Introduction

I believe that it is of great importance to make use of the comparative method with regards to the issue at stake, namely the planning and regulation of language in contemporary societies. It is indeed essential to weigh and contrast the various situations which present themselves in specific societies.

In this case I have decided to study two emblematic cases, Quebec and Israel, which although very different have a number of points in common, certainly enough to stimulate discussion and lead to some serious thinking about language issues in contemporary societies. It is important to note, however, that the approach that I am taking in this instance is free of any political biases.

I also hope that the exercise will give us a better understanding of the status of minority languages, or of languages that are not used widely in Europe or in North America and whose geographical focus remains rather limited. The political and cultural isolation from which certain languages suffer, or the little that is known about their potential and current position, is one of the main difficulties in the field.
To facilitate understanding of the objective situation with respect to Hebrew in Israel and French in Quebec, I am going to use the concepts of “emerging languages” and “renascent languages”.

It should also be noted right from the beginning, all the more since this conference is mainly about language policy debates in Canada and in Europe, that the development of the Hebrew language in the twentieth century has originally more to do with events that took place in Europe than with the Middle East.

**Emerging Languages**

Certain minority languages have not really lost ground in recent history, at least since the Industrial Revolution, and have remained relatively stable in terms of the number of speakers. In such cases, they are reviving or emerging in the sense that their political status has changed, having shifted from being languages used primarily orally, in rural settings or in a minority situation, to being official or quasi-official languages that are present in large urban areas or used in leading-edge scientific or cultural fields.

In short, they have gradually acquired considerable importance within the apparatus of government, public management or in movements of national resurgence, without having suffered from a lengthy eclipse. This is definitely the case for Quebec French, which has become an official language not only in Quebec itself but also within the Canadian federation. Since the late 19th century, Quebec Francophones have maintained their proportion within the total population of Quebec at approximately 80%, while managing during this period to change the status of their language from marginal to dominant.

It is nevertheless true that French in Quebec occupies a special place in the current typology of minority languages in the Western world, mostly because the language itself has been a linguistic vehicle with international credentials since the Enlightenment. The hegemony of French in Europe until World War II did not do much for Quebec French, however, because French speakers in Quebec came under the political influence of the British Empire. From the English Conquest in 1760 until the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, Francophone Quebec received virtually no cultural or political support from France. In short, during a 200-year period, Quebec French evolved in relative isolation from its dominant European counterpart.

**Renascent Languages**

The renascent languages suffered a different fate. More often than not, they were linguistic vehicles that had become completely marginalized, abandoned and forgotten in everyday usage, usually because of political oppression or military conquest. They nonetheless reappeared as a result of hard edged nationalist movements, initially in an
artificial manner or as heritage languages, mostly supported by a cultural elite pursuing specific political goals.

In the 20th century, Hebrew appears as one of the most remarkable of the renascent languages. Until the appearance of the Zionist Movement at the end of the 19th century, Hebrew was no longer used anywhere except in Judaic liturgy and in traditional biblical studies. Hebrew, which was rarely spoken in the modern era, even in the Middle East, was timidly reintroduced around 1850 in Eastern Europe by a number of modernist thinkers, this as a strictly literary and learned language not used in daily channels of communication.

**Renascent Hebrew**

Around 1880, in a number of Jewish Eastern-European circles, the idea surfaced that however dispersed the Jews might have become, they still constituted a people. In view of the dominant nationalist currents of thought at the time, notably in the context of minorities aspiring to control a nation state, Jewish ideologists argued that Jews, like other peoples, needed to have a country. That is to say, a land area over which they had political control. Also implied was the notion that a people needed a national language as well. At the time, Eliezer Ben Yehuda (1858-1922) put forward the idea that this national home should be Palestine and the language in question Hebrew. Other thinkers of the day, including Theodor Herzl, Moses-Lieb Lilienblum and Peretz Smolenskin, advocated a form Zionism without a specific language component.

In such a context, one may say that the current language situation in Israel originated largely in the history of Europe in the late 19th century, and particularly from the fact that many Jews, who were often persecuted and pushed towards the margins, felt that they could no longer fit into modern European society. This sentiment was particularly acute at the time of the Dreyfus affair in France, during the massive pogroms perpetrated in Tsarist Russia prior to World War I and also during the Nazi Holocaust. Modern Europe, by rejecting its Jewish communities can largely be credited with the birth to Zionism, and the idea that a new kind of Jew had to appear in response to anti-Semitic oppression and persecution. Among the means used in view of forcing a definitive break with Europe, was the adoption of a new language for Jews now planning to live in a new country.

