightly different techniques to encourage employees to continue their second-language learning.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Nater, you may go ahead.

[English]

**Mr. John Nater:** I need one of those buttons that says, "I'm learning, don't switch languages, please". I'll have to follow up.

I want to follow up on the Commissioner of Official Languages report and the number of complaints that were received in relation to language of service. Could you provide me with an understanding of the geographic breakdown, or even a departmental breakdown of where those complaints may have originated and what types of departments or geographic areas those came from?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** The commissioner's report has historically tracked on a regional basis where most of the complaints occur. I'll say it's not much of a surprise that they occur where there are more francophones, though Quebec is not entirely immune from similar types of complaints.

We have more complaints in the national capital region, more complaints in New Brunswick, and so on.

I think it's important to put all of this in context. The number of complaints is small when considered against the millions of interactions between Canadians and their federal institutions. That's not to say that every one of those complaints is not in itself important, and that they're not indicators of work to be done.

Institutions that receive a complaint get to manage that complaint, take an action plan, and follow up on the recommendations of the commissioner. My sense is that every one of these institutions takes every one of those complaints and recommendations seriously and does what's required to follow up.

• (1625)

**Mr. John Nater:** Do we know which institutions seem to have received the most complaints? I'm sure it's in the commissioner's report, which I don't have handy.

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Again, the commissioner's report is one indicator of performance, not the only indicator of performance. The commissioner himself, over the last couple of years, has decided to move away from the list of institutions for reasons that we would have to ask the commissioner about.

That said, there has been a history of certain concentrations in institutions that have a large footprint of service, for example. Those institutions, like Canada Post, Air Canada, and Service Canada, which have a large service footprint and are involved in hundreds of thousands of transactions with Canadians, get a somewhat higher proportion of the complaints.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Nater.

Mr. Choquette, the floor is yours.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to ask you a question I didn't have time to ask earlier.

If I'm not mistaken, you work with the Treasury Board Secretariat's centre of excellence for evaluation. Questions about that have come up in the past. The importance of working with the centre is an issue that was raised. Obviously, building cooperation matters.

Could you elaborate on how your relationship with the centre has changed over the years?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** I've had meetings with my counterpart who heads the centre of excellence for evaluation. We also worked with the centre as part of a meeting with representatives of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, who had concerns regarding the evaluation centre's policies.

We are in regular contact. We sit alongside one another at the Treasury Board Secretariat's central policy table. We have many methods and issues in common. As far as other policies are concerned, there are no differences when it comes to official languages, whether it involves developing policies, supporting institutions, providing advice, or ensuring oversight. So we're often at the same table discussing the same issues. And, naturally, we provide the centre with any official languages advice it needs.

**Mr. François Choquette:** So, together, you met with the people from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada.

What did the FCFA suggest to both of you?

**Mr. Marc Tremblay:** Seeing as you will soon be meeting with FCFA representatives, you can ask them about it as well. But I think the FCFA wanted to know whether the relevant evaluation policy instruments would expressly mention the need to take official languages into account.

I wouldn't want to speak for my colleagues, but as a matter of general practice, when developing policies, we try to avoid repetition to make sure Treasury Board directives are clear. With that in mind, if the main instrument is sufficient in that respect, we won't repeat the official languages requirements in every single Treasury Board policy.

Basically, the centre of excellence for evaluation explained the overall approach to policy development and indicated that it might be possible to provide deputy ministers with examples, as far as guidance and advice, and supporting documentation were concerned. We actually explain to all deputy ministers how the client services directorate can measure the capacity to provide those services in both official languages.

That's the approach that was discussed at that time.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Choquette.

Thank you kindly, Mr. Tremblay and Ms. Thornton, for your presentation.

My hats off to you.

We are now going to break for a minute or two, just long enough to bring in our next witnesses.

**Ms. Sally Thornton:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you again.

• (1630)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Welcome.

This afternoon, from the translation bureau at the Department of Public Services and Procurement, we are hearing from Donna Achimov, chief executive officer; Adam Gibson, vice-president of linguistic services; and David Schwartz, vice-president of corporate services.

Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. As I mentioned earlier, we'll have to end the meeting at 5:30, because someone else needs the room.

You may go ahead with your presentation, Ms. Achimov.

**Ms. Donna Achimov (Chief Executive Officer, Translation Bureau, Department of Public Works and Government Services):** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to provide an overview of our mandate at the translation bureau and how we work eagerly to support the government and official languages, as well as the language tools that we are developing to support a bilingual public service.

