

Language Characteristics of Albertans

Introduction

Language is the fourth release of information gathered by the Census of Canada taken on May 10, 2011. The Census explored the language characteristics of Canadian residents with three questions about mother tongue, knowledge of the official languages and languages most often spoken at home. Note that 'population' in this highlight refers to the non-institutional population i.e. excludes people living in an institutional collective dwelling, like a hospital, nursing home or a jail. All data in this publication is from the Censuses of Canada, conducted by Statistics Canada.

Mother Tongue

Mother tongue refers to the first language learned at home as a child and still understood by the person at the time of the census. The vast majority of Albertans (98.3%) reported only one mother tongue in 2011, but about 62,500 said they learned more than one language in childhood. Most (80%) of the multiple responses involved English

and a non-official language as dual mother tongues. In 2011, Albertans provided over 170 languages or dialects in response to the mother tongue question on the census. In addition to English and French, these included languages associated with early waves of immigration to the province, such as German, Ukrainian and Dutch, as well as those brought by more recent immigrants from Asia and Latin America. In addition, Aboriginal languages continue to endure in Alberta's linguistic mosaic.

English was the mother tongue of over three-quarters of Albertans...

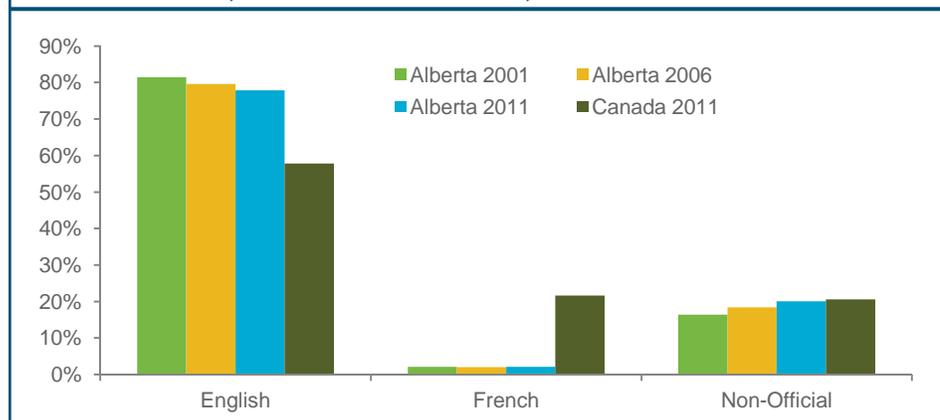
About 2.78 million Albertans (77.0%) identified English as their sole mother tongue in 2011 (Figure 1), a drop from 80.9% in 2001 and 79.1% in 2006. The 2011 census found that over 68,500 Albertans (1.9%) identified French as their sole mother tongue, an increase from just over 58,500 in 2001, although the 2011 share was down slightly from 2.0% in 2001.

Comparability of language data between censuses

The 2011 Census marks the first time that three language questions were asked of 100% of the population. Previous language data and analysis was based on the long-form census questionnaire given to 20% of the population. Statistics Canada affirms that data on the knowledge of official languages and the first official language spoken are comparable to those of previous censuses. However, the changes to the census questionnaire appear to have impacted responses to the mother tongue and home language questions. It appears that Canadians were less likely than in previous censuses to report languages other than English or French as their only mother tongue, and more inclined to report multiple languages as their mother tongue and home language. Trends related to mother tongue and home language that compare the 2011 Census to previous censuses should be used with caution. A complete analysis of factors affecting comparability of language results between the censuses will be available in the forthcoming publication, "Methodological Document on the 2011 Census Language Data", Catalogue no. 98-314-X2011051.

Adapted from Statistics Canada

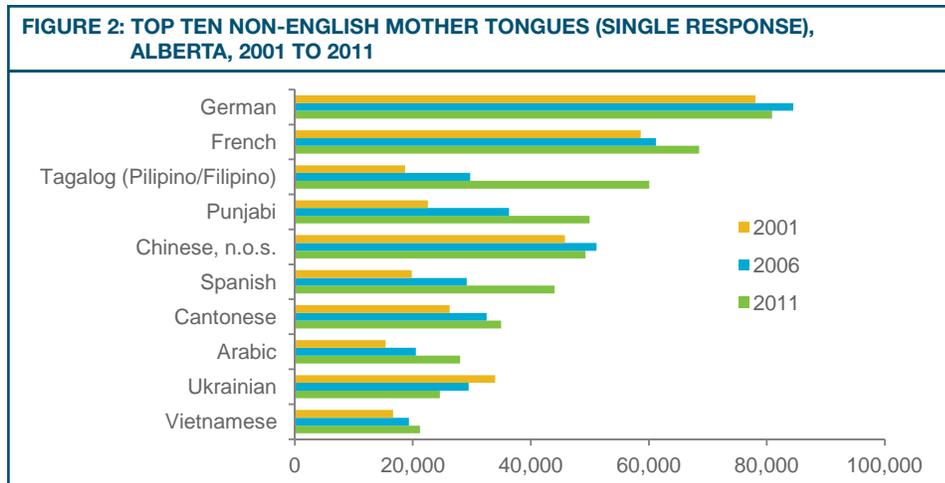
FIGURE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION BY MOTHER TONGUE*, ALBERTA, 2001 TO 2011 AND CANADA, 2011



