



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 007 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, March 5, 2009

—
Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Official Languages

Thursday, March 5, 2009

• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this seventh meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I would like to thank you for being punctual and I apologize for being late. I am going to tell you that I was late because of family reasons, that is the catchall excuse for politicians, given that it is the school break week.

This morning, this is our third and final meeting regarding the overview of the visually impaired in a minority situation, unless I hear otherwise from committee members.

In order to continue and complete our work, this morning we will be hearing from two witnesses that I would like to thank for coming. We have with us Ms. Jen Goulden, who is a member of the board of the Canadian Braille Authority.

Welcome to our committee, Mrs. Golden.

We also have appearing Mr. Stephen Loyd, Director General, Office for Disability Issues, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development.

Thank you for coming this morning, Mr. Loyd.

I will explain how we normally proceed in the committee. As you have been told, you will first of all make an opening statement, and then we will proceed with an exchange with our parliamentarians during various rounds of questioning.

Without further delay, we will begin our meeting. Ms. Golden, would you begin please, we are all ears.

[English]

You can proceed either in French or in English. We have translation. Be as comfortable as you wish.

Mrs. Jen Goulden (Member of the Board of Directors, Canadian Braille Authority): *Je vais parler en anglais*, just to save a bit of time.

My name is Jen Goulden, as you heard. I have a master's degree in linguistics, and I work for Canada Revenue Agency. I'm a certified Braille transcriber, and a proofreader as well. I work in English and French. I'm here today, also as you've heard, representing the Canadian Braille Authority. I'm also here partly because I live in Ottawa. We have members from all across the country, but I live here, so I'm here today.

What I want to say is very short. I don't have much to say except that the standardization of Braille in French...well, in English, or in any language for that matter, only serves to improve efficiency of transcription. It allows transcription to happen more quickly, more effectively. It's more cost-effective because the software can do more. Less human involvement is necessary, which makes things go faster and again is less expensive.

The benefits of standardization are many. It also means that students can access more information. For example, in the standardization of English Braille, I can get something from England that we may not have produced here.

A lot of good things are being done in Quebec. There's some funding from the provincial government. This is a really good thing. The unfortunate thing is that because provinces have jurisdiction to set their own standards on this, particularly in education, students outside of Quebec, be they francophones, or anglophones studying French, don't have the same kind of access. They don't necessarily have access to

[Translation]

an abridged braille in French.

[English]

So whether they're students attending a French-language school, or whether they're English students in immersion, or simply anglophone students studying French as a second language, they aren't necessarily going to have access to this level of Braille. The problem with that is that those of us who aren't able to access regular print are already limited in the material that we can access. So as *braille abrégé* is the standard, both in English and French, it's what you'll get unless you specify when you order something. Not as much is available in uncontracted Braille, so basically what's happening is these students are being limited even further because they aren't able to read this level of contracted Braille.

I can attest to this as an anglophone student who grew up in Ontario. I took French all the way through school, and I had to teach myself *braille abrégé* as an adult. I bought a book and I taught myself. I was able to do that, but it would have been better, and I may have had more opportunities, more access to information, if I had learned contracted Braille while I actually was a student.

So the summary of what I'm saying is just that there needs to be—you would know better how this works than I would—a federal way of ensuring that students across the country have access to the same things because there are good things happening; it's just that not all students have access to them.

That's essentially what I wanted to say. There are members of the Canadian Braille Authority board, Pierre Ferland is one, and he's actually from Quebec.... There are people who could give you probably a whole lot more detail, and probably even more statistics. I know this person in particular has worked on the standardization process, so definitely we are open to any questions you would want to ask. You can feel free to contact us at any time.

Thank you.

Merci. C'est tout.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Goulden, for this opening statement.

At this moment, before I turn to our second witness, I would like to inform you that with the help of our team we can provide you with a hearing device if you want to have simultaneous translation, because there might be some questions asked in French. So if you are willing to have some support or help, just let me know and we'll make sure you get the hearing device.

• (0910)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Jen Goulden: That should work.

The Chair: All right.

We will continue with Mr. Stephen Loyd.