Joining me today is Adam Gibson, our vice-president of linguistic services, and David Schwartz, until recently vice-president of corporate services.

The translation bureau's mandate is to provide government translation, interpretation, closed captioning, and terminology services. We are the sole in-house service provider to one of the world's largest consumers of translation services—the Government of Canada. This makes us a major player in what is in every sense a global business.

• (1635)

[English]

We translate 354 million words a year, of which 44 million are translated for Parliament. We also translate regulations, scientific publications, policy briefs, contracts, and trade agreements.

We enable government officials and ministers to exchange ideas and negotiate with their counterparts all over the world. We do this by offering translation services in more than 100 languages and dialects. We provide interpretation services for over 2,000 parliamentary meetings, 1,800 official language conferences, and 500 foreign language conferences.

We also provide 2,500 sign language interpretation assignments for deaf and hard of hearing public servants and parliamentarians, and live simultaneous closed-captioning in English and French for all House of Commons and Senate proceedings.

I'd like to take a moment to point out that at today's committee we have talented interpreters who are providing these sessions in both official languages. They're at the back of the room.

I'm proud to say the superb skills of not only our interpreters, but also our translators, are often mentioned by colleagues in other governments. The translation bureau is recognized as a world leader in language services and innovation, on par with the United Nations, the European Union, and other organizations.

Here is a bit about our history, with some high-level facts.

The translation bureau was created in 1934 under the authority of the Secretary of State department. In 1993 the government decided to amalgamate most common services into one portfolio. The translation bureau was moved to Public Works and Government Services Canada, with the rationale being that the bureau does extensive procurement with the private sector and should be housed with the rest of the government's procurement activities.

[*Translation*]

In 1995, we were made a special operating agency by Treasury Board. This meant that we became an optional service and we had to generate revenues. That decision laid the groundwork for making our operations more cost-effective and competitive by giving departments and agencies the authority to purchase translation services directly from the private sector.

In 2004, Treasury Board made a second decision to make the bureau the sole employer of translators in the public service.

Today, thanks to a combination of hard work and the willingness to innovate, we have retained 80% of the government's business.

As far back as the 1970s, we set out to explore how technology could support our operations, the public service, and Canadians. In the following years, the bureau was asked by provinces and the public service to share its terminology and glossaries.

In response to this, in 1999, we launched our first computer-based language tool, Termium Plus. It has since evolved from a fee-for-subscription French/English database on CD-ROMs to an online repository of more than 4 million terms in English and French. Today, it is available to everyone, free of charge through the Government of Canada's Language Portal. Last year, it was used over 61 million times by students, Canada's language industry, and internationally.

Over the past 15 years, we have steadily increased our use of automated tools, alongside the rest of the major players in the language industry, with tools such as translation memory databases and computer-assisted translation.

[*English*]

Most recently, we realized that we needed to do even more in order to keep pace with the rapid changes and access to free and sophisticated information and communications technologies. In order to stay relevant and to offer government quality, we knew we had to rethink the way we offered our services and the way we worked.

Let me be clear, our use of technology does not in any way replace professional translators or interpreters. Rather, it has allowed us to be more efficient, to lower our costs while maintaining our high quality.

[*Translation*]

In recent years, the size of our operations at the bureau has been shaped by two forces: increasingly competitive and innovative Canadian language service providers that our departmental colleagues and clients can turn to at any time; and changing trends in government communications, and the rise of social media and plain language. This has led to an overall reduction in the volume of our translation business. As business volumes shifted and turnaround times shrank, the translation bureau had to improve its scalability.

• (1640)

[*English*]

Let me emphasize, no translator has lost his or her job at the bureau because our business model has changed. We are smaller today because we do not need the same number of people to do the work that we once did. We've reduced the number of positions in our organization through attrition. I need to be clear here, that's through voluntary departures, primarily through retirements.

How we build, use, and disseminate technology at the bureau is not only a big part of our business model, it's how we support efforts to advance bilingualism across the public service. Today, in the federal public service, there are one million uses of Google translate every single week and all government desktops are equipped with Microsoft translator. A simple right-click on the mouse gives you translation free, any time of day.

These tools are being used for work-related purposes every single day. They are very helpful, but they come with a risk. Our newest desktop tool, developed by the National Research Council of Canada, helps mitigate this risk. It puts translated texts and vocabulary tailored to the public service workplace and terms specific to government at the fingertips of public servants for the primary purpose of comprehension. When using this tool, simple translations are not done in a cloud offshore, they stay inside the Government of Canada's firewall.

