

**The Francophone Minority of Welland,
Ontario: Linguistic and Cultural Erosion in a
Small Industrial City, 1970-2012**

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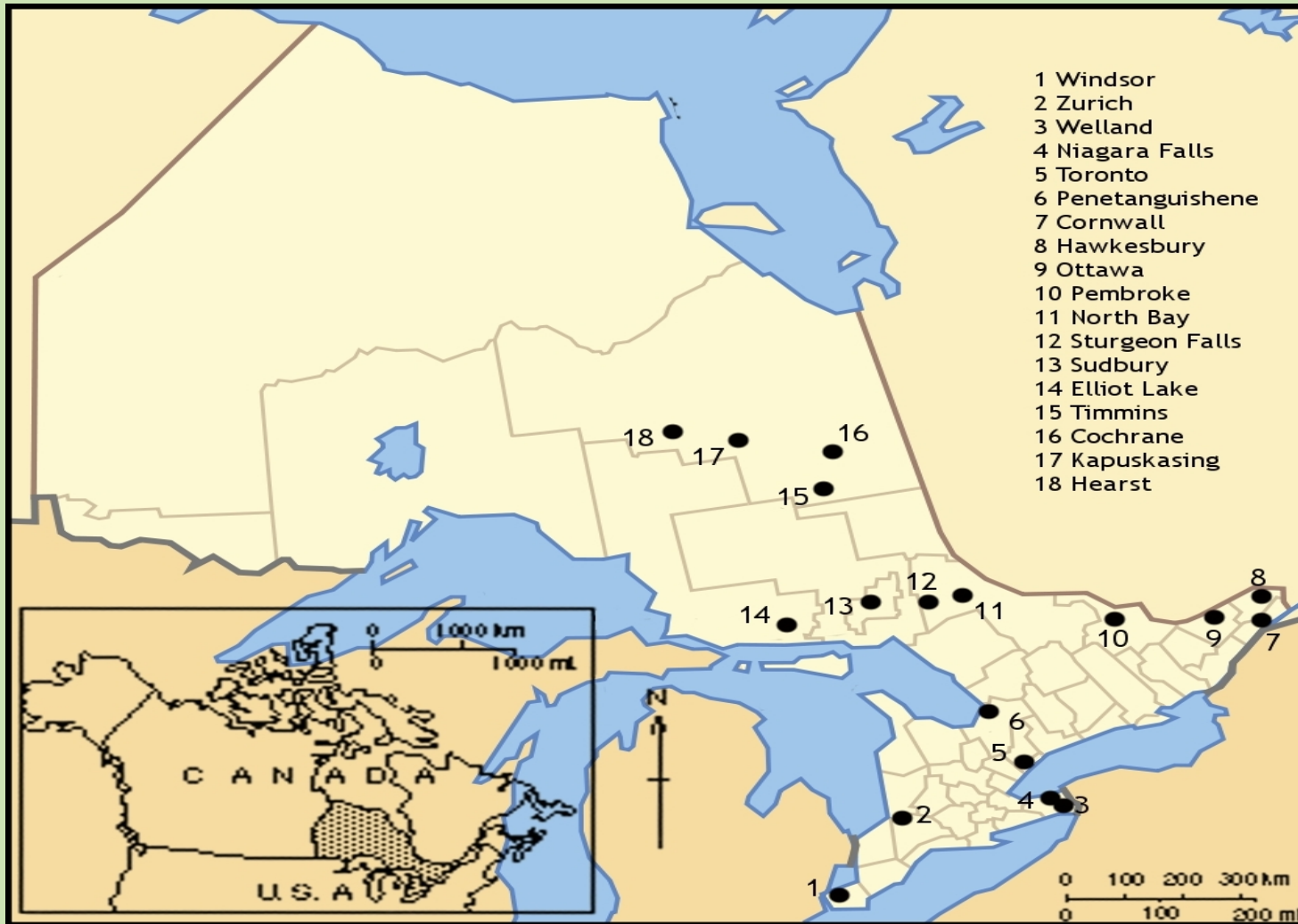
Outline

- **Historical overview of Welland's Francophones**
- **Patterns of language use at home and linguistic exogamy**
- **Welland's French language schools: agents of linguistic reproduction?**
- **Welland's French Catholic church: preservation of French vs preservation of the faith?**
- **Conclusion**

Methodology and main research question

- Study based on data collected in the 1970s via interviews and questionnaire surveys, and on data from the Canadian censuses.
- The study's main goal is to assess the extent to which the home, the school and the church were able to contribute to the preservation of the community's cultural and linguistic heritage.

