

Inside Out: **Montreal Language Use Inside the Home and Out on the Streets**

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<http://stoptoutesdirections.org/report13.pdf>.

Abstract: *This report addresses a potential correlation between the language most often spoken at home and the language appearing most frequently on stop signs. Seven different municipalities or regions of Montreal were examined including: The Plateau, Cote-des-Neiges, Notre Dame de Grace, Hampstead, Cote St. Luc, and Westmount. Using the distribution of language use within the home and on the stop signs, these findings examine the relationship between language on the 'inside' and 'outside', and reveal aspects about space, cultural distinctiveness, power and politics in contemporary Montreal.*

Introduction

A stop sign is more than just a mere sign; it is a symbol. It is something that each of us sees every day and, whether consciously or unconsciously, we recognize stop signs not only as a symbolic representation of the specific law demanding cars to "stop" but also as related to a larger system of laws that we must abide by and a culture with which we identify. Due to this interplay between cultural symbol and authority, the language in which a stop sign is written is important. It is the language in which the voice of authority, the voice of our government, speaks to us as citizens. As symbols of governmental law, stop signs can help us to understand whether that law is more reflective or oppressive of the people it would purport to represent. This paper will attempt to determine the degree to which the language of stop signs reflects the language most often spoken in the homes of the community they speak to. Here, we will examine the language used on stop signs within particular municipalities of Montreal as compared with the language spoken most often at homes of those municipalities.

Language most often spoken at home was chosen as the variable of our study because the language people choose to speak when there are no linguistic constraints forced upon them is the truest representation of a people's linguistic preferences. We believe that this inquiry might allow us to better understand whether stop signs are a 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' phenomena; is the language of a stop sign thrust upon the people or do the people determine the language of the stop sign? This investigation should also give us insight into the effectiveness of Bill 101 which was an attempt to preserve a cohesive and "French" Montreal.

Quebec has been a bilingual province since its inception, and ever since there have been continual tensions between French and English speaking people. These tensions escalated until 1974 when the Quebec liberals passed Bill 22 making French the official language of Quebec. The language law inspired much controversy from both the English and French sides of the debate; the English who felt it was too strong and the French who felt that the law did not do enough to protect their culture. In 1977, Bill 101, formally titled the Charter of the French Language, was passed which made the laws more strict, allowing only French on outside signs or French and English with English lettering significantly smaller than French (*CBC News Online*, 2005).

This kind of visual homogenization of an otherwise diversifying, expanding, and multilingual city is demonstrated in another context by Clifford Geertz. In the ironically titled article *Toutes Directions: Reading the Signs in an Urban Sprawl*, Geertz describes political and cultural implications of homogenization and tension between "authentic" city inhabitants and "outsiders" in his discussion of the

Moroccan city of Sefrou. In 1986, the municipal council of Sefrou, in reaction to the growing modernization and cultural diversification of the city, announced that all the buildings in Sefrou were to be painted beige (Geertz, 1989:291). This municipal redefinition of the city was rooted in the heightened tensions between “real Sefrouis” (those identifying with the city’s traditional Islamic roots) and “outsider Sefrouis” (those living on the periphery both geographically and culturally). With urban sprawl came the addition of new European styles trickling into the city which had otherwise historically been defined as a distinctively “Moroccan Islamic city”. Moreover, in resistance to their exclusion from the core of the city, “outsiders” painted their houses bright, garish colors. In doing so, they turned the attention to the peripheries and threatened the homogeneity of the controlled and traditional core of Sefrou.

The Montreal Francophones’ call for cultural distinctiveness and determination through the implementation of language laws in Montreal echoes the municipal government of Sefrou’s need to preserve their threatened cultural identity through a façade of homogenization. Moroccan king Hassan II, he insisted in one of his speeches that “we must give to our works a national character; preserve, amidst modernization, that which is beautiful and authentic” (Geertz, 1989:298). The solution to the perceived invasion of the “outsiders” was, in addition to implementing a cultural revival of all things “genuinely Islam”, to paint every building in Sefrou beige. Geertz describes this painting over as both a metaphorical and literal “facade” (1989:299). After this municipal rally for homogenization, although Sefrou remained an economically, linguistically, and culturally diverse city, all the houses appeared deceptively uniform. “From outside, a rich man’s home and a poor one’s look hardly different; within they contrast as a palace to a hovel in their decorations, furnishings and use of space” (Geertz, 1989:299). This contrast between the reality of lived experience represented by the private sphere, and the contrived reality of the city in its representation in the public sphere, is related to our own research which attempts to better understand the multidimensional nature of both the city, and its microcosm, the home in Quebec. Although governmental agencies, in both Montreal and Sefrou, have attempted to homogenize and prioritize a certain type of cultural distinctiveness, these attempts have been contested in peripheral areas and even when a homogeneous culture is presented in the public sphere, this is not necessarily indicative of or influential to the private sphere.