In 1881, Ben Yehuda immigrated to Palestine and decided to speak only Hebrew with those around him. A few years later, in 1890, he founded the Va’ad ha-lashon, or the Language Council, the precursor of today’s Academy of the Hebrew Language. In 1910, he released the first volume of his dictionary of the Modern Hebrew language. It was considered authoritative and established much of the practical usage for the emerging Hebrew language, in addition to setting in motion the creation of a lexicon of everyday terms and phrases. In 1920, a few months after the British Protectorate in Palestine was established, His Majesty’s government decreed through an order in council that English,
Hebrew and Arabic would henceforth be the official languages of government and of the country.

Most importantly, the Zionist movement, which at the beginning of the twentieth century established farming settlements in Palestine, invented the *kibbutzim* and founded the city of Tel-Aviv, adopted Hebrew as the common language for all of its institutions. By 1948, when the State of Israel was created, the vast majority of its Jewish inhabitants could speak the language. Today, Hebrew has approximately 5.5 million speakers in Israel, and it has become the dominant public and private language of the country. In this context, Hebrew has also become the language of government and science, not to mention the fact that approximately 1 million Palestinian Arabs make partial use of it as a second language.

**History of the Jewish Language Situation**

After the fall of the Second Temple, in the year 70 A.D., a triglossic Jewish linguistic model appeared that would be perpetuated for two millennia with continual minor transformations. Three levels of language developed within the diaspora, each with its own special features: a) Hebrew and Talmudic Aramaic used for religious and literary purposes within high Jewish culture, b) for everyday communications among Jews more recent composite languages appeared, including Yiddish, Ladino and Judeo-Arabic, c) Jews learned the vernacular languages of the countries in which they lived to communicate with non-Jews.

The model shifted in Palestine at the end of the 19th century and became more complex and polyglossic: a) Turkish was used by the government and for administrative purposes, b) peasants and city dwellers used dialects of Arabic, c) the elite used classical Arabic, d) Sephardi Jews used Judezmo among themselves and Arabic with their neighbours, e) the European powers introduced French and German, f) Ashkenazi Jews who had recently immigrated used Yiddish or East European languages such as Russian, Polish and Lithuanian.

Under pressure from the secular European Jewish streams of thought mentioned above, a fierce battle began in the early twentieth century in Palestine between Yiddish, which was preferred by those who advocated a non-territorial cultural nationalism, and Hebrew favoured by those who espoused a form of territorial nationalism. In fact, most of the Jews who were attached to Yiddish immigrated from Eastern Europe to the United States, whereas many of those in favour of Hebrew went to Palestine, thus sealing the fate of the linguistic issue in the Jewish state to be.

In this context there appeared a mono-linguistic Hebrew ideology that succeeded in winning over the vast majority of the Zionist Jews, and then the Jewish population in Palestine. It advocated a virtually exclusive use of Hebrew and was able between the two world wars to overcome the presence of competing languages, even within the Jewish sphere. The Jewish State that appeared in 1948 was resolutely unilingual and fought
against the other Jewish languages that were found within its territory, including a large number of old composite languages developed in adjoining Arab countries, in addition to Yiddish. Hebrew also served to assimilate the heavy flow of Jewish immigration in the immediate post-war period that brought a strong linguistic heterogeneity to Israeli society.

“Hebrew has become the hallmark of Israeli identity and unity. It is the national language, the first official language, and the language of the majority. Hebrew is the language in which all citizens are expected to achieve functional oracy and literacy.”


The Current Situation in Israël

For approximately 20 years now this monolingualism has been soundly battered by: a) a massive new immigration of people who seem more difficult to assimilate, including Russian and Ethiopian Jews who arrived after the 1980s, b) the pressure of international English, which is also the main language of the Jewish diaspora, c) the resistance of ultra-orthodox Jews, who speak mainly Yiddish.

The situation is thus changing again as there has appeared only recently, within the Jewish population of Israel, a new form of bilingual, if not multilingualism, with Hebrew as the dominant language, English as the second language (200,000 mother tongue English speakers in Israel) and other languages that have remained in common use like Russian (10% of the population), Arabic (8%) and Yiddish (5%). In fact, by the end of the 90s, only 50% of Israeli Jews had Hebrew as a mother tongue and no more than 60% were born in Israel. Within the Arab Israeli populations there appeared a strong trend towards Arabic-Hebrew bilingualism. There is also a reasonable familiarity with English in all segments of the Israeli population, whether Jewish or Arabic.