Ontario's main Francophone communities



Historical overview

- Welland is located half way between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie on a major canal that links up the two lakes and on roads and railways providing access to the neighboring state of New York and to Ontario's capital city, Toronto
- Welland underwent significant industrial expansion from 1914-1928 and from 1939-1969.
- The bulk of Francophone immigration to Welland took place during these two periods
- From the 70s onwards, francophone migration has come to a stop

Historical overview (continued)

- **First Francophone immigrants came mostly from the Quebec City area – Chain migration**
- **They found jobs primarily in the textile, steel, automotive and chemical industries – Chain employment**
- **They settled in an area known as *French Town*, located near the factories and the first French Catholic church (1923)**
- **During the 50s and 60s the francophone population became somewhat more diversified geographically (other regions of Quebec – Acadia, Northern Ontario) and socially, with the arrival of professionals and the rise of small business owners**
- **Number and % of French mother tongue respondents in Welland (Census data)**

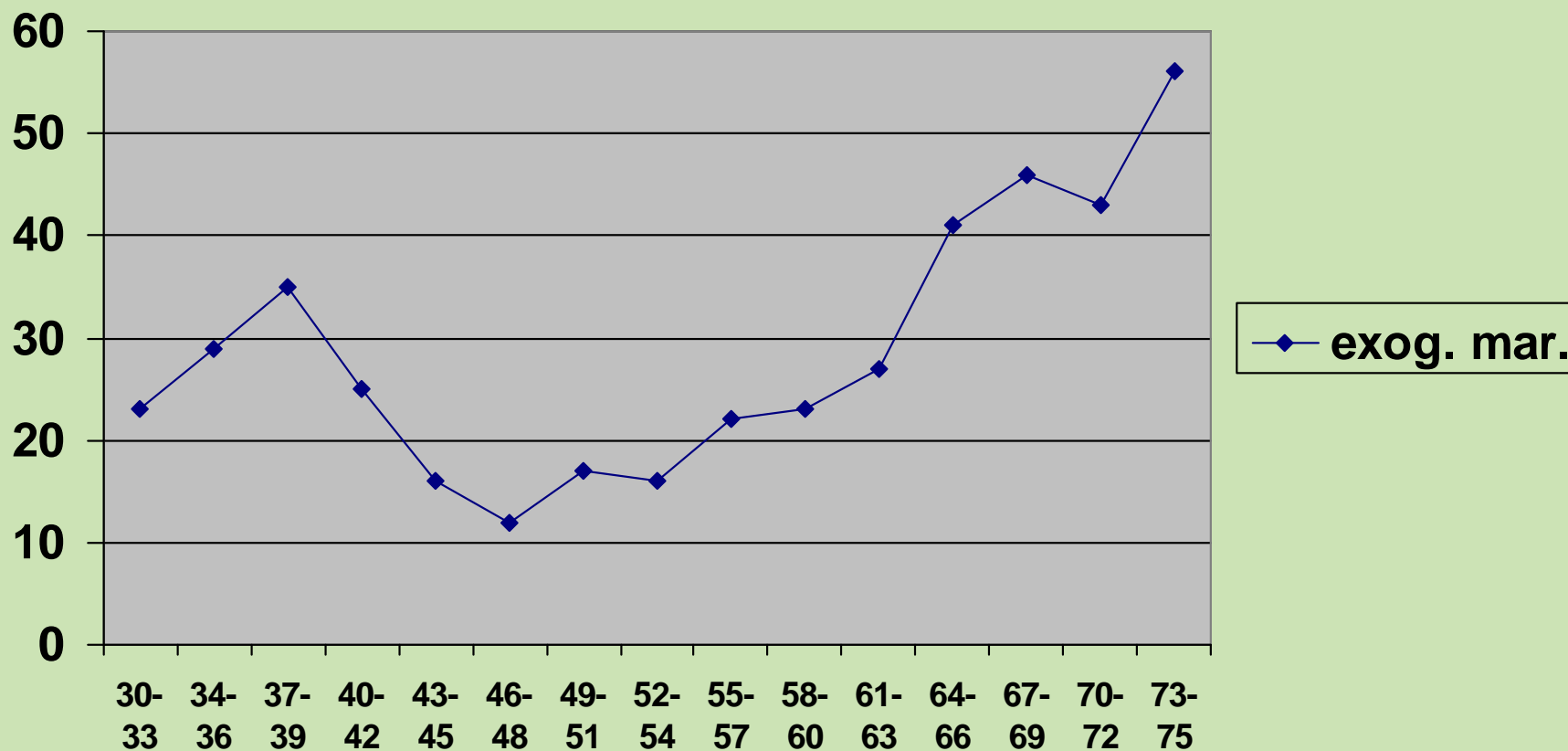
French mother tongue		Total Population	Ratio
1931	931	10 709	9%
1951	2 356	15 382	15%
1961	5 976	36 079	16,5%
1971	7590	44 395	17%
1981	7070	45448	15,5%
1991	6070	47914	12,6%
2001	5700	49895	11.4%

