5 Hello/Bonjour Won't Cut It in a Health Crisis

An analysis of language policy and translation strategy across Manitoban websites and social media during COVID-19

Renée Desjardins

Introduction

When COVID-19 had affected nearly all corners of the world, news stories began to report the pandemic's unequal effects on different demographics. In Canada, one of the largest initial outbreaks took place in Alberta in April 2020. The outbreak took hold in a meat-processing plant where a percentage of the workforce was 'staffed by people born and raised abroad', including temporary foreign workers and workers from the Filipino community in the province (Baum et al. 2020; Babych 2020). Language barriers were one of the challenges that led to 921 cases of COVID-19 at the Cargill High River plant: 'Bulletin-board postings and letters to employees were provided only in English, causing confusion about compensation, isolation protocols and eligibility for paid time off, workers said' (Baum et al. 2020). What this example speaks to is the fact that crisis[1] itself is not necessarily discriminatory: arguably, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone, to varying degrees. However, the pandemic did underscore and continues to underscore 'inequitable *policies* and *institutions* that place those already at risk'—such as the meat-processing workers at the Cargill High River plant—'in perilous positions' (Clark-Ginsberg and Petrun Sayers 2020: 482). Indeed, when larger corporate or public communication strategies and language policy ignore the importance and value of translation, interpretation and multilingual communication, the burden is placed on already disadvantaged groups 'to bear the brunt of COVID-19 *information insufficiency* and *misinformation*' (Clark-Ginsberg and Petrun Sayers 2020: 482). For example, the Cargill High River employees combatted information insufficiency by

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creating social media groups, notably on Facebook, that provided information in English and Tagalog (Baum et al. 2020).

There is no federal law that requires businesses in Canada provide communication in Indigenous languages (e.g. Cree) or languages related to migration (e.g. Tagalog), though section 3(c) of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*[2] suggests the Canadian government must endeavour to facilitate civic participation in 'all aspects of Canadian society' regardless of origin. With a narrow focus on official languages, federal, provincial, and corporate entities may have indeed fulfilled their obligation to serve some Canadians during the pandemic, but they did not reach all Canadians and Indigenous Peoples[3] and this continues to be the case at the time of writing, particularly with regard to vaccine rollout in Canada.

Canada's *Official Languages Act*[4] ensures the use and respect of the official languages of Canada (English and French) in federal institutions (and specifically, of interest here: in communicating and providing services to the public). However, as McDonough Dolmaya (2020: 553) indicates, 'translation is directly mentioned only three times: when referring to the proceedings of Parliament, regulations by the Governor General, and information added to bilingual forms used in federal court'. Notably absent from the *Official Languages Act* (at the time of writing[5]) are Indigenous languages and languages of migration. In the context of this crisis, the lack of translation into languages other than the official languages (such as Tagalog and Vietnamese) has been ostensibly deadly, which illustrates the concept of 'cascading crises' rather evocatively (Pescaroli and Alexander 2015; Federici and O'Brien 2019). The focus of this chapter is not to scope a revision of or to propose specific amendments to the *Official Languages Act*. Rather, I point to the lack of language protection for (and outright omission of) Indigenous languages and languages of migration to show how federal institutions (as well as other governing bodies) shape bilingualism and multilingual communication in Canada and how such language policies have effects elsewhere in terms of linguistic and translational justice.[6] In Canada, language policy also varies provincially: strategies differ and can be sector-specific and English remains largely dominant nationally, despite Canada's linguistic diversity.

Thus, Canadian citizens and residents can usually expect federal-level communication in English and French. At provincial level, communication will usually align with the province's official language (English *or* French), to the exception of New Brunswick (English *and* French). However, crisis communication follows a different logic than everyday communication and general public sector communication: there is a different sense of urgency and access to information should be easy and

equitable. Said differently: current official federal and provincial policies do not suffice to ensure reach and equitable access to information at a time of crisis.