The Israeli educational system, which was created early on by the British during their Protectorate and is administered at the community and local level, is currently divided into two: a) a part in which Arabic is the language of education, Hebrew the second language and English the main foreign language, and b) a system in which Hebrew is the language of education, where English is taught from Grade 3 onward to all students and in which 50% of students learn Arabic for three years, in addition to other languages like French, Russian and Yiddish.

The major language issues within Israeli society today are: a) does English threaten Hebrew, b) will Russian continue to be spoken by Jewish immigrants longer than other languages now declining in importance, like French and Arabic, c) how many Jews
whose mother tongue is Hebrew will want to learn Arabic, d) will Arabic remain an important language, both for Jews from Arabic countries as well as for Arab Israelis themselves.

“The unique revitalization of Hebrew resulted in a strong tendency for an ideological and instrumentally-motivated monolingualism to replace an earlier multilingual pattern, but this has been challenged, on the one hand by the mixed success of resistance to language shift by Arabic, Russian, Yiddish and many other languages, and on the other hand by the fact that Hebrew is now forced to compete with English in an increasing number of domains.”


Similarities with Quebec

There are several interesting points of comparison between a renaissant language like Israeli Hebrew and an emerging language like Quebec French. Despite their geographical remoteness and very different objective conditions, Israeli and Quebec societies share a number of linguistic features that deserve to be studied in greater depth.

This could tend to demonstrate that minority languages, in the context of the modern state and in an era of globalization, end up encountering problems that are relatively comparable and that can sometimes lead to similar policies. Without ever having worked together or having been in contact with one another in any way, the Government of Quebec and the Government of Israel have applied language policies and proposed regulatory systems that are sometimes parallel and sometimes rather akin. More detailed comparative studies would no doubt reveal similarities of this kind between other countries and regions of the Western world.

1) The language issue has played a crucial role in the appearance of modern Israeli (or even Jewish) and Quebec nationalism, with the idea of a national language being one of the key issues that inspired and influenced the creation of a state structure, not to mention the emergence of the concept of «people».

In both instances the state has acted as a catalyst to promote a minority language, French and Hebrew in this case. Under such circumstances language tends to provide a clear cultural rallying point for defining membership within the national group.

In short, a national language stimulates, propels and fuels Quebec and Israeli secular nationalism, replacing older realities that are less suited to a modern context, such as religion, cultural traditions or even blood ties. In Quebec’s case, this linguistic component was already widely available, whereas in Israel
it had to be invented by revitalizing a Jewish language that had fallen into disuse for over two millennia as a normal vehicle of communication.

2) In both instances, the State ended up taking responsibility for shaping the linguistic material as it was existed in the 19th century, thus replacing intellectuals, grammarians or activists who had worked in isolation to ameliorate and elevate the national language. As such, it was largely recognized that improving the quality of Hebrew or French appeared to be one of the means by which a national sentiment could be sustained. It was also viewed as a tool necessary for the building of a modern and enlightened public administration.

In 1977, Quebec established the Office québécois de la langue française, a government agency whose mission is described in the province’s Charte de la langue française. Its goal is to formulate and implement Quebec’s official language policy. The Office also has responsibilities with respect to terminology, the francization of business dealings and government administration, as well as the promotion of French in Quebec. It developed and administers the Grand dictionnaire terminologique, which contains approximately 3 million French and English terms, and also offers a «banque de dépannage linguistique».

In Israel, the Academy of the Hebrew Language (ha-akademia le-lashon ha-ivrit) was established in 1952 to guide the lexical, grammatical and orthographic development of Hebrew. Both of these government agencies, the Office and the Academy, played a very similar role in enhancing the national language vehicle vis-à-vis competing languages in the immediate cultural environment.

The Academy of the Hebrew Language prepared a Modern Hebrew grammar, established standards for spelling and the transliteration of Hebrew, and supported the development of language use that would meet international standards, thereby contributing to the appearance of a more effective national linguistic vehicle. The Academy has also been working on the development of a Hebrew lexicon that would be capable of dealing with all scientific and technical concepts, thereby giving rise to over 100,000 new words. A historical dictionary is currently in preparation by the Academy, which thus far contains 6.4 million Hebrew words from the post-biblical period and 9 million words that have been used since the mid 19th century.

