Toronto Metropolitan University
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The added value of bilingualism:
Arm wrestling between French and English in Ontario
Monika Jezak, Luisa Veronis and Anne Lechowicz, University of Ottawa

This presentation aims to analyze Francophone immigrants' perceptions considering the added value of bilingualism in Ontario. The data presented are part of a broader research-action carried out for the Réseau en immigration francophone du Centre-Sud-Ouest de l'Ontario, and aims to create a range of workshops to introduce Francophone Ontario to newcomers. This paper will be based on 20 testimonies of Francophone immigrants, collected with online semi-structured individual interviews during summer 2021. The thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted within DeSchutter and Robichaud's theoretical framework (2012) which categorizes the advantages of a language into two groups: "instrumental" or "integrated" value. One of the main themes that emerged from the interviews is the use of French and English in Ontario as a power relationship. The interviewees also perceive a discrepancy between official discourses on bilingualism and the language reality for French speakers in a minority context. Three phenomena are identified as a result of imbalance between French and English: The asymmetry between the two languages in everyday life and at work, the lack of services available in French, and the limited English proficiency as a barrier. However, mastering Canadian official languages goes beyond economic or professional benefits, and touches upon personal growth and identity development. For some interviewees, this represents a medium for social integration; for some others, it is about preserving and transmitting French; French as a cultural heritage is also mentioned. Finally, some go beyond the issues of duality between French and English, and tackle the issue of plurilingualism. Our presentation will contribute to the workshop's thematic by bringing to the fore an interdisciplinary analysis of Francophone immigrant voices settled in Ontario. This sheds the light to the nexus between discourses, languages and realities in a minority context, and the role of networks.