Maintenance of French at home

Welland	French mother tongue respondents N	French mother tongue respondents who use French at home	
		N	(%)
1971	7590	5900	77.7
1981	7070	4645	65.7
2001	5915	2605	44.0

Source: Canadian Census

Rates of linguistic exogamy (1930-1975) among Welland Francophones



Source : Registers, Welland Francophone Catholic parish

Welland 'French' Language Schools: agents of linguistic reproduction?

- In 1968, Ontario's Francophone minority is allowed to establish a system of elementary and secondary public schools providing education through the medium of French.**
- This puts an end to close to 50 years of severe restriction of French-medium schooling in Ontario.**
- As elsewhere in Central and Southwestern Ontario, Welland Francophones were not ready to fully embrace this newly won linguistic right.**
- The elementary schools provided education entirely in French, except for English Language Arts. However, at the secondary school level (Gr. 9-13), a third of the subjects were taught in French only and the remaining two thirds were taught either in French and English or in English only.**
- The subjects taught in both languages or in English only were in fields like science, math and crafts. The subjects taught in French only were history/geography, fine arts, music, phys. ed. and home economics.**

Class-based divisions over the instrumental value of French-medium instruction (interview data)

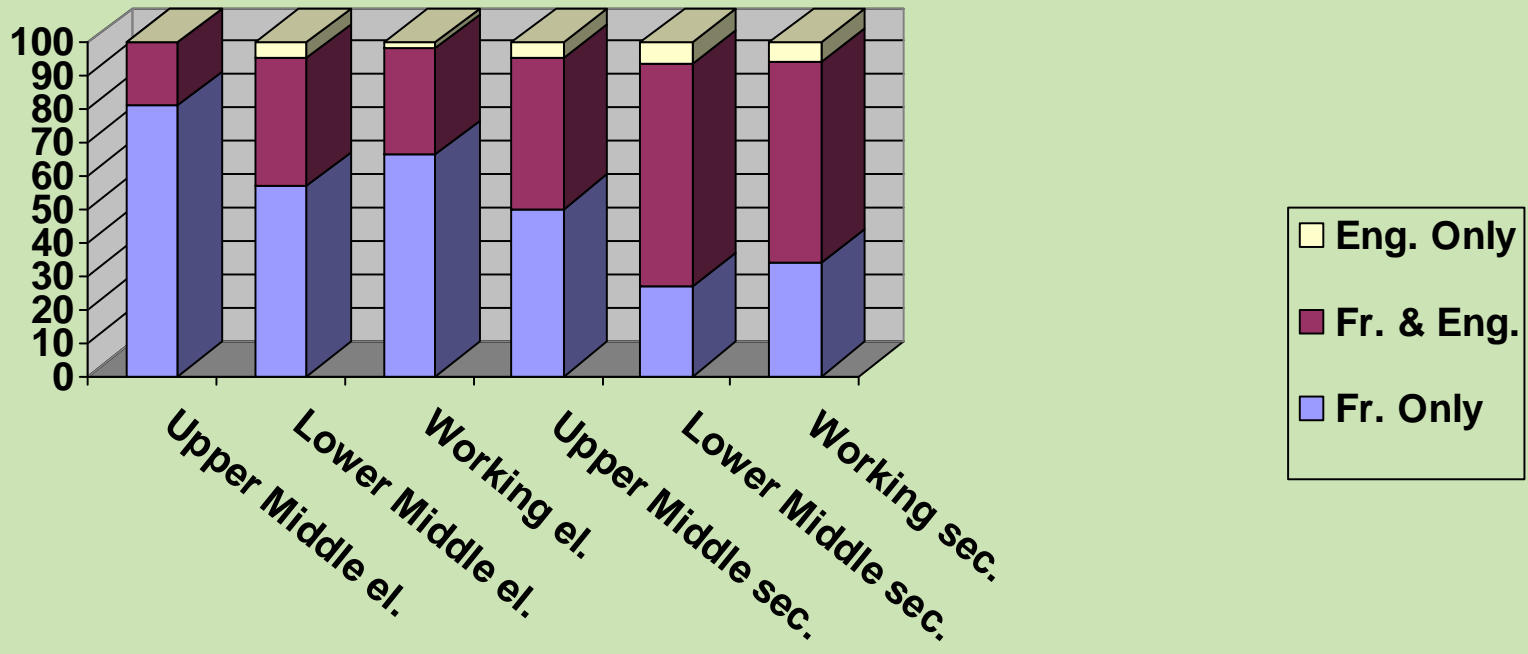
- 1) It is important to transmit French to the young generations in order to ensure survival of the Francophone community. In a majority Anglophone setting such as Welland, education provided entirely in French is a minimum means to achieve this goal and to curb the anglicization of Francophone adolescents.**

vs

- 2) In Welland and in Ontario, English is the majority language. Therefore it is important that the young generations be highly proficient in English. Education provided entirely in French is feared to have a negative impact on the attainment of this goal and hence it is imperative that subjects that are a gateway for good jobs be taught in English.**

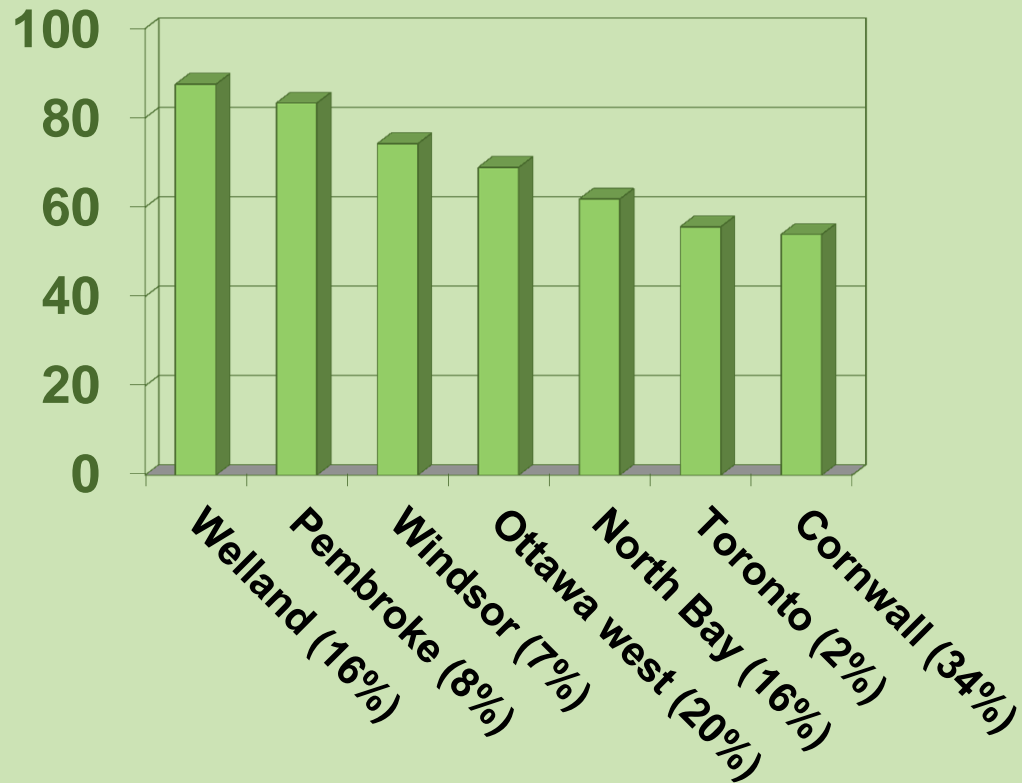
Class-based divisions over the instrumental value of French-medium instruction (continued)