[*Translation*]

We loaded the tool with millions of professionally translated government-specific terms and phrases to make it easier for public servants to function effectively at work in their acquired official language. It is a better and more secure alternative, meant to aid comprehension, to give public servants the confidence to practice their second official language and work in it more often.

[*English*]

This is not a tool meant to translate colloquialisms, such as "it's raining cats and dogs", or to be used to translate official government documents. Over time, as more government-specific translated terms and phrases are loaded into it and the translation bureau's linguistic professionals play their role in ensuring its quality, the more sophisticated it will become.

It's worth noting that it is also the kind of tool that millennials, the next generation of public servants, expect in a modern workplace. They're heavy users of similar tools on their own personal mobile devices and they expect to have them at work.

We know the more literate and equipped our public servants are to function in both official languages, the better they will become at serving Canadians in the language of their choice.

[Translation]

In concluding my remarks today, I would like to recognize the extraordinary co-operation we have enjoyed with our colleagues at the National Research Council of Canada. This partnership, with people who work at the leading edge of technological innovation in Canada, has opened our eyes to the possibilities of the future.

In closing, as the translation bureau's CEO, I am very proud of the work of our translators, interpreters, and linguistic professionals, and the teams who support our efficient operations. We are all committed to official languages and to supporting the public service to communicate in both official languages.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the vibrant and committed network of official languages champions across the public service. They helped us pilot our newest machine translation tool, just as they have consistently supported all our efforts to encourage the use of official languages in the public service workplace.

Thank you for your time and attention, and we are happy to answer any questions you have.

**The Chair:** Thank you kindly, Ms. Achimov.

To my colleagues who had expressed a desire to have two or three meetings with translation bureau officials, I would just point out that we are setting the stage today.

Now we'll get right into questions with Ms. Boucher.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Good afternoon. Thank you for your presentation, Ms. Achimov. It was very appreciated.

Translation is an important issue today, but I'd like to pick up on the matter of social media. Like it or not, we now have no choice but to stay on top of technology and to make use of these tools.

In light of the growing place of social media in federal institutions and our communications, what mechanisms have you put in place to meet your language obligations and ensure accurate translations and correct terminology?

• (1645)

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** Thank you for your question. I will answer with Mr. Gibson's help.

Quality is paramount to us. It doesn't matter whether we are dealing with tweets, social media text, or briefing notes. It all boils down to the same thing: quality is key.

**Mr. Adam Gibson (Vice-President, Linguistic Services, Translation Bureau, Department of Public Works and Government Services):** I would just like to add something. With the rise of social media, we are receiving more and more requests for short texts. So we have a few services to ensure the best quality possible. When we see that a department is on the verge of launching a major initiative,

we expect to receive numerous tweets and many more requests for shorter texts. In that case, we provide the client with the services of another translator who is closer to the work and who can do the translation more quickly, while maintaining quality, even for short texts. In the meantime, when we receive short texts, we can provide service on an urgent basis, because we understand that social media requests are always urgent. People want an answer quickly, and it's hard to do that manually, so we offer other services tailored to the new work reality presented by social media.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Thank you. That definitely answers my question.

On another note, the translation bureau made the decision to install a translation tool on the computers of all federal employees by April 1, 2016. Can you explain what the tool is? What is the tool's impact on the quality of translated documents? Will you make sure that the translation is done well? Will the translator control the quality of the translation before documents are distributed?

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** Mr. Chair, as I mentioned during my presentation, one million federal users access Google Translate and other translation tools every week.

In our view, we had a duty to share our terminology and glossaries. We have already shared and translated millions of terms. Under the blueprint 2020 plan to modernize the public service, we decided to share our tools, including the one you just mentioned, to help facilitate second-language comprehension across the public service.

Teams of employees are working together to make sure that system content is up to date and of high quality.

However, the tool is intended, first and foremost, to facilitate comprehension, not to provide official translations. This summer, we conducted a pilot project with the participation of 300 public servants. Most of the communications consisted of short polite texts, emails between colleagues, and out-of-office messages. We believe it's important to have a professional translator handle an official document for the sake of quality.

There are two very important things to keep in mind regarding the translation tool. In my remarks, I pointed out that, whenever people use the tool, a very clear message appears indicating that documents of a more official nature should be translated by a translation bureau professional. We built a link directly into the tool so that users can request such a translation. If the user changes their mind, they can request the services of one of our professional translators.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Very well.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

It is now over to Mr. Bélanger, who had questions about the translation bureau earlier.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (via text-to-speech software):** Have any translation bureau positions been eliminated in the past few years? If so, what kinds of positions were eliminated? How many positions were eliminated? Will more positions be eliminated in the near future? What are the reasons for eliminating these positions? Has eliminating these positions affected the quality of the translation bureau's services? How has eliminating these positions affected the ability of federal institutions to meet their language obligations?