In this study, we hope to understand the cultural and political significance of the spatial distribution of stop sign language in the city of Montreal. The language laws, including Bill 101, were implemented in an attempt to revitalize and sustain the Francophone identity and cultural distinctiveness of Montreal. However, as Geertz has demonstrated in his example of Sefrou, political, historic, social and ever-changing and diversifying contexts of a city impact the meanings of a sign to its inhabitants. Moreover, the visual redefinition of language by Montreal municipalities may not necessarily reflect the language use and cultural reality of Montreal’s inhabitants. In this way, we hope to turn the Montreal home, “inside-out” in order to analyze if, or to what extent the municipality sanctioned language laws reflect or conceal the language usage occurring within the confines of the home. In other words, are French stop signs really in French because the people using them are French, or, is it merely another way to paint the city beige?

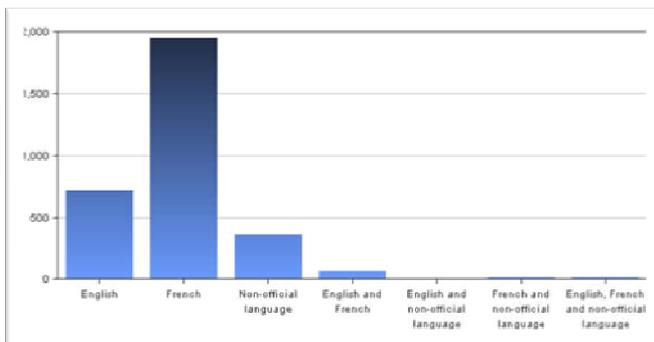


Figure 1 Census Tract Language Data

Statistics Canada. 2007. *Census tract profile for 0139.00, Montréal, Quebec* (table). *2006 Census Tract (CT) Profiles*. 2006 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 92-597-XWE. Ottawa..

Methods

The process for organizing the *Toutes Directions* database was twofold. First, all *Toutes Directions* stop signs were sorted by their Census Tract numbers. Then, within each census tract the data concerning the language on each sign was noted. After all the data from the census tracts for each municipality were observed and recorded, the data were aggregated into municipalities. Linguistically there were only three categories of stop sign and these include: English (Stop), French (Arret), and Bilingual (Arret-Stop). We calculated the

percent distribution of the occurrence of Stop, Arret, and Arret-Stop on stop signs to determine which of the three comprised more than 50% of the total stop signs in each municipality.

In the second phase of our data collection, our team used the census tract numbers within each municipality on Statistics Canada's online research *GeoSearch2006* to determine the statistical breakdown of "language spoken most often at home" in each municipality. Note the graph in Figure 1 above demonstrating the languages spoken at home in a Census tract within the Plateau, a well known French region within Montreal.