Mr. Stephen Loyd (Director General, Office for Disability Issues, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would really like to thank you for your invitation to speak to you on behalf of the Office for Disability Issues.

The mission of HRSD is to build a very strong Canada, to help Canadians make good choices in order to have a productive and rewarding life, and also to enhance their quality of life.

[*English*]

In support of this vision,

[*Translation*]

The Office for Disability Issues, the ODI,

[*English*]

provides a focal point for disability issues in the Government of Canada. BCPH is focused on developing innovative and effective policies and programs that will provide the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities, and BCPH is engaged in doing this work with a broad range of stakeholders, the CNIB being one, at all levels of government. We work with provinces and territories, the disability community, and civil society.

[*Translation*]

The mandate of the ODI is to develop and manage disability-related policies and programs; to support the development and sharing of knowledge on disability issues; to raise awareness and promote disability as an important component of policies and programs across government; to ensure ongoing stakeholder-client and provincial-territorial engagement on disability issues; and to

serve as a model of accessibility for the federal government and provide leadership by example.

We have two programs to assist us in doing our work in the area of grants and contributions. The first is the Social Development Partnership Program. This program is aimed at the disabled and it provides funding to eligible non-profit organizations that are working to meet the social development needs of people with disabilities.

The second program is the Enabling Accessibility Fund. It provides funding to improve accessibility in communities by contributing to the capital costs of construction and renovations related to physical accessibility for people with disabilities.

[*English*]

Other activities that are currently being undertaken relate to the world of awareness—awareness building, promoting awareness of disability issues, and reducing stigma. In this work we are particularly focused at this point within our own department. We have a champion for accessibility. We have a task team on accessibility that's ensuring that HRSDC becomes a workplace of choice for people with disabilities and also a model for other federal governments. There is some very exciting work going on in the department with that.

As well, we oversee the production of publications and communications tools. A new publication that will soon be coming out relates to how to make an accessible meeting, basically. It's to assist people who are running meetings, to help them understand and think through and plan for making those meetings accessible. The other publication we produce is the federal report on disability programming, which is done on an annual basis.

One of the other areas we're currently working on—it's been newly launched—relates to the government's new registered disability savings plan for people with disabilities. Our department is responsible for the grant and bond aspects of that new program. Working with our colleagues in the learning branch of HRSDC, the bureau does the policy work and the program design work. The program is actually run through the learning branch. It's a very important new complement to the programming available for people with disabilities across the country.

The final thing we do is coordinate within our department the work we're doing in support of the 2010 Olympics and the Paralympics. We work with a variety of people within the department to do that.

In summation, I'd just like to make a few points of clarification. My understanding is that at the present time, the Government of Canada does not regulate the usage of Braille within Canada. I want to be clear that the Office for Disability Issues does not have the mandate to create or enforce accessibility standards. We work with others to that effect, but we are not mandated to do that.

My understanding is that the development of national Braille standards has traditionally been in the purview of the Canadian Braille Authority, Jen's organization, and the CNIB, under the umbrella of the Braille Authority of North America, BANA.

I can tell you that within HRSDC, and within other government departments like PWGSC, we conform to the standards of BANA and the Canadian Braille Authority at the present time. I can't speak for other departments, and I can't speak for the provinces and the territories in that regard.

Finally, I can say that our overall delivery arm is Service Canada, as you know. Service Canada is providing services to people with disabilities across its four service channels. It has in-person service at their Service Canada offices, through 1-800 O Canada, via the web, and via mail. Again, Service Canada, in its documents, also adheres to the standards of the BANA and the CBA.

That's it for me.

● (0915)

The Chair: Thank you for sharing this information with us.