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** Thank you for those very important questions.

We took a look at trends around the world, not just across the government. We had already noticed an overall shift in demand government-wide: departments wanted quick turnaround times, 24/7. We examined how other organizations around the world who followed best practices were dealing with that reality. To be frank, I have to tell you that we learned our processes were somewhat outdated and cumbersome. We had failed to automate the process and find a way to handle texts quickly. We were already in the habit of separating texts for translation into chunks. We improved our practices by working closely with our translators to find better ways of processing texts supported by tools and strong skills. And now, thanks to those efforts, we no longer need as many employees.

In the past, we weren't flexible enough. The bureau's biggest challenge revolves around fluctuating translation demand. And not having flexibility built into the system makes it extremely difficult to manage operations. That is true of any organization, whether in the private sector or other levels of government. With the support of our professional translators, as well as freelance experts, coupled with software tools, we have been able to find a balance.

I would also like to make something clear: we didn't eliminate any positions at the translation bureau. We leveraged attrition, in other words, vacancies left by employees who retired or left the bureau, to build a more flexible organization.

In the next few years, we plan to review our processes and practices as they relate to our core business of government.

•(1650)

[English]

We're looking very carefully at what we cannot ever outsource: security documents, top secret work, classified work. We need to keep that work internally, and let me assure you, we will ensure that we have the right level of staff to continue that core centre of excellence.

As to some of the other areas, we will be looking to be very creative in the way we work with not only the private sector but also universities and other organizations, all the while to keep to our original commitment, which is always to ensure that the Government of Canada has a supply of quality translations and that we help departments respect the Official Languages Act.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** We still have some time left.

Does anyone else have a question?

Go ahead, Dan.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You mentioned other countries and translation tool models.

Can you give us an example of a country or a model you studied?

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** Yes. Thank you.

In 2012, we hired PricewaterhouseCoopers to do a little overview of Canada and elsewhere. Together with the people in that company, we looked at the European Union, the United Nations—

[English]

and a host of other organizations such as NATO, as well as very large corporations. As a matter of fact, PricewaterhouseCoopers has quite a large translation bureau because they do a lot of translation work.

What we found was that all of these organizations had a few things going for them that we didn't have. They had flexibility, so they weren't encumbered by permanent large numbers of staff. They had a core team who were experts in what they did. They had the ability to use technology not to replace people, but actually to improve their business processes.

Memory translation is huge in the translation business. It allows you to take a text, to look at it to say we've translated it many times before or portions of it, and it actually builds into that process the terminology, the texts that were translated before, and then it uses the expertise of the translator.

We were missing some of those processes or, to be quite honest, we weren't actually following industry practices in terms of how they were to be used. We studied very closely these best practices and we were able to adopt those within the translation bureau. I have to say, we did that with consultations of our employees and we used the skills of our professional translators and interpreters to improve our productivity and our efficiency.

•(1655)

[Translation]

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Can we really compare a bilingual country with countries that are not bilingual? Did you do that comparison with countries whose background is different from Canada's? A corporation is certainly not bilingual, for example.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for joining us today.

You have all already seen examples in the media of results generated by the translation tool that you are going to install on all the computers. "It's raining cats and dogs", for example, which becomes "*C'est la pluie, les chats et les chiens*". This is clearly a tool that is never going to replace translators.

The crux of this controversy is the concern that the tool, coming as it does from the translation bureau, may give the impression that it is relatively trustworthy and ready to be used. But we can see from using it that such is not at all the case.

We are told that the tool was designed to write short messages, but actually it should be capable of reading more scientific texts, more tailored to the reality of the departments. That is where the controversy lies.

Since this has all got off to a bad start, would it not be better to stop the launch scheduled for April 1 and to review the process? Clearly, a lot of questions are being raised at the moment.

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** As I mentioned, each week a million people use Google Translate, Bing and other similar tools. It's a way of life.

My mother often used to call me to say:

[English]

“Could you google this for me? Would you help me?”

[Translation]

Now this is a tool that she can use. She talks with her friends in other languages. People are using it every day now, even at work.