Figure 1. Parental expectations re: the use of French and English as media of instruction at the elementary and secondary school levels according to social class



Bilingual and English-medium schooling: agents of anglicization?

Proportion of highschool students who communicate
always or often in English with siblings



Welland's Francophone Catholic Parish: preservation of the faith vs preservation of French

- **In 1974, three vicars and a priest were in charge of French Catholic parish.**
- **About 80% of the parishioners attended church on a regular basis.**
- **The growing number of linguistically-mixed marriages represented a momentous challenge to the Church's ability to continue its historical fight for the preservation of French.**
- **In most instances, linguistically-mixed couples expected that religious ceremonies, other than the regular mass (e.g. weddings, baptisms), be offered bilingually or in English.**
- **In 1964, the church recruited a bilingual French-Canadian vicar from New England to perform ceremonies in English or bilingually, which the three other clergymen could not or were not willing to perform.**

Welland's Francophone Catholic Parish: preservation of the faith vs preservation of French (continued)

- **According to one of the Francophone vicars: 'The increasing number of mixed marriages threatens the survival of French in Welland. If it were left to me, I would not allow ceremonies in English. Such ceremonies accommodate Anglophones. However, no one cares if relatives from Quebec will not be able to understand English. I feel that faith has become a higher priority than language. (adapted from French original interview transcript)**
- **According to the Anglophone vicar: 'If you turn down requests for an English ceremony, they go to another parish and don't come back. But now that we marry them in English, they come back for baptism and maybe send their kids to the French schools. Maybe 30 of the 72 mixed couples will send their children to the French schools. Before I came to Sacré-Coeur, all ceremonies were performed in French. It gave the impression that the Anglophone members of mixed couples and their children were not welcome'.**

Conclusion

- In Welland, in the 1970s, French was in stiff competition with English in the home, the school and the church.
- The home and the school being primary determinants of linguistic reproduction and the church being still a key rallying point for the community, this did not augur well for the long-term survival of French in Welland.
- Several factors partly contributed to this situation:
 - The decline and cessation of Francophone immigration and concomitant rise of linguistic exogamy
 - The relatively small size of the Francophone community in relation to the local Anglophone population
 - Divisions among the church leaders over priorities: the French language vs the Catholic Faith
 - Class-based divisions over the importance of French vs English-medium schooling for linguistic reproduction and socio-economic mobility.
- During the 70s these divisions prevented the implementation of French only schooling in the local high school. However in the early 80s, bilingual and English-medium schooling were finally phased out.
- In a new replicative study, which has just begun, thanks to a research grant from the SSHRC, we will check, among other things, if the switch to French only schooling has had a positive impact on the maintenance of French by the young generations attending the all French high school.
- We will also return to the local church to see whether it has moved further in the direction of accommodation to English (e.g. providing regular masses in English and/or sermons in both French and English).