3) Given that the State of Israel owed its birth and development to significant flows of immigrants from Europe, Maghreb and the Arabic Middle East, Israel made a point very early on to teach the national language to adult newcomers who were bringing to the country a great deal of linguistic heterogeneity. Thus structure to teach Hebrew was created from scratch, called an ulpan with the State agreeing to spend considerable resources to teach the national language to settled migrants, including courses spread over several months or even up to a year.
Quebec did the same from the 1960s onward with institutions specifically created for that purpose, called COFI or Centres d’orientation et de formation des immigrants, whose main purpose was to steer adult immigrants towards French. The idea was also to ensure that newcomers from abroad would not constitute a threat to the linguistic resurgence that was underway. French instruction to immigrants became a major undertaking in Quebec and a key socio-political issue.

4) Both Quebec and Israel feel a great deal of pressure from English, the international language of communication and global trade. In both instances, the national populations exhibited a marked increased in English language skills, leading to what might be called functional bilingualism. It is not clear at this point whether Quebec and Israel possess either the skills or resources needed to counteract this universal phenomenon. Moreover, in Israel and Quebec alike, English is taught very early on in the public school system, around Grade 4, often at the insistence of parents who are keen to give their children access to a language that is spoken around the world.

5) Although reluctant at the outset, both in Israel and Quebec, co-territorial populations have now tended to start learning the national language, meaning Anglophones in Quebec and Arabs in Israel. This is generally done strictly on practical grounds, or as a result of the intermingling of populations in large cities. This trend considerably strengthened the extent and importance of French and Hebrew in the societies now examined.

6) Both Israel and Quebec, particularly in the cities of Montreal and Tel-Aviv, appear to be relatively new societies, growing as a result of an influx of new populations. In both cases, the rise of a national state can be considered as a phenomenon that goes back barely a half century. Such conditions are conducive to the introduction of daring and innovative language policies, in the absence of a well-established social structure that could have impeded the government’s determination to reorganize or even reorient already well-established practices.

It is also interesting to note that mainstream Quebec and Israeli nationalism unexpectedly share common symbols originating in the biblical tradition or in the context which gave birth to Christianity. The fleur de lys on the Quebec flag and the Quebec coat of arms is a very ancient Jewish symbol and reached France at the time of the Crusades. St. John the Baptist, the patron saint of French Canadians, is a figure from Jewish history considered to have been a disciple of the Qumran sect, a community which produced the Dead Sea Scrolls. There are other interesting coincidences, including the fact that the Quebec flag, which is very important as a nationalist symbol of North American francophonie, was adopted in 1948, the year that the state of Israel was established.
Lastly, the populations of Israel and Quebec are approximately the same, at around 6 million for the former and 7 million for the latter, a fact that makes it easier to compare the two societies and that gives their respective nationalisms a relatively similar scale at the international level.

Differences with Quebec

Although the State of Israel was established in 1948 and the rise of Modern Hebrew goes back barely 100 years, the fact remains that the Jewish people and Judaism have a history that can be traced over three millennia. This contrasts sharply with the situation in Quebec, whose historical roots are much more recent and are the product of a form of mercantile competition in North America between two modern colonial empires. The geographic area of the State of Israel and the abstract concept of space in the Middle East are also at a great variance with the Quebec experience within the Americas.

The existence of a vast and highly influential Jewish diaspora has no equivalent in French-speaking Quebec, although in the mid-nineteenth century, many thousands of people left Quebec to settle in New England, Ontario and Western Canada. Over the centuries, the Jewish linguistic tradition also cut across and absorbed every major European language and a number of Asian languages, giving rise to a multilingualism that is without parallel within Quebec culture.

Israeli society has from the outset faced issues so serious and urgent that language is not what its citizens are most concerned with. Although ever-present as part of national Jewish affirmation process, the language issue does not receive in Israel the media and political attention found in Quebec and Canada.

The economic problems experienced during the creation of the first rural settlements, along with terrorist attacks from a variety of sources as soon as the British Protectorate was established, plus constant threats of war since 1948, created the sort of climate in which the idea of reviving a language did not strike Jews as a task that was too difficult or unachievable. The climate of urgency and vulnerability faced by Jews in the Middle East turned out to be conducive to the introduction of radical and highly innovative linguistic measures.