We decided that, at the translation bureau, we had an obligation. We are the official languages experts and we very often receive comments and questions from departments seeking to use certain tools better, like machine translation. They want to know how to use them in order to improve their understanding.

For us, it was an obligation. We are responsible for coming up with a way of creating a tool and the goal is not to replace professional translators.

My Treasury Board colleagues began to discuss the official languages champions with you. That is one of the hats I wear too. I am the co-chair of the Council of the Network of Official Languages Champions. Before launching the tool, we decided to bring each champion in each department and each government agency completely on board, to work closely with them and to seize the opportunity to spread awareness.

The launch is also being done using education, awareness and communication. We are very clear in stating the risks and the consequences if people send something out without running it by a professional translator.

• (1700)

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thank you, Madam.

You mentioned that you consulted the champions, the leaders, but did you study the risk management involved in launching a tool like this? Were there risk management studies in terms of compliance with the Official Languages Act? For example, are people going to be able to continue to work in the language of their choice? When they receive an email, can they be assured that the email will be in good quality language? Were any studies done along those lines?

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** We held a lot of consultations and had a lot of discussions with the official languages champions, with the directors general responsible for communication in the federal government, with a number of official language communities, precisely about ways of encouraging people to use the other official language, while still meeting their obligations and being more collegial with their co-workers.

It is also important to point out that each department is now responsible for managing its own affairs, for managing its employees. That is done with education, with awareness, and with a lot of discussion about the risks. There are processes in each department to

make sure that all data and all information available to Canadians are of good quality and come from a professional translator.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Ms. Achimov, do you not find that you are continuing to feed the ambiguity surrounding this tool? You say that the tool can be used for courtesy phrases in small communications. But we have just seen that the opposite is true; it is not at all up to the task of providing everyday language.

I showed you one example a little earlier and we could quote a lot of others. Everyone in the university world, even Donald Barabé, the former vice-president, says that the tool should only be used for reading and that, at the moment, it is not good. It is only good internally, with government leaders. So we need to stop the project and reconsider it before going any further.

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** We are working closely with the National Research Council Canada. They have world-class experts in the operation of this automatic tool. The real key is the quality of the source text, for which the federal government is responsible.

[English]

Forgive me, but expressions found in Urban Dictionary or expressions such as “It's raining cats and dogs” are not part of what we do in the federal government. We have to encourage people to understand the comprehension value of a tool like this. The adult learning principle is based on experience.

It's doing it on your own. It's having that type of practice. Our commitment is to continue to work with the research council, to continue to use professional translators to ensure that the corpus, the robust database, is filled with proper Government of Canada terminology.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you.

Thank you for your presentation. It taught me a lot about the translation demands and about the work that you do, either at conferences or with texts. That is impressive work and we need to say so.

It is said that the bureau's mission is to serve the translation needs of departments and other organizations created by federal legislation. You explained that sometimes people do not send you texts because of the cost or for other reasons, and because there are other ways of getting the translations done.

Have you noticed whether people are using external translation services more? If so, why?

• (1705)

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** In Canada, we are very fortunate in having a language industry that is very strong and very professional in both official languages.

As I mentioned in my presentation, it is important for us to be flexible and to work with our professionals in order to meet our federal obligations. I also said that it was important to be flexible and to work closely with the private sector. I mentioned the fluctuations in demand. We have a lot of work at certain times of the year. As this financial year ends, and because of the new processes, we are extremely busy. It is good that Canada's language industry is there to handle fluctuations of that kind. Under our mandate, we can have that flexibility. As I mentioned, we have a good partnership with the Canadian language sector.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** With all respect, my question was whether federal institutions are increasingly using private sector services rather than your own, and why.

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** Actually, 80% of the departments use our services. They are the biggest slice of the pie, if you will. However, organizations, agencies and departments can choose to use the private sector. Sometimes, the choice is not made only in terms of cost. They may use the services of an organization that provides a specialized service, or that operates a little differently. The fact remains that 80% of organizations use translation bureau services.

**Mr. Adam Gibson:** I would like to add something.  
[English]

I'm newer in the bureau, and from what I've seen, there isn't a tendency for us to lose business, but there have been a few very key files. We know some departments have chosen to go 100 per cent through the private sector without going through the bureau. In those instances, we talk to them and we try to find out their reasons for doing that. Often it's price. That's obviously a driver. Everyone has budgets they have to respect. In those cases, we do talk to them about whether we can use our buying power to bring them back and whether there are other services we can offer. We can work it out and we've had some successes. In one example, Environment Canada left the bureau and then came back, just in the last year. I wouldn't say there is a tendency for us to lose business, but it is a continuous risk that we manage.