Reporting on the Cargill High River case indicated translation and interpretation should have been key strategies in navigating the pandemic in Canada, though neither was touted as a frontline strategy in the initial stages of the crisis. Further, it was increasingly clear that it was not only a matter of ensuring interlinguistic translation and interpretation, but cultural translation as well (Desjardins 2021b). In various reports, employees recounted having to maintain social/physical distance, yet carpooling and multigenerational living arrangements were commonplace. Such practices are not inherently problematic outside of a health crisis and they serve to create community and support systems within migrant or newcomer populations. However, Cargill failed to initially account for these factors in its communication to employees, assuming it was feasible to find alternative modes of transportation or housing and neglecting how culturally conflicting such recommendations might be. Employees from migrant and newcomer communities, specifically the Filipino community, felt 'unfairly blamed' (Dryden 2020) for the outbreaks. Even if employees could have mitigated risks associated with carpooling and multifamily households, the fact remains that meat processing itself is a close-proximity job.

Following these events, I decided to examine whether similar cases of non-translation were being reported in Manitoba. According to 2016 Census data (Statistics Canada 2017), the province had 288,985 Manitobans (22% of the population) who did not have English as their mother tongue and 144,800 Manitobans (11% of the population) whose most spoken language at home was neither of the official languages.[7] Manitoba was an outlier province in the early months of the pandemic: unlike other Canadian provinces, its case counts were low and some experts opined the province had been spared from the first wave that swept elsewhere across the country. However, in fall 2020, case counts increased significantly and reports began to surface across the province suggesting that language, outbreaks and public health communication were indeed intertwined. In October 2020, a Francophone daycare reported a COVID-19 case and parents received information of this in English (Radio-Canada 2020). For the daycare's director, whose fifth language is English, this posed a problem (Radio-Canada 2020). The daycare received information in French a day later, but the sentiment was that this was a little too late. This example shows the delay some non-English speakers had to face and accept in order to receive information in their languages. Further, it is worth noting in this case that the language in question was French, a

national official language. It is reasonable to hypothesize the delay was likely longer for other languages without official languages status and that other cases of non-translation went underreported.

Canada's federal and provincial governments increasingly leveraged online social media to publicize important public health information, including epidemiological statistics, vaccination information and testing site locations. Canada, of course, was not unique in doing so—social media have increasingly replaced other forms of traditional media (e.g. television, radio) in providing news to the masses internationally. That said, Canada's specific language laws and policies do intersect with federal and provincial communication strategies, yet consensus on how this applies to social media remains to be determined, particularly in crisis. What is known is that there is a federal obligation and some provincial obligations to communicate critical information in both official languages.

The coverage of the Cargill outbreak in Alberta and local Manitoba reporting both revealed translation oversights (and arguably a lack of translational justice). Thus, I decided to further investigate the Government of Manitoba's online COVID-19 translation strategy. More specifically, the case study below focuses not so much on a comparative analysis of content translation (i.e. comparing English and French versions of a tweet), but rather in how translation—in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic—is accessed from the perspective of the user's experience (UX).[8] I start by examining the Government of Manitoba's website, followed by its social media accounts to identify translation strategies and translated/multilingual content. I compare this analysis with 'conversations' on Twitter, relative to the handling of the pandemic and vaccine rollout. The goal is to map some of the social conversations about the pandemic, translation, multilingual communication, and Manitoba in order to see how public health discourse and translation in crisis situations intersect (cf. Federici and O'Brien 2019; O'Brien 2011, 2016). This case study intends to expand research on multilingualism, language barriers, linguistic and translational justice in Canada beyond the 'Bilingual Belt' (a corridor that spans roughly from Montreal to Toronto). It is worth noting that translation studies research produced in and about Manitoba remains limited.

Government of Manitoba websites and socials: Case study

Theoretical framework and methodology

This chapter constitutes a context-oriented case study that examines both qualitative and quantitative data related to translation on social media, language demographics, and the COVID-19 pandemic in Manitoba.

I collected data using different approaches and tools, in line with current practices in the Digital Humanities.[9] This includes web scraping, hashtag indexing/searching, network analysis and close-reading/discursive analysis of specific social media content and accounts, including searches for multilingual features and content, however these occurred (e.g. 'translate' buttons, hyperlinks to translated documents, bilingual account information). When conducting online research, particularly in the context of crisis, it is important to take into account some ethical considerations, such as objectifying traumatic experience or personal accounts without explicit consent, even if the content is public-facing. More specifically, three areas warrant attention: general ethics, privacy and security. While a detailed discussion of all three areas escapes the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting that this case study falls under observational work for which only public-facing data was examined; otherwise, sensitive information has been anonymized or omitted in compliance with guidance from the Canadian Tri-Council Policy statement.[10] Online communication can ephemeral and fast-paced, so it can also be difficult to track content in real-time and over time (Desjardins 2017): I acknowledge this posed a challenge. The findings I present here are current at the time of writing.