From the legal standpoint, the Hebrew State was content after 1948 to apply over its territory the British 1920 order in council making English, Hebrew and Arabic the official languages of the country. This was done on the basis that the mandatory laws would remain in force until officially amended by the Israeli Parliament. No comprehensive language statute has therefore been promulgated in Israel since the beginning of the 20th century, in stark contrast to the Quebec and Canadian situation. There is also no constitutional act in the Israeli legal system.

The use of languages in public signage and elsewhere is not a major issue in Israeli society, whether politically or socially. There are thus no specific regulations governing
language use in the private sphere, which varies by neighbourhood and region, including the use of foreign languages like English. The Israeli authorities tend on the other hand to advocate trilingual signage (Hebrew, Arabic, English) on all major highways, in tourist areas and in areas where there is international traffic. On a more local scale, messages are often only in Hebrew. There do not appear to be any movement to challenge this state of affairs.

Throughout the 20th century, the level of immigration to Israel has been stronger than to Quebec. Virtually all Israeli Jews trace their roots to the region only since the twentieth century, and there have been migratory waves on a phenomenal scale, the most recent of which consisted of approximately 600,000 Russian Jews who arrived within a few years following the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Last but not least, the political and military complexity that the Middle East introduces into everyday Israeli life gives rise to constraints that are not found in North America, particularly with respect to personal security and the geographic mobility of populations. Israeli politics is also much more conflictual and its governments accordingly tend to be much more vulnerable in terms of political longevity.

**Conclusion**

Each in their respective sphere, the Quebec and Israeli linguistic experiments may be considered to have been extremely successful on a world scale, the former in terms of enhancing the status of a language that had previously been considered marginal and the latter in terms of reappropriating a linguistic vehicle that had disappeared from use for several millennia.

The Israeli case is in fact the only twentieth century instance of a heritage language that had disappeared almost completely from use, being reintroduced on a massive scale as the language of administration, scientific research and everyday life. This was achieved in the context of building a new state structure under the impetus of a nationalistic secular ideology.

In Quebec, the progress made in the practical and symbolic reinvestment of the national language was less problematic, particularly as the Canadian Constitution of 1867 gave Francophones a provincial parliament whose powers within the Federation allowed them enough latitude to accomplish the task. In reality, of all the national minorities in the West that have decided to make language claims, the Francophones of Quebec were probably the best equipped legally to achieve this goal.

In both Israel and Quebec, the government took control of the development and promotion of the national language, notably by imposing its use in all spheres of society, so much so that co-territorial populations of different cultural origins and immigrant cohorts became willing to adopt it without too much resistance. This determination, which had to be insistent and exercised over lengthy periods of time, nevertheless
required a well-established democratic framework. It also needed a form legal legitimacy if the presumed minority community was to expect to achieve progress in an otherwise unfavourable global context.

The Israeli effort was at nation building was conducted within the limits of a sovereign State, even though it has been severely threatened over the past 50 years both militarily and demographically. The Quebec example on the other hand shows that full political autonomy is not necessary for a national language to re-emerge. The determining factor would rather appear to be access to a level of public management or democratic government, that is sufficiently broad as to make it possible to introduce legislation on language policies that can then be applied on a large scale. From this standpoint, federations appear to be more suitable than unitary or centralized States, and parliamentary systems based on the British model more appropriate than republican regimes.

The linguistic, lexical or grammatical features of a language do not appear to play any role whatsoever in the process that we have described above, which is to be understood from a strictly political and legal point of view. Hebrew for example, which belongs to the family of Semitic languages and is written with an alphabet that it alone uses, has no pretence to becoming an international language. The vehicle was nevertheless adopted in the 20th century by hundreds of thousands of European Jews as their common language and that of the State of Israel. In short, in such a context, in which a national identity is being built, no language will appear too complex, difficult or daunting if it is officially declared by the national State to be the national language.

A major program of comparative research needs to be undertaken in this area if we are to acquire a better understanding of the circumstances in which language policies appear in North America and Europe, and under what conditions minority national languages can gain ground. Many cases have been studied already, but there has never been an overall synthesis of the data available. We also need to enhance our knowledge by examining some specific cases. These thoughts might as well serve as a starting point for communities or regional governments who want to enhance, promote or give legal status to a minority language.