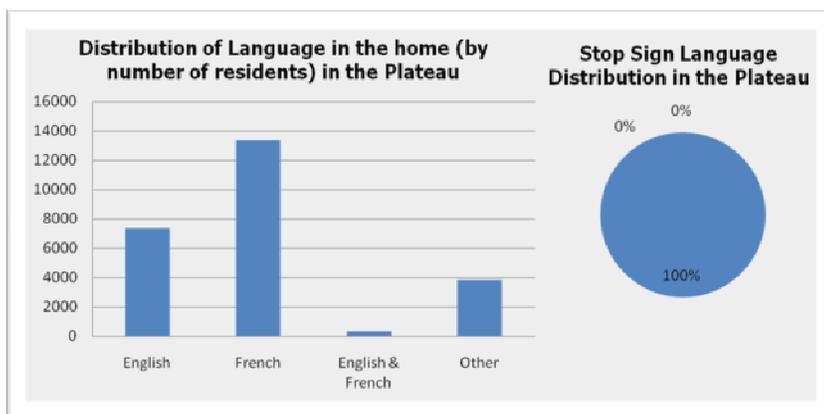
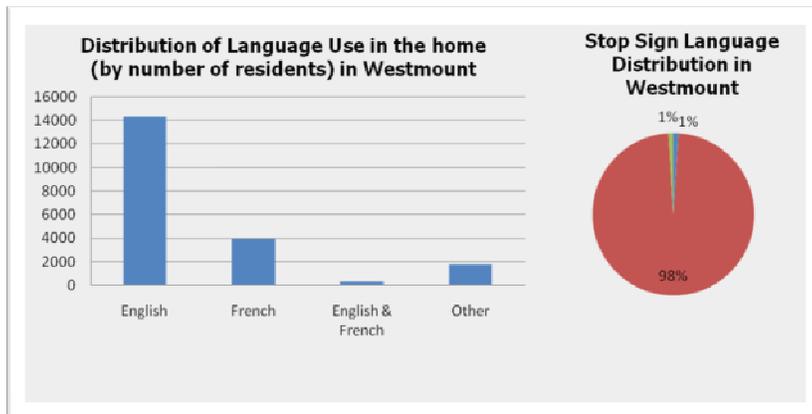
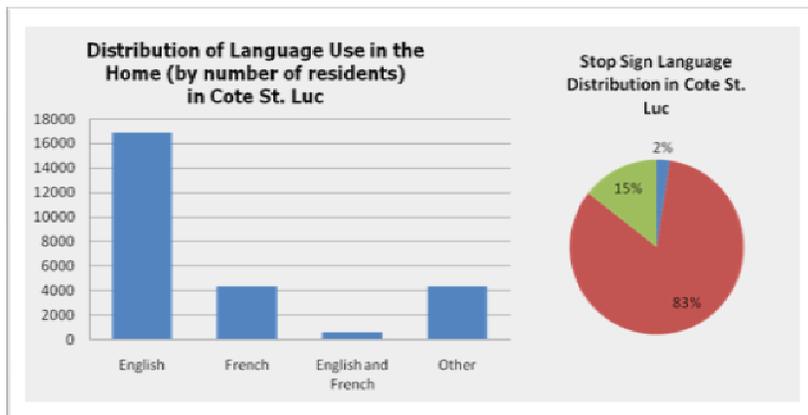
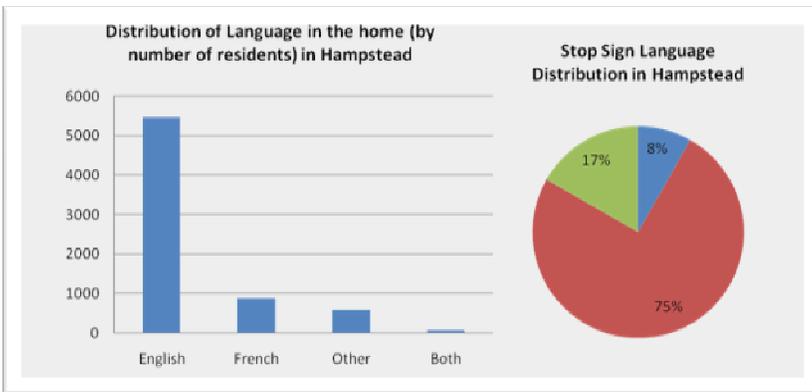
Other linguistic attributes available to us from the *GeoSearch2006* compilation included "Mother Tongue" and "Knowledge of Official Languages". Although this information is salient to the question of language use within Montreal, for purposes of our "Inside-Outside" approach to the research question, we felt the language spoken most often within the home would give us a more accurate and intimate picture of daily language use for Montreal residents. First, Montreal is a highly diverse city, thus mother tongue can easily be a wide range of languages, and may not reflect the daily experience and interactions of Montreal residents today. Second, the attribute "Knowledge of Official Languages" connotes a kind of legitimacy and legality which does not necessarily reflect everyday vernacular. This said, if further research was to be done on this topic, the official language knowledge might allow for a better understanding of the effects of law and Quebec language identity on the language education of Montreal residents.