The study of translation in online contexts[11] also requires a re-assessment of 'traditional' categorizations of translational phenomena. Within the field, there is a tendency to approach different types of translation as wholly distinct from one another, for instance, some researchers view audiovisual translation as distinct from online social translation. However, the multimodal nature and layered 'materialities' (cf. Littau 2015) of digital online contexts 'necessarily multiplies the forms translation activity can take' (Desjardins 2021a: 131). If one is to examine translation in online contexts, one has to concede that the lines between human translation, neural MT, crowdsourced translation—to name only these—become increasingly blurred, especially depending on the viewpoint (Desjardins 2019). For instance, depending on a user's settings and preferences, social media content might only appear in one language, while other users may choose to use a localized version of the platform, while others, still, might select other language preferences, such as automated translations without prompts. As such, when I analyze translation in social media contexts, I opt for a holistic approach that takes into account all (or as many as methodologically feasible) types of translation concurrently taking place.

Unsurprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an impetus for projects that seek to make sense of the crisis and to propose ways to

mitigate detrimental effects and injustices in the future. One particular area that has warranted significant attention—as some of the chapters in this volume signal—has been the nexus of social media, misinformation and disinformation. This is understandable, given that social media play a crucial, and sometimes misunderstood or understudied role in the proliferation of dubious and misleading content.[12] For instance, Gruzd and Mai (2020) studied the propagation of COVID-19 conspiracy theories on social media. Their goal was to understand how a hashtag (#FilmYourHospital) can 'travel' through a network. The authors conclude that the more notoriety a misleading claim gains, the harder it is to 'root out' misinformation/disinformation. However, an emphasis on misinformation/disinformation obfuscates other informative observations from social media data. In the case of the Cargill High River outbreak in Alberta, misinformation did not inherently lead to more cases; rather, it was the lack of a comprehensive multilingual, cross-cultural communication strategy at a time of crisis and a lack of knowledge around the novel coronavirus itself. The Filipino Facebook groups initially created by Cargill employees, for example, were helpful in tipping reporters to a lack of multilingual communication at the plant and within larger communities. This is why the theoretical lens of translational justice/linguistic justice (De Schutter 2017; McDonough Dolmaya 2020; Desjardins 2021a) is appropriate for this study. Language and translation policy inform practice, behaviour and output, and provide a sense of what citizens can expect. The analysis of policy, strategies and output (content created by institutions), and interaction (user engagement/user experience) can shed light on best practices and omissions—that is, where translational justice is served and where it is not. Policies codify the status of languages and structure communication with and within the public. What the COVID-19 global pandemic has underscored is the need for concerted and consistent multilingual public health messaging to help guide citizens through different phases of crisis and different public health measures. When the logic of official languages is applied to public messaging at a time of crisis, to the erasure or outright omission of other languages, parts of the population who do not speak or who have less proficiency in the official languages stand to be considerably less informed than those who are proficient. This creates an asymmetry in actionable knowledge and can lead to or exacerbate other underlying inequities (social, economic). In the words of Rodríguez Vázquez and Torres-del-Rey (2019: 93): '[…] speaking a different language […] or simply coming from a different cultural background could make the person "informationally

vulnerable" or disabled, given that accessing needed information would represent a challenge in its own right unless translation and/or interpreting services were to be available'.

Analysis

I first examined the Government of Manitoba website followed by its official social media accounts, with particular attention given to COVID-19 content. Although Manitoba is not considered officially bilingual, section 23 of the *Manitoba Act*[13] stipulates English and French have official status in the legislative and judicial spheres of government in the province.[14] *The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act* was assented in 2016 and its purpose is to 'provide a framework for enhancing the vitality of Manitoba's Francophone community and supporting and assisting its development through the work of the secretariat and the advisory council and the use of French-language services plans'.[15] Manitoba's Francophone Affairs Secretariat's French-Language Services Policy[16] states that its purpose is 'to allow […] access [to] comparable government services in the language of the laws of Manitoba'. And, in relation to the provision of health services more specifically, the French-Language Services Policy also states that the same directives apply to public health bodies.[17] The policy does not explicitly outline social media communication guidelines, though one could surmise social content would fall under official Government of Manitoba communications and thus should be in both official languages. Similarly, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's (WRHA) 2019 Community Assessment Health Report (2019: 69) states that access to health services in one's language is an important social determinant of health and that miscommunication can be life-threatening.

