



Inter-regional Interpreters Bank, 1999-2000

The population of the Montreal Urban Community

The territory of the Montreal Urban Community (MUC) is made up of 29 municipalities occupying a surface area of 496 km² (approximately 190 miles²). During the 1996 quinquennial census, it had a population of 1 808 188 residents and represented 25% of the entire population of Quebec.

The Montreal population differs from the rest of Quebec by its great diversity.

	Montreal	Rest of Quebec
Total population	100%	100%
Ethnic origin other than French, English and Canadian	37%	5%
Immigrants	26%	4%
Mother tongue other than French or English	25%	4%
Unable to hold a conversation in French or English	3%	0.4%

More specifically:

- ❑ 116 000 immigrated between 1991 and 1996,
- ❑ 35 000 non-permanent residents live on MUC territory,
- ❑ 53 500 inhabitants cannot hold a conversation in French or English.

Montreal, like any other cosmopolitan metropolis, must deal with linguistic diversity on a daily basis.

Ten languages cover 70% of the needs of these 53 500 people. With only one exception, no language has more than 5 000 speakers who are unable to hold a conversation in French or English. In most cases, fewer than 1 000 people who speak a same language will need the services of an interpreter.

This represents quite a challenge when it comes to coordinating interpretation services.

Context

The Government of Quebec adopted French as the province's official language in 1974. The legislation nevertheless ensures access to education and health and social services in English for English speakers.

Furthermore, An Act Respecting Health Services and Social Services (R.S.Q. c. S-4.2) provides for rules for adapting services to particular linguistic and ethnocultural characteristics (art. 2.5 and 2.7). It also defines user's rights (art. 4 to 16) and the responsibilities of institutions with regard to organizing their services in a way that takes into account the diversity of their population (art. 171).

In 1999, a Quebec Supreme Court ruling¹ recalled the importance of communication between the care receiver and the caregiver, stating that "when there is a lack of such communication, the withholding of care and services becomes inevitable."

In order to facilitate equal access to immigrants who are not sufficiently familiar with the host society's language and culture, the *Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal-Centre* (Montreal-Centre Regional Board) created the Inter-regional Interpreters Bank (hereafter Bank) in 1993 at the request of two Quebec Government departments: the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*, and the *Ministère des Affaires internationales, de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles*. Since then, the Bank has extended its coverage to serve the Laval area in the north and the Montérégie area in the south, where there are approximately 10 000 inhabitants unable to hold a conversation in French or English.

The Régie régionale de Montréal-Centre

The Regional Board administers, on behalf of *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*, all health and social service programs provided directly to the MUC population by some 160 institutions and 515 community organizations.

Access for cultural communities

The Regional Board has incorporated access for ethnocultural communities in all of its recent endeavours. It drew up its first access plan in 1990, which it revised in 1997.

The 1997 plan has four major guidelines, including that of taking down barriers and limits to access by supporting inter-cultural training for service providers, information and interpretation, notably the Inter-regional Interpreters Bank.

The Cultural Interpreter

The cultural interpreter is a skilled professional who transmits all of the information expressed by verbal and nonverbal communication in strict confidentiality.

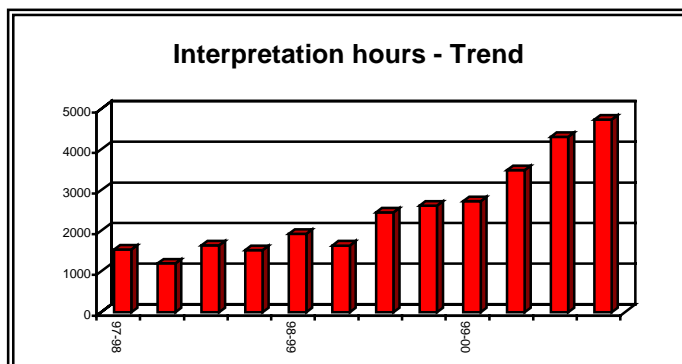
The interpreter helps the client and the professional understand each other's cultural values, concepts and practices, from a neutral position and in a vocabulary that is adapted to the people he or she is interpreting for.

The interpreter's greatest asset is not only his or her knowledge, but also the ability to bridge two cultures.

