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Media Release

Study shows link between attitudes toward anglophones and perceived strength of French

Attitudes could be improved with policies that promote French, research suggests

ST CATHARINES, Ontario — May 26, 2014 — The stronger French is perceived to be within a certain community in Canada, the more positive are the attitudes of francophones in those communities to anglophones, according to a new study.

And the study shows that the more positively Canadian francophones view anglophones, the more positive their views to Canada will be.

The study involved a survey of university students in four provinces: New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba. It was spearheaded by Mike Medeiros, a PhD candidate and a lecturer in the political science department at the Université de Montréal. The results of the study are being presented at the 2014 Congress of the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Medeiros became interested in finding out why language minorities in different countries react in different ways when it comes to making demands and fighting for their rights. Some groups make a lot of demands, others do not.

He says that while it would be useful to understand what motivates the attitudes of different linguistic groups, political science has “tended to overlook the influence of linguistic factors.”

He attempted to begin to answer the question by assessing attitudes here in Canada. To do that, he conducted a survey of university students late last year and early this year.

One of the things he wanted in particular to assess is perceptions around language: The actual ability to use a language, he notes, can be completely different from the perceived facility of using it.





What he found was that there was a correlation between the students' perception of how strong the French language was in their milieu, and those students' attitudes towards anglophones.

Francophones' attitudes toward anglophones were more positive when they felt French was not under threat.

"The weaker the perception of French, the greater the chances that attitudes of anglophones will be negative," Medeiros says.

"And the mechanism that explains that, is that the weaker French is perceived to be, the more people feel threatened, and the more people tend to blame anglophones for that."

He adds that Quebec plays an important role in francophones' attitudes toward Canada; however, he says it is not the only variable to influence attitudes towards Canada.

"One should not place too much importance on simply being from Quebec to explain Franco-Quebeckers' more negative attitudes towards Canada," his paper notes.

Medeiros says there is a lesson in this for policy-makers.

If governments set up policies that promote French, that should help create a positive attitude about the French language. And if French is perceived as being in a stronger position, that should help improve francophones' attitudes towards anglophones.

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About the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences

Organized by the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Congress is the largest interdisciplinary conference in Canada, and one of the largest in the world. Congress brings together 75 academic associations that represent a rich spectrum of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including literature, history, theatre, film studies, education, music, sociology, geography, social work and many others. For more information, go to www.congress2014.ca

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