Moreover, Figure 1 demonstrates the categories of "English and non official language," "French and non official language", and "English, French and non-official language" to the overarching bilingual question. In order to reconcile the six categories of census data into three from which we could get an idea of language spoken in the home in terms of ability to read an English or French stop sign, we simply re-categorized and, for example, placed "English and non-official language speakers" within the "English" category. The effect of this was to simplify our data and make relationships between stop sign language and language spoken most often in the home more easily understood. Thus, the calculated percentages of language spoken within the home appearing in the results section of this paper reflect this re-categorization.

Finally, from these three kinds of data: stop sign language taken from the *Toutes Directions* data collection and the "language spoken in the home" taken from *GeoSearch2006* Census data, we were able to determine apparent correlations between inside and outside language use for each municipality. This data was then used to analyze how far reaching the legal ramifications of bilingual signage have been in Montreal, if the signs indeed reflect the language spoken by the residents driving and walking within those stop sign areas, and whether the bilingual approach to language use and signage in public arenas reflects the private language use inside Montreal homes.

Results

Upon examination of the language of stop signs within each the seven municipalities, stop signs within each area appear to be either overwhelmingly French or overwhelming English. No area has an equally distributed number of "Stop" and "Arret" signs. Those areas which had predominantly "Arret" signs include: the Plateau (100%), Cote des Neiges (92%), Ville-Marie (92%), and Notre Dame de Grace (91%). In fact, of these four, only Ville-Marie had any English signs at all and these accounted for only 2% of the entire assemblage, with the remaining percentage reflecting Arret-Stop signs. Those areas which had predominantly "Stop" signs include: Cote St. Luc, Westmount and Hampstead, which were 83%, 98% and 75% English, respectively. It is notable here that while the percentage of English signs in predominantly English municipalities are not as overwhelming as the percentage of French signs in the predominantly French regions, there are still not very many French signs in predominantly English areas; Hampstead has 8% French and Cote St. Luc has 2% French, while the remaining signs are both French and English (Arret-Stop).



In terms of the correlation between language spoken in the home and language use on stop signs, the results can be categorized into areas where the inside reflects the outside and areas where the inside does not reflect the outside. In the first category, four out of the seven areas examined demonstrate the inside as (language spoken within the home) reflective of the outside (language used on stop signs). In these cases, those homes which spoke predominantly English were situated in areas with a majority of "Stop" signs; similarly, those homes which spoke predominantly French were situated in areas with a majority of "Arret" signs. This phenomenon occurred in Hampstead, Cote st. Luc and Westmount with English the most prevalent language; and in the Plateau with French being the most prevalent language.

The Figure displayed to the right demonstrates the statistical distribution of language use both within the home and on stop signs for these four areas: Hampstead, Cote St. Luc, Westmount and the Plateau, respectively (Figure 2). In the first case, 75% of the Hampstead area had "Stop" signs while 17% had both "Arret-Stop", and 8% were "Arret". Interestingly, this example is the highest percentage of "Arret-Stop" in all the areas studied. Moreover, in Hampstead, the language most often spoken in the home is overwhelmingly English (77.7%) while French is 12.7%, both languages is 1%, and "other" is 8.4%.

Cote St. Luc reveals similar data with 83% of its area having "Stop" signs, 15% "Arret-Stop", and 2% "Arret". Thus this area proved to have even fewer "Arret" signs than Hampstead. However, like Hampstead, the predominant language spoken in the home is English (64.6%) which demonstrates that the "Stop" signs outside reflect the most spoken language inside the homes. The French and "Other"

Figure 2 Municipalities where the Language Spoken Within the Home Reflects the Language Use on Stop Signs. **In Pie Chart, Blue=Arret, Red=Stop, and Green=Stop-Arret

language categories were equally distributed (16.6%) in Cote St. Luc, while homes speaking both English and French were a mere 2.2% of the population.

Westmount reveals the highest number of "Stop" signs of all the areas with 98% and only 1% being "Arret-Stop" and 1% "Arret". This well-known English area has a number of French speakers which demonstrates why the overwhelming percentage of English "Stop" signs is not met with an overwhelming number of English speakers. Although the population of English speakers still holds the majority at 55%, 15% speak French, 1% cite that both languages are spoken within the home, and 6.8% reflect the presence of other languages besides French and English.