Given that Francophones do represent a linguistic minority in Manitoba, the Act and these policies reflect a degree of linguistic and translational justice. Yet, Census data show that in addition to the previously cited statistics (see Introduction), 16,285 Manitobans had no knowledge of either official language, and 15,840 Manitobans had neither official language as a mother tongue. In fact, 16,865 Manitobans (1%) responded having French as the most spoken language at home, compared to 144,800 Manitobans (11%) who indicated non-official languages as the most spoken at home (Statistics Canada 2017). This is not to suggest Francophones should not have access to services in French provincially. However, it does suggest that exaltation of official

languages does not serve other linguistic demographics, which, in a crisis situation such as the pandemic, is ineffective and inequitable.

- Government of Manitoba website

Government websites are a way for people to access information about provincial services and activities. Websites also serve as a 'point of entry' to find related social media accounts. Iconographical elements or buttons will redirect users to the social accounts in question. This is why I chose to examine the Government of Manitoba website as a point of departure, even though some may argue websites are not universally categorized as 'social media'.[18] Upon entering the Government of Manitoba site,[19] users have the option to view the main page in English or in French, the only two language versions available. This is consistent with the language policies outlined above, but appears incongruous when compared to the linguistic and cultural demographic make-up of the province. Interestingly, the Government of Manitoba website does not use iconographic elements to redirect users to social platforms. Instead, on both the English and the French sites, users must scroll to the very bottom of the page where they will find different social platforms listed. These are: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Flickr. Before turning to social media, a few additional points related to the website are warranted. Given the Census data, a strategic and equitable translation strategy would at least help users who speak other languages (Indigenous languages or languages of migration in particular) find translated content more easily or quickly on the site. While it is true that the site tabs indicate only English and French, content in other languages does exist elsewhere on the site. In fact, three (not necessarily intuitive) mouse-clicks starting from the English homepage will redirect a user to a section called 'Resources and Links', where two sub-sections include explicit reference to COVID-19 materials (infographics, fact sheets, videos) in other languages. First, the *Social (Physical) Distancing Factsheet* can be found translated into eight languages: French, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, Korean, Low German, Punjabi, Arabic, and Tagalog. Second, further below, another sub-section titled 'Other Languages' redirects to a collection of silent (no audio) *Focus on the Fundamentals* YouTube videos on the Government of Manitoba's YouTube account. These videos are available in the following languages: Amharic/Ethiopian, Arabic, Cree, English, French, German, Hindi, Mandarin, Punjabi, Spanish, Tagalog, Ojibwe and Dene.

The availability of multilingual content suggests some consideration was given to various linguistic communities, but there are some issues worth noting. The first is that these videos focus only on one aspect of the pandemic, the 'fundamentals' (e.g. handwashing, social distancing), without more specific aspects of this relative to different cultural groups. Essentially, the videos appear to be nothing more than 12-second translated videos for which no cultural adaptation is present, meaning that there are no markers related to cultural specificity or any adaptation to account for specific cultural differences.[20] Videos such as these can be useful, but more nuanced content, adapted to address specific cultural community needs and concerns should be available. The second problem is that accessing this content is not intuitive or straightforward (and this from the perspective of a researcher who is fluent in both official languages and who has studied the website). For instance, on the English homepage, it would be more intuitive to have a menu or explicit button signalling where to click for a direct route to content in another language. Curiously, the French version of the site requires a different set of clicks to find this same multilingual content—as if whoever designed the site or uploaded content felt users who spoke other languages would likely default to the English website to click through rather than the French. This ignores the fact that some Manitobans may very well have language combinations, such as Arabic and French but no English proficiency. A citizen can use the same three clicks from the English homepage to 'land' on the COVID-19 'Resources and Links' page and then select 'Français' to access the French version of the page. However, in doing this, the multilingual content listed above disappears: the French page does not have the seven other translated *Social (Physical) Distancing Factsheets*, nor does it have the *Focus on the Fundamentals* video library. This is one example of the discrepancies between the English and the French versions of the site, but the larger issue has to do with the seemingly inconsistent distribution of multilingual content, particularly if we consider UX.