We will proceed with our first round, starting with Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would to thank our two witnesses for coming here in order to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

However, there is an issue I need to raise. Mr. Loyd, I do not know exactly which members of Parliament wanted to invite you here, although I do have an idea. Currently we are studying the standardization of braille in French. I would like you to explain to us the link between this study and you, given that the only thing that you have explained is the use of the 1 800 O-Canada number. I am trying to understand.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Loyd: I'm afraid the department does not have the mandate to work on the standardization of French. Therefore, coming to you today was to give you a sense of what we are doing and to let you know that is not part of the mandate of our organization, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: That's exactly what I gathered from your presentation, but I feared not fully understanding that point. I simply wanted to make sure that you were seeking to promote the government's plan, and not actually pinpoint solutions relative to our study on standardizing French-language Braille. In any case, let us move on.

Mrs. Goulden, I don't know if there's a difference between standardizing French-language Braille and English-language Braille, but you seem to be saying that this would be a good thing. However, this week, witnesses gave us a totally different view. Can you provide us your opinion? Why would standardization be advantageous?

If we focus solely on French-language Braille, all of the francophonie, with a few exceptions, are not inclined towards standardization, gathering from what we've understood. This would

complicate things and require additional training for people who are already experienced in other forms of Braille.

Mrs. Jen Goulden: You would like to learn of the advantages of standardizing French-language Braille, despite the fact that people do not think that this is a good idea. Is that your question?

● (0920)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Exactly.

Last Tuesday, a woman from the Department of Education in New Brunswick, as well as a representative from Quebec, explained to us why standardization would complicate the lives of French-language Braille users.

You can answer my question in English, if you wish.

Mrs. Jen Goulden: Very well, I will answer in English.

[English]

One problem with standardization is that when the standardization occurs, there are changes, of course. For me, for example, I've been reading Braille for many years, and now English Braille is being standardized, so there will be changes. When you standardize, obviously, there are compromises and things will change, so I have to learn some changes.

On a personal level, I don't really like change and part of me thinks I don't want these rules to change. I've known these rules all my life. I don't want to learn new ones. But from not such a personal perspective, as a person who wants to make Braille more accessible and more efficient, I guess I view it that initially there are some complications—because initially there are going to be some changes Braille users will have to learn—but the long-term benefits outweigh that.

I'm more familiar with the changes in English. I'm still in the process of learning which changes are happening in French Braille, but a lot of the changes are designed so that it's actually easier to learn, easier to understand. One of the processes the standardization committees looks at, what they work on, is things that people learning Braille sometimes find difficult, and they try to simplify them. So I agree with what this person was saying in the sense that initially it can be complicated, because there's sort of a change-over that has to take place. For example, all the information at the CNIB library, all the Braille books are in Braille the way it is now, in the standardized version of English. At what point do they start producing them? How do they phase it in?

So I agree with him in the sense that there are challenges to it, but I guess I think that anything that's going to make Braille more accessible, more cost-effective, because for us it's very expensive.... If I want to buy a book that might cost you \$10 at Chapters, it could cost me \$50 to \$60, and I love to read and I don't have an endless supply of money with which to buy books. So anything that's going to make it more efficient I think is a good idea in spite of.... I guess I believe the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

And while we're in the standardization process, particularly the members of our board who are from Quebec, we're not in a position to enforce. We don't have that kind of power, so we can come up with a standard and we can say this is the standard that will be used in Braille in Canada. And we're connected with the CNIB; they're involved in the process as well. So if they agree to it, then all the things the CNIB produces will be in the new standardized format of Braille, of course, but we can't go—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you. You'll have plenty of opportunities to elaborate more on your thoughts. I just want to make sure every member has an opportunity to ask a question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. D'Amours, you will recall that members of the committee were interested understanding the link between standardization of Braille and federal organizations. With the help of the Library of Parliament, I have been able to identify the Office for Disability Issues as the federal representative that has the closest link to the topic we are examining right now.

• (0925)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, that is exactly why, from the very beginning, I said that the Committee on Human Resources should be given this file.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Good morning, Ms. Goulden and Mr. Loyd.

Mrs. Goulden, please continue answering Mr. D'Amours' question. You may answer in either French or English.

Mrs. Jen Goulden: All right. Thank you.

[*English*]

I want to say that while we are involved in the standardization process, we don't have the power to make anybody follow it. Again, the CNIB is obviously one of the major Braille producers in the country, so if they agree to it, then much of the Braille produced will be in the new standardized format.