Finally, the Plateau is the only area which reflects the French inside and outside correlation in a similar way that Westmount reflected the English inside and outside. The Plateau is also known for being a very French area, which is indeed demonstrated in the "Arret" signs being 100% of all stop signs in the area. Although the absolute 100% of "Arret" signs is reflected on the stop signs language use, the languages spoken within the home just make the majority so that they can be grouped into the inside reflecting the outside category. The percent of French spoken in the home in the Plateau is 53.7% while the percent of English is 29.65%, both English and French is 1.3%, and the amount of other languages is 15.5%.

In the second category there were three municipalities in which the language spoken in the home was not directly reflected in terms of "outside" languages present on the stop signs. These areas include Ville Marie, Cote-des-Neiges, and Notre Dame de Grace. Their statistical data is demonstrated in Figure 3. In the case of Ville Marie, 92% of the area had "Arret" signs, 6% "Arret-Stop", and only 2% had "Stop" signs. The language does not have one particularly prominent majority; 45.9% of residents speak English in the home, 30% speak French, 1.6% speak English and French, and almost a quarter (22.4%) speak other languages aside from English or French.

Similarly, Cote-des-Neiges had 92% "Arret" signs, 8% "Arret Stop", and had absolutely no "Stop" signs. The languages most often spoken at home in Cote des Neiges is 35.2% English, 28.5% French, 1.8% both English and French, and almost half (40%) other languages besides English or French.

Finally, Notre Dame De Grace had 91% "Arret" Signs, 9% "Stop-Arret" 9% and 0% Stop Signs. Thus, for both Cote-des-Neiges and Notre-Dame-de-Grace, despite the substantial number of English speakers and other languages, there was a continual prevalence of "Arret" signs. The distribution of languages most often spoken at home in Notre Dame de Grace is 50% English, 32% French, 2%