On the national level, 56.9% of the Canadian population recorded English as their only mother tongue, while 21.3% reported a single mother tongue of French. Only 1.0% of Canada's single-mother-tongue francophones resided in Alberta in 2011, a share that has been relatively stable over the past decade. Although French is not a common mother tongue (single response) in the province as a whole, it has a more significant presence in some Alberta communities. For example, 15.2% of the town of St. Paul identified French as a mother tongue, either alone or along with another language. Other examples are the Municipal District of St. Paul (13.5%), Lac la Biche County (8.0%) and the town of Bonnyville (7.6%).

More Albertans' mother tongue is English compared with national average...

Compared with the national picture (Figure 1), a greater proportion of Albertans report English as their sole mother tongue. This differential is mainly due to the smaller influence of French as a mother tongue in Alberta, since the proportion of Albertans



Chinese n.o.s. refers to respondents who reported 'Chinese' without further specification.

who have a mother tongue other than English or French (allophone) is comparable to the Canadian average of 19.8%.

Proportion of allophones on the rise in Alberta...

Allophones are people whose mother tongue is neither English or French. In 2011, about 19.4% of Albertans (700,000) were allophones, up from about 16.0% in 2001 and 17.9%

in 2006. Although the non-institutional population grew by about 10.9% between 2006 and 2011, the number of Albertans with a non-official language mother tongue (both single and multiple responses) increased by 21.3% over the same period, reflecting the impact of immigration on the growth of Alberta's population. On the national level, the population grew by 6.0%, compared with the allophone population growth of 8.2%.

German the most common non-English mother tongue...

Of the non-English languages (single response) in Alberta in 2011, German was the most common mother tongue, followed by French (Figure 2). About 2.2% of Albertans identified German as their sole mother tongue in 2011. In third place, Tagalog (Pilipino/Filipino) was listed as the only mother tongue of about 1.7% of Albertans and was the fastest growing language, as the number of native Tagalog speakers in Alberta more than doubled between 2006 and 2011. In 2011, Alberta was home to almost 1 out of every 5 native German speakers in Canada and about 18.0% of those who first spoke Tagalog. It is also notable that about 22.0% of Canadians with Ukrainian as their sole mother tongue resided in Alberta, as did about 21.6% of the Cree speakers.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF ALBERTANS WITH NON-OFFICIAL LANGUAGE MOTHER TONGUE AND NO OFFICIAL LANGUAGE KNOWLEDGE, ALBERTA CMA/CA, 2001 TO 2011

		2011	2006	2001
Medicine Hat	CA	390	240	200
Lethbridge	CA	755	510	400
Brooks	CA	340	290	130
Okotoks	CA	25	0	15
High River	CA	65	-	-
Calgary	CMA	25415	20300	15475
Strathmore	CA	15	-	-
Canmore	CA	25	30	25
Red Deer	CA	485	375	110
Sylvan Lake	CA	5	-	-
Lacombe	CA	25	-	-
Camrose	CA	30	0	0
Edmonton	CMA	16060	14000	11245
Lloydminster	CA	30	15	10
Cold Lake	CA	15	0	10
Grande Prairie	CA	155	180	110
Wood Buffalo	CA	365	165	95
Wetaskwin	CA	25	0	15

Knowledge of Official Languages

Almost all Albertans know at least one official language...

Almost 99% of all Albertans reported the ability to converse in at least one of Canada's official languages in 2011. About 3.3 million (92.0%) reported knowing English only, while 6.5% knew both English and French and very few (0.1%) knew only French. This pattern has been quite stable over time, with the exception of a slight drop in the share of officially bilingual Albertans from 2001 (6.9%) to 2011 (6.5%). Among those whose mother tongue was a non-official language, 89.2% reported knowing English, and 4.0% said they were officially bilingual. Again, very few Alberta allophones (0.1%) claimed knowledge of only French among the official languages.

The share of allophones who do not know an official language on the rise...

In 2011, 6.7% of allophones in Alberta reported that they could not converse in either of the two official languages, up from 6.3% in the 2001 census and 6.6% in 2006. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of people in Alberta who had a non-official language as a sole mother tongue and could not converse in an official language increased by 22.4% to over 48,000 in 2011.

Knowledge of official language varies by mother tongue...

