



## Linguistic Duality and Institutional Responsibility

MOSAIC

February 2026 (Vol. 58, No. 1)

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The question of the place of French within the Canadian Mathematical Society (CMS) is not a new one, but it deserves to be revisited with calm and clarity. In a context where English has become the near-exclusive language of scientific communication on a global scale, it is important to reflect on what bilingualism concretely means for a Canadian learned society.

As a national organization, the Canadian Mathematical Society has assumed the responsibility of reflecting Canada's official bilingualism, as explicitly stated in its own by-laws: "The official languages of the Society are English and French." This commitment is reaffirmed in the current Language Policy, in which the CMS declares itself "committed to supporting Canadian linguistic duality" and to providing "the best possible service in the language of choice." The CMS has therefore taken upon itself the responsibility of embodying, in its practices and activities, the linguistic duality that is integral to its identity and national mandate. It cannot—and must not—content itself with being a formally bilingual society that functions exclusively in English. Bilingualism does not consist in the occasional juxtaposition of two languages in isolated communications, but in ensuring that each language is genuinely present and active in conferences, publications, and the life of the Society. Genuine bilingualism presupposes a symmetry of legitimacy and a visible presence of both French and English within our shared scientific spaces.

It is also worth recalling that the second president of the CMS, Adrien Pouliot (1949–1953), was not only a distinguished mathematician, but also a passionate advocate for the French language and for the rights of Francophone minorities in Canada. Serving as a governor of Radio-Canada for twenty years, he emerged as one of the foremost ambassadors of French language and culture, both nationally and internationally. His commitment earned him, among other distinctions, the Prix de la langue française of the Académie française (1948) and appointment as a Knight of the Legion of Honour. This exemplary trajectory reminds us that, within the CMS tradition, the defence of French has never been an inward-looking or identity-based retreat, but rather an effort grounded in openness, equity, and mutual recognition within a genuinely Canadian mathematical community.

This is not to deny that English has become the lingua franca of the global mathematical community, as it has for most of the natural sciences. This situation is the result of well-documented historical and functional factors. However, as sociologist and historian of science Yves Gingras recently emphasized in a 2023 interview with *Cahiers de lecture de L'Action nationale*, it is essential to distinguish between "different levels of activity": the international scientific field, which relies on shared norms of validation and therefore requires a common language, and the university sphere, where the language of teaching and daily scholarly work remains a local issue of culture and accessibility. From this perspective, the issue is not to promote publication in French at all costs, but rather to recognize that Francophone mathematicians in training must be able to benefit from linguistic scaffolding that allows them to develop scientific thinking in their first language before transferring that rigour into research-level English. Supporting such a progression does not conflict with the imperatives of internationalization; on the contrary, it constitutes a concrete commitment to diversity, linguistic equity, and respect for academic trajectories, fully consistent with the EDI values the CMS seeks to uphold.

It is in this spirit that it would be desirable to consolidate and expand the measures already undertaken by the CMS to strengthen the presence of French in its scientific activities. The progress achieved in recent years represents genuine advances. The next step would be to go further by systematically ensuring the translation of session titles and abstracts, as well as presentation titles, and by providing bilingual visual materials for plenary lectures, even when the oral presentation itself remains unilingual. Offering bilingual slides is a simple way to rebalance linguistic visibility without imposing undue constraints on speakers. Such a measure fosters a sense of equal belonging among Francophone members, particularly in Quebec, New Brunswick, and minority Francophone communities elsewhere in Canada. Moreover, its technical feasibility is assured: translations can be produced using language-assistance tools, followed by terminological review by a Francophone mathematician. The logistical cost is minimal when weighed against the symbolic and institutional value of the gesture.

Some may fear that such measures could hinder the inclusion of international students for whom neither French nor English is a first language. However, the notion that international students would be burdened by the presence of French does not reflect reality. Many of them are multilingual and accustomed to navigating between languages, and all stand to gain from a richer engagement with Canadian reality through exposure to the coexistence of its two official languages. In short, the systematic translation measures proposed here take nothing away from anyone: Anglophone and allophone participants retain full access to English content, while Francophones finally gain access to material that is equally intelligible to them. Such measures would only broaden the circle of inclusion. Finally, the argument that such initiatives are unnecessary

because “Francophones speak English well” is not a valid one: linguistic equity is not a matter of competence, but of recognition and mutual respect. Even if all Francophones were perfectly bilingual—which is not the case—it would remain legitimate, and indeed necessary, to render their language visible and alive within Canadian scientific spaces. Linguistic plurality, moreover, functions as a pedagogy of inclusion in action: it cultivates linguistic tolerance and values accents as well as the shared effort of mutual understanding.

Promoting French through the implementation of the measures proposed here would represent a concrete commitment to linguistic duality and to equality of treatment between Francophone and Anglophone communities. Such an approach aligns fully with the CMS’s mission: to promote research, teaching, and the dissemination of mathematics across all regions of Canada, while reflecting the linguistic and cultural diversity that underpins its national identity. It would send a clear signal that French—a language of knowledge production and dissemination on a global scale—is not relegated by the CMS to the status of a regional patois. Such a policy would strengthen the legitimacy of the CMS as a truly national society and enhance its standing as a progressive and inclusive scholarly organization, faithful to the values of openness and respect for diversity.

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