Ultimately, it is apparent from this example that accessibility and universal design principles are inconsistent across the site as communicational and interactional content cannot be intuitively accessed unless one is prepared to go through multiple clicks. The structure of the site also presumes proficiency in either official language, to the detriment of the various linguistic communities that only speak other languages.

- Government of Manitoba on social media: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube

Social media have increasingly become a way for users to engage with government content more easily than previous traditional channels and government institutions at all levels in North America are increasing uptake, albeit in different ways (cf. Zavattaro and Bryer 2016; Desjardins 2017). Returning to the social media accounts listed on the Government of Manitoba's homepage, one notes the Government of Manitoba is present on four social platforms, three of which will be analyzed here:[21] Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Whether a user accesses the English or the French homepage of the website, all four social accounts are listed in the same fashion, at the bottom of the page. Unlike the two separate versions of the website, the Government of Manitoba's social media strategy employs a different approach. All three social media accounts post both English and French content, as opposed to separate accounts for English content and French content (i.e. 'sister' accounts). I argue this is a more accessible strategy in terms of aggregating content for English and French users at a time of crisis compared to some of the inconsistent approaches taken on the website, but it is not without issues either, as will be discussed shortly. As noted elsewhere, Indigenous languages and languages of migration do not feature prominently or regularly on Government of Manitoba socials. Some may suggest that these specific language and cultural communities may turn to social accounts created by and for their communities[22] rather than the main Government of Manitoba social accounts. This does warrant further investigation, but falls beyond the scope of this analysis. Regardless, if population reach and public trust are important to government, approaches that favour inclusion and representation are likely to be more effective.

The Government of Manitoba's Facebook page is followed by 58,709 users (as of 1 July 2021). The page's 'About' section is only available in English even if a user's Facebook language preferences are set to prompt automatic content translation. This was tested by altering language parameters and translation settings in the way that a user who speaks Spanish or Tagalog might have done so (again, with an eye to analyzing content from the perspective of UX). The Government of Manitoba's Facebook page regularly uploads posts, but they are not systematically bilingual, whether the content relates to COVID-19 or not. In terms of COVID-19 content, media bulletins, such as the *COVID-19 Bulletin* and the *COVID-19 Vaccine Bulletin* are systematically posted in separate, language-specific posts (English and French), with links redirecting users

to the Government of Manitoba news release page in either English or French, depending on which language version of the link users click. Neither the *COVID-19 Bulletin* nor the *COVID-19 Vaccine Bulletin* is translated or available in other languages via the Government of Manitoba Facebook page or website.

The Government of Manitoba website Twitter link directs users to the @MBGov account, but it is worth noting other sector-specific Twitter accounts exist (e.g. @MBGovNews, @MBGovRoads, @MBGovParks). One might expect to find a public health account with a similar handle, but instead, Shared Health Manitoba is found under the handle @SharedHealthMB. Users trying to find the Shared Health Manitoba socials from the Government of Manitoba COVID-19 website are unlikely to find this information easily. It should be noted that the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer and the Medical Lead for the Government of Manitoba COVID-19 taskforce tweet under individual accounts separate from the MBGov accounts. This points to a disjointed social media strategy in the handling of COVID-19: users should be able to find information about provincial health and public health websites and accounts on the Government of Manitoba COVID-19 webpage[23] easily. Citizens shouldn't have to navigate across numerous social accounts to find clear, plain language messaging (i.e. Shared Health, the CPPHO, and the taskforce Lead, and the MBGov accounts). Before returning to the Government of Manitoba Twitter accounts, a brief analysis of the Shared Health Manitoba website shows that the site is available in English and French (a user can select either English or Français by clicking a button); no other language options appear to be available. Further, Shared Health tweets and re-tweets predominantly in English and its Twitter profile is exclusively in English. The same applies to the CPPHO and Medical Lead of the Vaccine Taskforce Twitter accounts. Returning to the Government of Manitoba's Twitter account, specifically the @MBGov account: tweets and re-tweets are predominantly in English, though French-language content does make a somewhat regular appearance (this seems to coincide with news releases as described above or re-tweets of French-language content from other accounts).