The Inter-regional Interpreters Bank: Noteworthy facts in 1999-2000

Some figures:

- ❑ Over 12 000 clients benefited from the services of an interpreter, not counting service providers.
- ❑ 8 578 requests for service, i.e., a 73% increase compared to the previous year
- ❑ 15 284 hours of interpretation, i.e., a 77% increase
- ❑ 48 service languages. Ten languages represented 75% of interpretation hours. Here are the most frequent in decreasing order of importance: Albanian, Punjabi, Spanish, Bengali, Russian, Vietnamese, Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin...), Tamil, Turkish and Cambodian. For the first time, Spanish was not the most frequently requested language.
- ❑ 114 interpreters and translators. Two of them earned \$24 000² in fees, 5 earned between 10 and \$20 000 and 13 between \$5 000 and \$9 999. The average income was \$2 959, and the median \$1 239. Conditions improved slightly.
- ❑ 275 institutions and schools received services and paid \$337 386 in fees to the Bank, which remitted all of the amounts received in full to the interpreters and translators.
- ❑ 75% of services were requested by Montreal institutions, 5% by southern and northern suburbs and 15% by schools.
- ❑ 38% of interpretation hours were provided in CLSCs, 18% in hospitals and 21% in youth centres.



Operation Parasol

The Federal program to take in refugees from Kosovo covers interpretation fees linked to their health care up until April 2001. That is why Albanian represented 12% of interpretation hours this year.

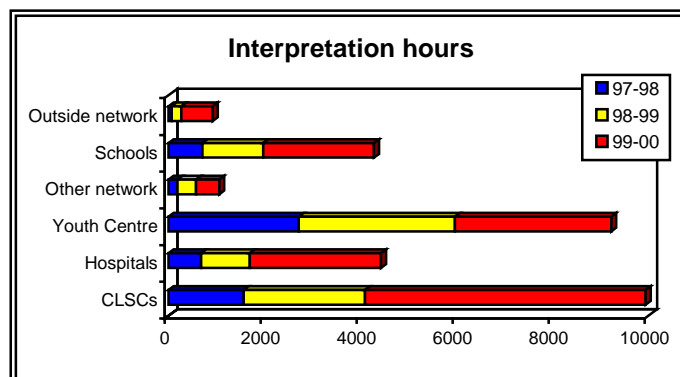
It was possible to organize these interpretation services throughout Quebec thanks to co-operation between the *Ministère des Relations avec les citoyens et de l'Immigration*, the Regional Board and the *Service d'aide et de liaison pour immigrants La Maisonnée* (immigrant assistance and liaison service), particularly Mr. Laze Leskaj.

In June, Kosovo and Albanian interpreters, based mainly in Montreal, provided services to the 1 500 or so refugees from Kosovo in a dozen Quebec cities. Many interpreters also worked in Ontario and the Maritimes.

Measures to support interpretation in the hospital setting

Since the Bank's creation, hospitals are the institutions that proportionally use its services the least. The Regional Board therefore set up measures to support interpretation. The first measure took the form of an inter-hospital committee in charge of creating guidelines for using an interpreter. The second measure is aimed at training employees who are occasionally asked to interpret for their colleagues and the clientele. The last measure involves financing half of the fees for interpretation carried out by the Bank.

The first two measures were set up late due to the energy devoted to Operation Parasol. Nevertheless, the inter-hospital committee agreed on the need to restate the importance of quality communication and interpretation. A joint communication campaign is scheduled for the fall of 2000. The last measure, however, has been an undeniable success, since 1 830 clients, i.e., 36% more than last year, benefited from the Bank's services. Demand virtually doubled, with 16 hospitals taking advantage of the financing plan.



Co-operation and influence

- ❑ Renewal of the agreement with the *Ministère de l'Éducation* in the context of supporting Montreal schools
- ❑ Regular presentations at Montreal universities on the services provided by the Bank
- ❑ Co-operation on the content of the Canadian Web site on interpretation in the social services sector – <http://www.criticallink.org/>
- ❑ Co-operation in developing the micro-program in community interpretation that will be given by the Université de Montréal in the winter of 2001.

Plans

A committee made up of the Regional Board, four Montreal universities, the McGill University Health Centre, the City of Montreal and the *Service pour l'interprétation visuelle et tactile* (visual and tactile interpretation service) will organize the 3rd International Conference on Interpretation in the Community.

Critical Link 3 / Un maillon essentiel 3 will be held from May 22 to 26, 2001. Over 400 convention members are expected at UQAM.

For more information, visit our Web site:

<http://www.rss06.gouv.qc.ca/colloque/index2.html>

¹ Hôpital chinois de Montréal vs. le Syndicat canadien de la Fonction publique et l'Alliance des infirmières du Québec – case: 500-05-043563-988

² Canadian dollars