[Translation]

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you for that answer.

I can understand that there may be reasons like cost, for example. But is there a possible correlation with the huge cuts? You can call them cuts, attrition, or anything you like. The fact remains that there are fewer positions and fewer people to do the work. Perhaps even expertise has been lost, I don't know. I am just saying that, at the bureau, there are fewer people, fewer hands on deck.

This follows on from Mr. Bélanger's questions. Is there a reason that could explain why people choose to go to the private sector or other services?

**Mr. Adam Gibson:** The short answer is no.

We have lost some departments and my colleagues could probably talk at more length about what happened in previous years.

Our price is the issue. There is no problem with our level of service or with our ability to meet their needs. It is not because of a reduction in the number of our people. We are always working on that. Recently, we have improved the efficiency of our service.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** So I have no choice but to ask this question: is your price too high? What is happening? Your expertise is exceptional. I imagine that, if 80% of federal institutions are using your services more, it is because the price is reasonable. Price is not the only factor. What is the private sector doing better? If the private sector works better, we have a different problem.

**Mr. David Schwartz (Vice-President, Integrated Services, Translation Bureau, Department of Public Works and Government Services):** Our rate per word is going down. As our CEO mentioned, we are constantly trying to find ways to be more effective and more efficient. The aim of our new technology is to support our translators and our language professionals so that they can be more efficient. Our productivity is increasing.

Our price goes down each year. In this financial year, it is actually 39 cents per word. For the 2019-2020 financial year, we are planning for a rate of 34 cents per word, which is comparable to the private sector rate.

There are important factors to consider if you want to compare that rate with direct freelance rates. A department might pay 26 cents per word, but there are costs for administration, revision and quality control. The translation bureau always provides added value. We are a centre of expertise. We provide excellent services because of our language professionals. We also provide translation services after normal hours, seven days a week, 24 hours a day. We have a secure infrastructure for documents that are classified and those designated "Protected B". We also have terminology databases. It is true that some people look only at the price, but we provide a lot of added value. That is why we remain convinced that, with 80% of the market, we are going to see growth and expansion.

• (1710)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Samson.

We will continue with Ms. Lapointe.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** It's my turn, Mr. Samson.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Ms. Lapointe can make her point.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Thank you for being here with us today.

I am going to ask you a very direct question, given that your expertise is in translation. In your view, what changes in internal policy could best encourage the use of both official languages?

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** There are a number of aspects to that question.

We have learned that the best way for adults, and public servants, to learn a second language is to be in an environment that shows leadership in encouraging the use of both official languages. Encouragement and leadership are critical. It is very important to find a way to encourage people to speak a second language, to let them make mistakes between themselves and to really practice. We have to find a great way to encourage people to use and learn a second language.



Each week, the official languages champions share little tricks, terminology and everyday ways to establish an environment where the use of both official languages is encouraged. The first key thing is to set up spaces in which people feel free to work in the language of their choice and to practice speaking the other language.

Another key objective is to make sure that people going back to their workplace after receiving structured training use the second language. As official languages champions, we are often fighting for everyone to be prepared to use the second language in which they have just been trained. In my opinion, training, practice and leadership in the workplace are the three most important things in keeping an environment really focused on the official languages.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Thank you.

So, I am hearing that there are three key aspects. First, people have to get second-language training. Then they have to be able to practice the second language. Last, the internal policies must provide leadership that encourages people to practice the second official language.

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** Exactly.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** It is going to be important to get that in place if we want to improve the situation for both official languages everywhere.

Do I have time to ask some other questions, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, you do.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** That is great.

In your presentation, I see the following:

...changing trends in government communications and the use of social media and plain language, leading to an overall reduction in the volume of our translation business.

That comes as a great surprise to me. How do we explain the reduction in requests for translation in the bureau. Are there fewer public servants? Are fewer people working for the government? Is it something else?

**Mr. Adam Gibson:** I will start, Mr. Chair.

We conducted some assessments to find why there has been a drop. The assessments show that one of the factors is the impact of social media. In fact, we are seeing a change in the way in which the government communicates, with the public especially. Twitter is an example, of course.

In addition, we are starting to completely revamp our web presence. Government websites are changing. The numbers of files and pages are decreasing. Communication is shorter and more direct. It is a general trend. That contributes a little to the decrease in our work.

Honestly, a link can probably be made between pressure on budgets, the numbers of translations and our workload. Three years ago, there were more budget cuts. I feel that departments have become tighter and are limiting the number of documents sent for translation.