The Government of Manitoba's YouTube channel has 12,200 subscribers. The account has a designated *COVID-19* playlist (English), which features a total of 346 videos and indicates 506,701 total views (as of 2 July 2021).[24] The channel also has a *Bulletin sur la COVID-19* playlist (French), which features a total of 203 videos and indicates 1,372 total views (as of 2 July 2021). It is interesting to note the discrepancy between the English playlist total video count and that of the French playlist: bilingual and Francophone users might be prompted to

ask 'what's missing' or 'why are there fewer videos in French', resulting in a feeling of mistrust or confusion. Engagement is also significantly lower for the French-language playlist. Although this may make sense given that Census 2016 data show there are fewer French speakers than English speakers in Manitoba, it may also point to the fact that this playlist was not adequately advertised among relevant French-speaking communities or demographics. From the perspective of UX, the *Bulletin sur la COVID-19* playlist does not feature on the YouTube 'Home' page of Government of Manitoba when the default settings are in English—which for many users is likely the case. The channel also features a *RestartMB* playlist, which is part of the larger *RestartMB* campaign launched in August of 2020.[25] Thus, while this playlist is not labelled explicitly with 'COVID-19' or 'pandemic', it nonetheless contains content that relates to the health crisis. No French equivalent of the *RestartMB* playlist is featured on the channel, though the campaign was and is bilingual (i.e. *RelanceMB* in French). The *RestartMB* playlist features a total of 32 videos and 1,691 views (as of 2 July 2021). The last update to this playlist was on 26 October 2020, which marked a pivotal moment in Manitoba's pandemic trajectory, the beginning of the second wave, and a time at which the *RestartMB* campaign came under critical scrutiny (Carrière 2020). The silent *Focus on the Fundamentals* multilingual videos on the Government of Manitoba website are not part of the *COVID-19* playlist and are marked as 'unlisted'. This means that if a user wanted to find the multilingual *Focus on the Fundamentals* videos discussed previously, they would not be able to by going to YouTube directly; users must click through the English Government of Manitoba website to access this content. Finally, there appears to be no other multilingual content on the channel pertaining to COVID-19, to the exception of sign language interpretation embedded in the news pressers included in the *COVID-19* playlist.

- Beyond the Government of Manitoba: Other Manitoban social accounts and COVID-19 conversations.

With a followship of approximately 39,900 followers, CBC reporter Bartley Kives was one of the prominent journalists (and Twitter accounts) Manitobans turned to for pandemic coverage. Kives tweets predominantly in English, but reported on language barriers and health inequities in his coverage and live tweeting of the Government of Manitoba pandemic press conferences. Scope limits a full analysis of Kives's pandemic tweeting. However, a tweet published on 2 June 2021 (see Figure 5.1) exemplifies the effects lack of translation, interpretation and access to multilingual public health information can have.

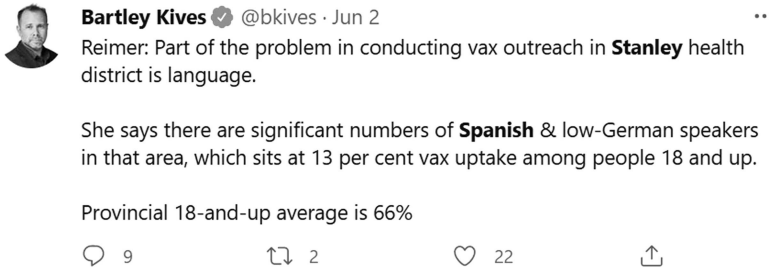

Figure 5.1 Tweet from CBC reporter Bartley Kives (@bkives) on language barriers and vaccine uptake.

'Reimer' refers to Dr. Joss Reimer, the medical lead and official spokesperson of the Government of Manitoba COVID-19 vaccine taskforce and Medical Officer for Manitoba Health and Seniors Care. As Manitoba entered a catastrophic third wave in May 2021, public health officials and other government officials urged Manitobans to get vaccinated (May 2021). As data began to indicate vaccine uptake trends, it appeared some regions lagged behind others. Though anti-vaccination sentiments and other forms of vaccine hesitancy are likely to be a factor, it was also clear that part of the problem was a number of language barriers, as evidenced by Dr. Reimer's statement during the June 2 press conference.[26] The Census data indicate Spanish was the language most spoken at home for 5,695 Manitobans. The same data show German was the most spoken language at home for 24,795 Manitobans (with an additional 465 for Germanic not included elsewhere). Combined, these figures represent roughly 2% of the province's population. Though 2% is a low percentage value, it can represent an important ratio relative to vaccine uptake, particularly during a third wave that saw Manitoba patients flown out of province for critical care. If language barriers were significant enough to make headlines, one can then wonder why translation and interpretation were not forefront issues in the early stages of pandemic preparedness in the province.