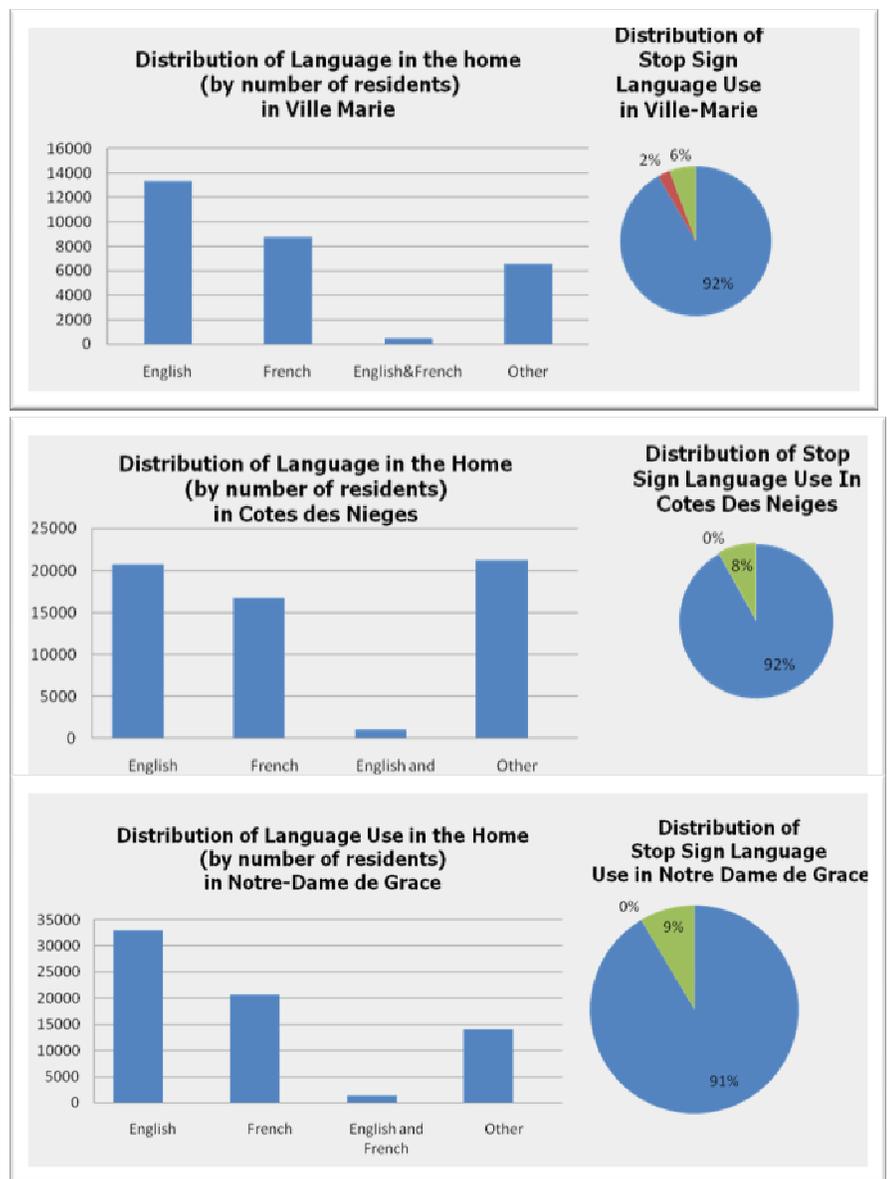


Figure 3. Municipalities Where the Inside did not Reflect the Outside. **In Pie Chart, Blue=Arret, Red=Stop, and Green=Stop-Arret

both English and French and again, a high number of other languages at 22%.

Discussion

In summary, we found that in the municipalities of Cote St. Luc, Westmount, the Plateau, and Hampstead the majority language of stop signs was indeed an indication of the majority language spoken in the home. Because French is supposed to be the primary language featured in officially bilingual Quebec, the fact that English speaking areas like Cote St. Luc, Hampstead and Westmount boast an overwhelming percentage of "Stop" signs reveals a certain amount of agency on the part of these areas. In other words, residents in these English areas seem to be actively pushing for stop signs that reflect the language they identify with. In the Plateau, as well, one might surmise an active selection of linguistic representation in stop signs but it is difficult to make this argument with certainty because the language distribution within the home was not as blatantly a majority of French speaking as the English cases discussed above were.

In Cote-des-Neiges, Ville-Marie and Notre-Dame-de-Grace, however, we observed quite a different phenomena. The language spoken most often in the home was not reflected in the stop signs of those regions. In all three of these regions the language spoken most often in the home is not French but "Arret" signs have a prevalence of 90% or higher. In regions where the "inside" did not correspond to the "outside" the languages spoken most often in the home were much more equally distributed than in those areas where there was an association between language of stop signs and language spoken most often in the home. There were also higher percentages of "other" languages being spoken in Cote-des-Neiges, Ville-Marie and Notre-Dame-de-Grace than the other four municipalities. This seems to imply that where there is no clear majority of one language, the official language becomes dominant.

Cote-des-Neiges provides a particularly interesting case study and one that may illuminate some general trends in the relation between stop signs and language spoken most often in the home. In Cote-des-Neiges "other" is the most common language spoken in the home at 40%, English is a close second at 35% and French follows with 28.5% of the population. This is not reflected whatsoever in the language appearing on the stop signs in Cote-des-Neiges which are 92% French and 8% French and English. There were no "stop" signs and obviously no stop signs in "other" languages so approximately 75% of the population is completely unrepresented by the stop signs in their area. Again, this suggests that where there is a heterogeneous composition of the linguistic population the official language will be dominant regardless of its lack of cultural relevance in the area. Here, despite the hybridity of the private spaces of the home, public space is presented in a homogeneous manner and both the English and "other" categories lose their voices. The dominant language seen on stop signs, then, is probably an indication of the group with the most power in that area and when other groups are divided those speaking French have most influence over their government and its voice.

Problems:

There were several definitional and logistical issues with this study. Logistical issues arose mostly in accordance with boundary delineations having to do with selection and definition of the zones surveyed. Because zones were created primarily with regards to ease of surveying and not in accordance with municipality there may be some overlap in the data. There is also the issue of boroughs versus municipalities, which were not differentiated in this experiment but would entail different governmental systems. Further, the spatial distribution of zones was skewed toward the Western municipalities, which in recent history are very "English" areas. This experiment would have benefited from examining those parts of Montreal that are well known for being distinctly "French" or Quebecois, such as Old Montreal and other areas further east. To expand the sample size to the whole of Montreal would have increased the accuracy of this inquiry and might have allowed to address such whether an area being situated in the periphery is a factor in how accurately stop signs represent the residents of those areas.