That does not mean that the official languages are any less respected. However, we do notice changes in the number of requests we receive when there is more pressure on budgets.

• (1715)

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** So it is partly the budget cuts.

Ms. Achimov, a little earlier you said that no translators had been laid off, but there had been attrition. I have a document that shows that, since 2011, 400 positions have been eliminated and another 140 are scheduled for elimination.

There have been no layoffs but 400 positions have been eliminated. I am asking you these questions because I do not understand. Is that also because the volume has dropped?

**Mr. David Schwartz:** That sort of goes back to our figures, the number of words and the amount of our revenues. There has been a decline.

It has been stable since 2012-2013. From 2008 to 2010, we were translating more than 400 million words annually. Now we are translating between 308 million and 310 million words annually. There are changes, but things have been stable for some years.

It is somewhat linked to what Mr. Gibson pointed out. Demand is changing because the way in which people communicate has changed. In the past, the RCMP issued a news release of two or three pages. Now, they send out a tweet.

There is some redundancy in documents like departmental plans and reports on plans and priorities. They change each year, but a good part of them remains the same.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Before my time runs out, I would like to check one thing. A little earlier, you talked about your basic activities. For documents classified “top secret”, has that changed or decreased?

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** No. As I explained, we have to keep a core of experts and highly skilled people. That will continue. We are going to make sure that we have well trained and skilled employees. That will always be the case at the translation bureau.

**Mr. David Schwartz:** I would also like to focus on the reductions. About 60% of our employees are translators and 40% are not translators. This somewhat ties in with the CEO's comments. We have changed our internal processes; we are more efficient. We are in the process of modernizing. We are maximizing the tools in order to reduce the number of people we need, in fact.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Do I still have some time, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** No.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will come back to you.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** You have the floor, Mr. Généreux.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank and congratulate the committee interpreters, who are doing an excellent job literally as we speak, as you pointed out, Ms. Achimov.

As I listen to you, you give the impression that you are the owner of a business that is outside government. As a businessman myself, I find that very interesting. Your language reflects it. You are talking about the number of words. Your financial picture is quantified by the number of words. That is the unit of measurement that tells you whether your sales figures are good or not. I sell paper, but that is another story.

[English]

You call yourself a CEO. You are talking about a business; you used the word “business” before.

• (1720)

[Translation]

Once again, I find that very interesting.

Do you consider the bureau to be like a company?

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** Thank you for that question.

[English]

The structure is a special operating agency. The way that was created, in the mid-1990s, was really to take a look at many organizations, not just the translation bureau, and to instill in those organizations some of that business discipline that we've heard about. That business discipline is understanding what it costs to actually do the work that we do. I have to say I am incredibly proud of my colleagues and my employees. I think we are the new brand of public servants.

We are what *Destination 2020* is asking of us. They want us to manage taxpayers' money responsibly, as if it were our own. They want us to make sure we have the best and the brightest and most capable people to do the job, and they want us to do that with the values and the ethics that are primarily part of what is core to the public service.

I'm very pleased that people are hearing us talk about our costs, about being efficient, about creating workplaces that are respectful and innovative.

I will take this opportunity to say we're one of the largest employers that allow and encourage our workers to work off-site.

[Translation]

I am talking about teleworkers. Each month, the number of people working from home increases.

[English]

That gives us the ability not only to save on office space, but also to improve the working, home, family, and workplace conditions to make sure that we have a vibrant workforce that is happy to continue to work with us and be part of our future.

The short answer to that question is yes. We have the business acumen; we have the public service values at heart; and most importantly, we have the official languages capability and obligations.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Ms. Achimov, your words are sweet music to my ears. Let me say that to you again: sweet music to my ears.

What you have just said is very important. Whereas there might have been some concern about that problem with the translation bureau, speaking personally, you are reassuring me.

Things are not always perfect here below. You said just now that you had stepped back to a degree in order to watch other ways of doing things elsewhere in the world, both in the private sector and in various governments or countries. You adapted, and you did so quickly.

Did the fact that you adapted so quickly bring with it some difficulty in terms of the quality of service that tool you have designed provides? In other words, did you move too quickly as you put this tool in place?

But I want to bring up something and it is important for me to do so before you answer. If you wait for something to be perfect before you release it, you probably never will. When you start using a tool, as I and a number of others do in our businesses, the tool evolves. That is my perception. Am I wrong to say that?

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** Let me tell you a little story, Mr. Chair.