As part of the vaccination campaign, Manitoba vaccination supersites offered vaccinated individuals 'I'm COVID-19 Vaccinated' ('Je suis vacciné[e] contre la COVID-19') stickers. These were available in English and French, although their distribution seemed somewhat arbitrary based on anecdotal accounts on social media and elsewhere. Nonetheless, the stickers became a symbol of pride and hope and, for some, notably those from the Franco-Manitoban community, the stickers were also an

opportunity to show linguistic allegiance, belonging and identity. When people feel represented and included, they are likely to participate in activities and behaviours that promote the collective good, and research on the topic abounds across disciplines. Andrew Unger, a Manitoban teacher, proposed that the Government of Manitoba COVID-19 vaccine taskforce add Low German (Plattdeutsch) to the vaccine sticker languages (Longhurst 2021) and the Government of Manitoba obliged, citing the move was likely to increase vaccine confidence and enthusiasm among a low-uptake demographic. Indeed, this seems to be the case, as Twitter users have shared photos of the translated sticker enthusiastically with noticeable engagement. Figure 5.2 shows an anonymized example of a tweet that garnered 283 likes, 28 quote tweets and 27 re-tweets.

Exciting day! Vaccine stickers in Low German... my grandparents first language. #ProtectMB #vaccine #manitoba #lowgerman

9:50 AM · Jun 23, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

27 Retweets **28** Quote Tweets **283** Likes

Figure 5.2 Anonymized Tweet with picture of Manitoba's vaccine sticker in Low German.

Among the comments indexed in the quote tweets were phrases such as 'this is dope', 'this is cool', 'I applaud this' and 'I want one! My first language'. Though it is too early to tell whether the Plattdeutsch stickers will have a marked effect on vaccine uptake in southern Manitoba, social media engagement suggests growing enthusiasm for multilingual vaccination stickers and, by extension, vaccine uptake.

Conclusion

This chapter examines language policy and linguistic demographics in Manitoba relative to some of the translation strategies employed by the Government of Manitoba during the COVID-19 pandemic across its website and social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube). This initial analysis is a step in better understanding how and when the provincial government used translation and multilingual communication to reach Manitobans during a significant health crisis that is still ongoing. It is evident that COVID-19 content in the two Canadian official languages (English and French) was more frequently posted, despite Census data showing the province's diverse linguistic make-up. Canadian (federal and provincial) language policy exalts the official languages, but fails in some respects to reflect the linguistic needs of a diverse population at a time of crisis, particular in online contexts where citizens are likely to seek public health information rapidly. From the perspective of a user's experience, the Government of Manitoba's haphazard translation strategy on its website and social platforms makes it all the more difficult to know what to expect and where to find multilingual and translated content. Future research could include interviewing participants to corroborate initial findings presented in this chapter.

The assumption that citizens can pivot to English or French because they have knowledge of an official language does not mean that this proficiency suffices when making health decisions. The Government of Manitoba could have been a national leader in adopting a consistent and coherent translation/multilingual strategy while simultaneously leveraging social platforms more effectively. Social media data (Statista 2021) show that Facebook continues to be the most dominant platform worldwide, so it makes sense for the Government of Manitoba to have a presence there. However, the Government of Manitoba is oddly absent on Instagram: it does have an account, with 2,233 followers, but no posts, and the Government website does not feature the Instagram link. This seems like a missed opportunity, given that Instagram allows for a number of interesting translation strategies (such as automated translation for captions) and the fact that Statista ranks it fifth among the most popular platforms.

Translation cannot be an afterthought in a pandemic; the effects of non-translation contributed to a serious outbreak in Alberta in the initial phase of the pandemic in Canada. In Manitoba, language barriers resulted in delayed public health information, asymmetrical knowledge dissemination, as well as slower vaccine uptake. Moreover, adopting a disjointed online translation strategy does nothing to facilitate access to critical health information. Finally, this case study shows that even when a country and a province have seemingly robust official languages policy, this does not guarantee *equitable* and *effective* multilingual communication in a crisis. Sometimes, Hello/Bonjour simply doesn't cut it.