The highest percentage of those without knowledge of either English or French in 2011 was among people with a Chinese language as a single mother tongue (15.9%), followed by Nepali (14.6%), and Punjabi (14.6%). At the other end of the spectrum, only 0.9% of those who reported a sole mother tongue of Tagalog could not converse in either official language. This is largely because English is also one of the two official languages (the other being Tagalog) in the Philippines.

Those without official language ability concentrated in large metro areas...

Those allophones who did not know either official language were concentrated in Alberta's large metropolitan areas, with Calgary home to over 25,000 and Edmonton home to around 16,000 in 2011 (Table 1).

Calgary was home to a disproportionate share, with 43.6% of Alberta's total allophone population but 52.6% of those who did not know an official language. While the numbers are quite small outside of Alberta's metro areas, some medium sized centres are home to a growing number of allophones without official language ability. For example, 7.1% of allophones in Brooks in 2011 could not converse in an official language and 6.4% in Medicine Hat were in the same situation.

Home Languages

Home language refers to the language spoken most often (or on a regular basis) at home at the time of the census. The nation and the province are becoming progressively more diverse and the wide variety of languages spoken in Alberta homes is a testament to this process. More recent waves of newcomers add their languages to the existing richness created by previous waves of immigrants to Alberta.

Almost all Albertans spoke only one language at home...

As with mother tongue, the vast majority (96.9%) of Albertans listed only one home language (single response) in 2011. This share is fairly consistent with the Canadian average of 96.5% in 2011. Among those who listed more than one home language (multiple response), about 93.0% spoke both English and a non-official language

in their home, while only 5.9% spoke both English and French regularly at home.

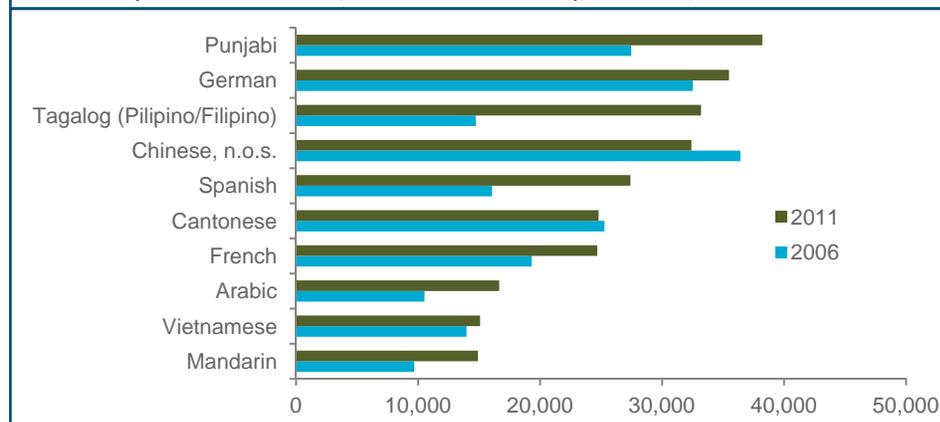
English is the sole home language for almost 9 out of ten Albertans...

In 2011, 85.7% of Albertans stated that English was their only home language while only 0.7% listed French as their only home language. About one in ten Albertans' sole home language in 2011 was a non-official language; a relatively small share and well behind BC's figure of 15.4% and Ontario's 14.4%. However, the share of Alberta's population speaking a non-official language at home has been on the rise over the last five years, from 9.1% in 2006. Nationally, only 64.8% of Canadians spoke only English in the home, while 20.6% spoke only French and 11.1% of the population spoke only a non-official language most often at home.

Punjabi was the most common home language after English...

Over 38,000, or 1.1% of Albertans reported that they spoke only Punjabi most often at home (Figure 3). The next most common home language among Albertans in 2011 was German (1.0% of Albertans), with Tagalog rounding out the top three, as the sole language spoken at home by over 33,000 Albertans. Albertans accounted for about 28.1% of Canadians with German as their home language, and about one in five with Tagalog as their sole home language.

FIGURE 3: TOP TEN NON-ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGES (SINGLE RESPONSE, SPEAKERS AGED 15+), ALBERTA, 2006 TO 2011



Cree was the most common Aboriginal home language

Non-official languages consist of both immigrant languages and Aboriginal languages. In 2011, 17 Aboriginal languages were listed as a home language (single response), with Cree by far the most commonly spoken language in Alberta (Figure 4). Over 10,000 Albertans, about 0.3% of the population, reported that they spoke an Aboriginal language most often at home. In 2011, 14.5% of all Canadians who reported Cree as their only home language resided in Alberta.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this release of data from the 2011 Census of Canada demonstrates that English is the dominant language in Alberta. While both French and Aboriginal languages endure, recent immigrants, especially from Asian and Latin American regions of the world, continue to add to the linguistic diversity in Alberta.

FIGURE 4: TOP FIVE ABORIGINAL HOME LANGUAGES (SINGLE RESPONSE, PERSONS AGED 15+) , ALBERTA, 2006 TO 2011