When I started working at the translation bureau four and a half years ago, I looked over some old org charts. I remember one from October 1976 specifically. The chart had a box marked machine translation. Since 1976, the bureau has been perfectly able to evolve in a stable way. But in the last five or six years, the world has completely changed because of how quickly all the new tools are being put into place.

[English]

I'm not sure if members here have iPhones. iPhones now have voice recognition, Siri. A colleague of mine who's British and who's in the private sector was saying that six months ago, Siri could not understand his accent. Today Siri is understanding his accent; there's interactivity.

The availability of the tools has hit us so quickly. Would I have wanted, would all of us have wanted to have a gradual uptake in terms of change? Absolutely. Is change disruptive? Absolutely. But we're doing our best to manage that responsibly.

• (1725)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Samson, you only have four minutes left because Ms. Lapointe used two minutes of your time earlier.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** That's fine.

Your last answer ties in with my next question.

One of the things you see on iPhones and BlackBerrys is the symbols you can use to communicate in English or in French.

In minority situations, there is great concern about the use of symbols like “lol” to communicate in both English and French. In one school board, I did a little experiment, trying to find whether we could find symbols that meant the same thing, but were in French.

A project like that would be interesting and would put us on the cutting edge of having both official languages represented. It is often said that, if you do not speak a language, it is because you do not have the tools or the information or the documentation you need. Could something be done along those lines? Perhaps my question is off-topic, but it is certainly very important for me.

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** Trends come and go quickly and young people are using symbols all over the world. Why? Because it is their way of communicating with each other.

I am extremely proud of two things at the bureau.

First, TERMIUM Plus is now available worldwide as an app. We find it very exciting to see that a number of Canadians, as well as schools, are using TERMIUM Plus each month. It is great. It is free and it is available in real time.

Second, the Language Portal of Canada. It contains millions of terms, games and documents. We are working closely with the provinces and territories to share documents and to encourage young people to use English and French in a more modern, user-friendly way.

[English]

We're going to be starting some work on the language portal to celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary, working with schools, targeting schools to encourage young people to give us their desires in terms of how they want to see language, and allowing us to work with them to make sure that this language portal is robust for the future.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Achimov.

It is almost 5:30 p.m.. So we will end this session immediately, except for inviting Ms. Achimov, Mr. Gibson and Mr. Schwartz to continue this discussion at a future meeting. I sense that was what all the members of the committee wanted.

We have a number of suggestions for witnesses to call. You are working in an area that generates interest, to say the least. Mauril has suggested some witnesses we could hear from. If other members of the committee would like to submit the names of witnesses, send them to the clerk. François has already done so too.

So we will have one or two more meetings on the subject. We would be grateful to you if you could make yourselves available in case we want to hear from you a second time.

Yes. Mr. Choquette?

**Mr. François Choquette:** I will do this quickly because time is getting on, as you said, Mr. Chair.

Would it be possible to get a plan for the upcoming meetings and email it to us, so that we know who will be our next guests in the coming weeks? I understand that some have already confirmed. It

would be good to have a calendar of how the next meetings will roll out.

**The Chair:** You are absolutely right. We will get it to you shortly.

On Wednesday, we will be hearing from two groups: the Quebec Community Groups Network, followed by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne. We are also having the Commissioner of Official Languages here on March 23, and the Minister of Canadian Heritage on April 20.

Mrs. Boucher, you have the floor.

• (1730)

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** This is not actually a point of order, it is a question.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Since I was previously the parliamentary secretary for official languages, I'd like to know how things work with you.

I gather that the parliamentary secretary has an observer's role.

**The Chair:** Yes. That is the new way of doing things.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Okay, but what does he do as an observer?

**The Chair:** He observes.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Okay.

**The Chair:** He does not have the right to vote.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** I just want to know how it works.

**The Chair:** Under this new approach, the parliamentary secretary is an observer. He is not a member of the committee.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Okay.

Does he have the right to vote?

**The Chair:** No.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** But he can come and see you, given that he provides a direct link.

**The Chair:** Certainly.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Okay.

**The Chair:** The committee is more independent that way.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** You say that it gives the committee more independence, but is he allowed to meet his colleagues in order to—

**The Chair:** He can talk to his colleagues, as all members of Parliament can.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** This is new for us.

**The Chair:** We can discuss it at greater length another time. I think that people are waiting for us to leave.

Thank you very much.

**Ms. Donna Achimov:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to your committee.

**The Chair:** A pleasure.

Meeting adjourned.

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