Notes

1 Federici and O'Brien (2019) nuance the difference between 'disaster' and 'crisis'. Here, I follow their use and definition of 'crisis' and 'crisis situation' to describe the COVID-19 pandemic.
2 https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-18.7/page-1.html
3 I deliberately distinguish between 'Canadians' and 'Indigenous Peoples' to address the fact that some Indigenous groups in Canada do not wish to be described or qualified as 'Canadian' or belonging to Canada (i.e., 'our' or 'Canada's Indigenous Peoples').
4 https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/o-3.01/fulltext.html
5 Bill C-32 was introduced on 15 June 2021 and pertains to the modernization of the *Act*.https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/canadians-official-languages-act/introduction-bill.html
6 I borrow the term 'translational justice' from De Schutter (2017).
7 In the Winnipeg Health Region Community Health Assessment Report (Winnipeg Regional Health Authority 2019: 68), attention is given to Census data that reflects *knowledge of official languages* rather than data from the *language most spoken at home*. The report explains why knowledge of official languages was chosen instead of mother tongue (which the report describes as 'maternal language'), but this seems to conflate knowledge of an official language with actual proficiency or preference. I argue that *language most spoken at home* is a more helpful and significant data point, because it suggests language preference *and* proficiency. Health communication can be delicate and fraught when a patient or caregiver is unable to fully express themselves or fully understand what is being communicated to them. Again, this is why the Cargill High River case in the introduction is so evocative: many migrant workers *have knowledge of an official language*, but that does not necessarily mean that this knowledge suffices in crisis, nor does it excuse businesses and institutions making English or the official languages the default.
8 'User experience' can refer to a person's subjective experience of a system, product, or service. It can also refer to the principles that will guide the design and creation of a system, product, or service. For more see https://www.nngroup.com/articles/definition-user-experience/.
9 For a more detailed definition of the Digital Humanities, see Berry and Fagerjord (2017) as well as Gold (2011) and Gold and Klein (2016).

10 Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2018) available at https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/documents/tcps2–2018-en-interactive-final.pdf
11 For a more detailed explanation of the differences between 'online' and 'digital' and why I use a combined term here, see Desjardins (2020).
12 Some researchers use the terms interchangeably, while others make a distinction. Here, I view these terms as distinct, with misinformation meaning inaccurate content that circulates regardless of an organic or explicit motive to deceive, while disinformation is a type of misleading information with intent to deceive or mislead. For more on contemporary issues related to social media and disinformation, see Starbird (2019).
13 The long title was repealed and 'Manitoba Act, 1870' substituted by the *Constitution Act, 1982.*
14 https://www.solon.org/Constitutions/Canada/English/ma_1870.html
15 https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/f157e.php?query=search
16 https://www.gov.mb.ca/fls-slf/pdf/fls_policy_en20170908.pdf
17 http://www.gov.mb.ca/fls-slf/pdf/fls_policy_en20170908.pdf
18 The definition of social media varies among experts and across disciplines (Desjardins 2017).
19 https://manitoba.ca/index.html
20 For more on the concept of 'adaptation' and 'cultural translation', see Milton (2010), Marinetti (2011) and Conway (2012).
21 I intentionally omitted an analysis of the Flickr content because (1) the content does not pertain to the pandemic; (2) the last update to the content was in 2017; and (3) there is no evidence of interlinguistic translation that would be relevant here.
22 An example of a grassroots/community-based initiative would be the Protect Our People MB campaign, which has Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts. The campaign launched in May 2021 and is led by the Southern Chiefs' Organization Inc. (SCO), Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc. (MKO), Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC), Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoayawin, Inc. (KIM), the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba (FNHSSM) and the Manitoba government. At the time of writing, the Instagram account (@protectourpplmb) had 653 followers; its Twitter account 93 followers; and its Facebook page 174 likes.
23 Similar observations also apply for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's website (https://wrha.mb.ca/) and Twitter account (@WinnipegRHA). The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority represents a total population of approximately 750,000 Manitobans.
24 Some of the YouTube videos on the COVID-19 playlist do include sign language interpretation, but scope limits analysis of this here.
25 https://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?item=49057
26 The video footage from the press conference is available in the COVID-19 playlist on the Manitoba government YouTube channel; Dr. Reimer's comments on language barriers occur at the 48:56 mark: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tN6y_36MfN8&list=PLvqXTqcYDg_fvIlP68aGxONh6DXfzsd0j&index=26

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