Also, there is the problem of history. The stop sign data is essentially a temporal palimpsest and we have no concrete way of knowing which stop signs are recent and which are not. For the purposes of this experiment we are forced to assume that all stop signs are current. However, a better

understanding of the history of the linguistic demographics and of the changing boundaries of municipalities and boroughs could have allowed for a much more in-depth analysis and have enabled us to take into consideration the possibility that many stop signs may simply be remnants of an earlier time.

Lastly, because the study focuses on Quebec we touch upon the issue of linguistic identity, the basis of our query. Though many residents of Quebec may identify themselves as French speaking people, this French is often peppered with English and English expressions. This leads to a kind of hybridity that makes it quite difficult to pinpoint a singular linguistic identity as language spoken most often in the home purports to do.

Upon examination of the seven municipalities, it becomes apparent that stop signs within each area are overwhelmingly either French or English; no municipality had anything close to an equal distribution of English and French. Moreover, in all cases there were both very low instances of those residents who identified as "both English and French" speakers and of "Arret-Stop" signs. Despite this, it is apparent to anyone living in Montreal that almost all inhabitants have at least basic knowledge of both French and English, indeed Quebec defined itself as bilingual province for many years before 1974. Thus, the results of this paper imply that though Quebec now defines itself officially as "French," Montreal is truly a bilingual urban area peppered with both French and English groups who will fight to have their linguistic cultures represented in the public sphere. Thus, we must ask where is the bilingualism in this apparently "bilingual" city?

Conclusion:

The Geertz article as well as our own research demonstrates the complexities and to some degree, the impossibility of creating culturally homogenous cities and urban areas. A city's very nature is a concentration of people, and it is rare that a concentration of people will ever be homogenous; identities are simply too complex. Our findings demonstrate this heterogeneity of peoples not only in parts of the city that are divided between French and English, but even within areas that are well known for one identity. For example, Westmount is "known" in Montreal for being an especially affluent English area, and has the highest percentage of "stop" signs. However, our findings prove that in actuality, Cote St. Luc and Hampstead each have higher percentages of English spoken in the home than Westmount.

Westmount's ability to control its space is most likely a product of the affluence of the English speaking peoples who live there, and it would be interesting if this idea of power and control over space were developed more in future research. However, it could also be the result of complex historical processes. We do not know where Westmount was in relation to downtown Montreal in the past, and it could very well be that just like the other mostly English neighbourhoods (Cote St. Luc and Hampstead), it could have been located on the periphery of the city. If this is true, then perhaps the individual cultures located on the peripheries of urban spaces have more control over their space than those minority cultures in the city "core". Just as the "other" cultures in Geertz's study were able to control the color of their walls and homes, the periphery municipalities and boroughs may have greater control of their space, and be better able to make their signs say Stop. We believe that this theory could be a fruitful area of future research.

However, with the information we have, we know that if the majority of people are united in one identity, they have the power to represent their linguistic identities publicly. Mostly English areas tend to have mostly English signs, and mostly French areas tend to have mostly French signs. However, if the identities are divided, such as is the case with Cote-des-Neiges, where 40% of the population was neither English nor French, nor any other *single* identity, the government is able to control the public space and "Arret" signs are most prevalent. In other words, for Montreal the governmental default is "Arret", for Sefrou it was beige, and we have no reason to believe that this phenomena of the unified controlling the divided will be different in any other space.

References

Geertz, Clifford. 1989. *Toutes Directions: Reading the Signs in an Urban Sprawl*. In International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 291-306.
"Indepth: Bill 101." In *CBC News Online*, 2005.

Appendix A:

Language Spoken in the Home Census Data Based on Population and Percent of Population

Municipality	English	French	English and French	Other	Total Population
CSL	16852	4320	570	4315	21742
%	77.51	19.87	2.62	19.85	
Westmount	14355	3960	300	1785	20400
%	70.37	19.41	1.47	8.75	
Plateau	7375	13355	315	3825	24870
%	29.65	53.70	1.27	15.38	
Hampstead	5440	890	70	590	6995
%	77.70%	12.70%	1%	8.40%	
NDG	32950	20715	1315	14085	64955
%	50.00%	32%	2%	22%	
CDN	20720	16750	1065	21180	59715
%	35.20%	28.50%	1.80%	40%	
Ville Marie	13340	8745	465	6520	29070
%	45.89	30.08	1.60	22.43	

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Rough Association of Zone to Municipality

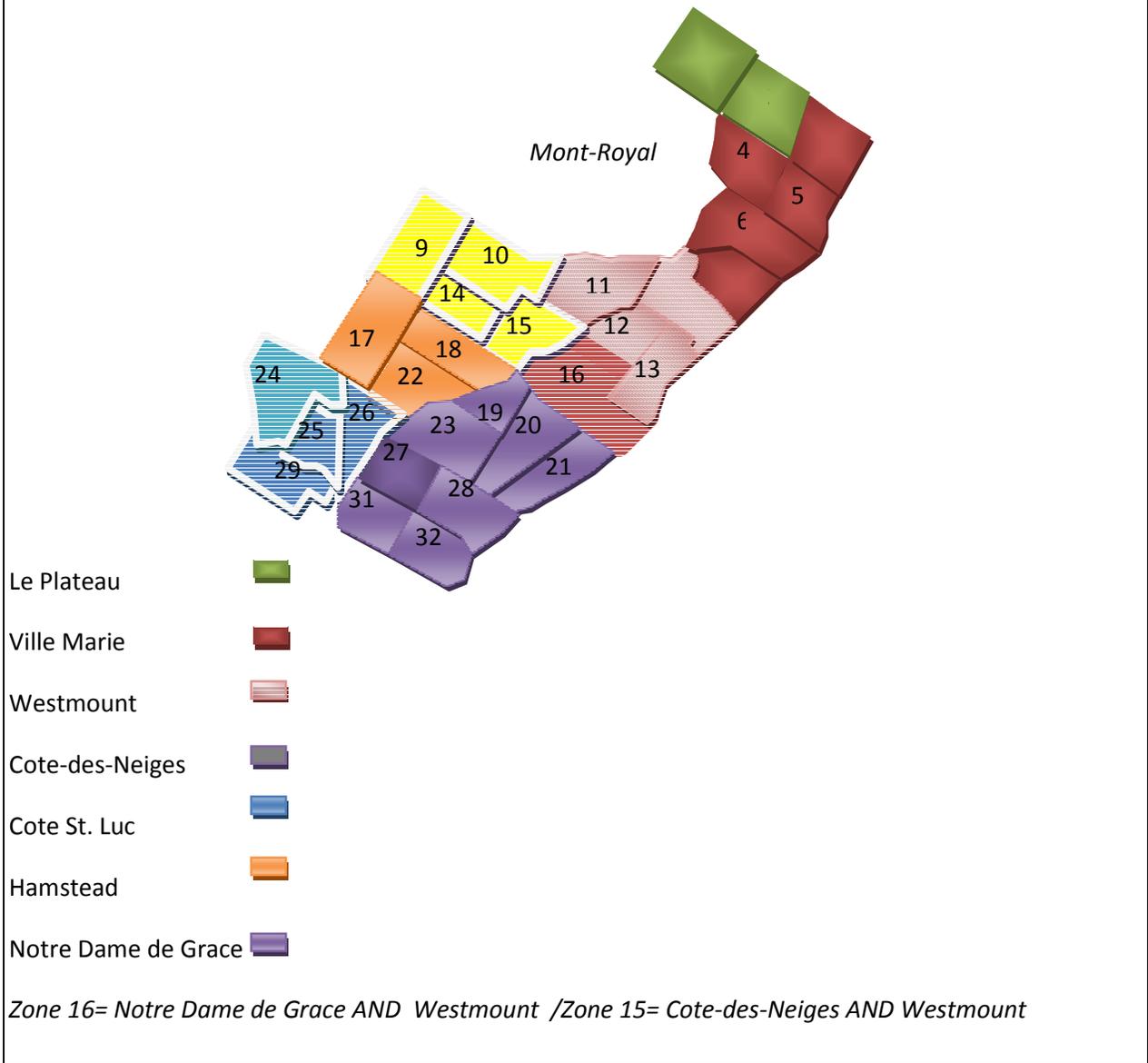


Figure 4. Zones and Municipalities