I think one of the issues is that nobody really has the power to enforce anything. Maybe someone does and I'm not aware of it.

We can come up with a standard, but we can't make anyone use it if they don't choose to.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Okay.

Mrs. Goulden, my question is for you because you are the braille expert in this room. During our last two previous meetings, some witnesses told us that the Nemeth Code is mainly used in Quebec, Acadie, and in all other French-speaking communities across the great Canadian land. We were also informed that the code standardized and adopted in France in 2008 applied solely to that country, and importing the standardized code to America would create problems.

A person who is familiar with the Nemeth Code could more or less manage with the standardized code when dealing with literary

texts, such as novels. However, as regards scientific material, the language changes completely, whether it be for scientific symbols or numbers that are used in mathematical or chemical equations. The Antoine Code is proposing something entirely new, but there isn't a crying need to adopt it, as Mr. Petit pointed out. It's almost as though if we were to change our 26-letter Latin alphabet to a completely different system.

We are talking about the code used by French-speaking visually impaired people. What do you think about standardizing Braille within the francophonie?

[*English*]

Mrs. Jen Goulden: Again, part of the standardization idea is to make it so there aren't several different codes for someone to learn.

[*Translation*]

In English, it is the same thing; there are three or four codes. We have Nemeth. In French, there is the Antoine Code.

[*English*]

The idea was to make it so that people don't have to learn

[*Translation*]

the literary, mathematical, and scientific components.

[*English*]

It's to simplify it.

I wouldn't want to, because I am....

[*Translation*]

I study French, but I am not a francophone,

[*English*]

even though I speak it.

I wouldn't want to disagree. I respect what they have to say because it's their mother tongue. It's their first language, and in that sense how they feel about it is more relevant than what I think, as a *français langue seconde*, someone who uses it as a second language.

I can tell you what the advantages are, and I can tell you it's important for francophones, wherever they are, to have equal access. But again, I wouldn't want to overrule what someone says who has French as their mother tongue.

• (0930)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Nadeau.

We will now move to Mr. Gravelle.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Mr. Loyd and Ms. Goulden.

[*English*]

Mrs. Goulden, I just want to clarify something. Did I hear you correctly when you said Braille was different among the provinces?

Mrs. Jen Goulden: It's not so much that it's different, but provinces have their own jurisdiction. Probably the Braille isn't necessarily going to be different. For example, maybe if I had gone to school in New Brunswick as a child I may have had access to abbreviated French Braille, whereas I didn't in Ontario. So I think it's the level of access that might vary as opposed to the actual Braille. Or they might choose to use some of the abbreviations and not all of them, depending on where the material is acquired.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Do you think it should be the role of the federal government to standardize Braille across the provinces?

Mrs. Jen Goulden: Honestly, I'm not sure whose role it should be. It's just that it seems at this point that nobody has the authority to do that. I'm not trying to come here and say the government should be doing this and the government should be doing that, because I'm not really sure whose place it would be. It's just that right now it doesn't seem to be anyone's place.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gravelle.

We will now move to the government side to Ms. Shelly Glover.

[*English*]

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Welcome. I can't tell you how much we appreciate your view on this. We as a committee had a moment at the last session where a light bulb went off, because our first witnesses on this subject tended to be much like you, Ms. Goulden. They appreciated the standardization and looked to it as one simple way of providing extra access, etc. In the next session we had two francophone witnesses who were involved in the teaching of French Braille, who saw significant problems trying to teach it, trying to maintain it, in our school systems in particular.

I just have a few questions, Ms. Goulden, just to understand how much involvement you've had in the French Braille. Do you read Braille in French?

Mrs. Jen Goulden: Yes.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Okay, and when you read French Braille, are you using Antoine numbering or are you using Nemeth numbering?

Mrs. Jen Goulden: Basically, I'm not really using the math system. I'm reading a text document, and yes, they have numbers in it, but the way Braille works is that when you're using literary Braille, you use numbers in a certain way. If I was reading a math textbook, then I would use a math code, which is part of, again, why they want to standardize it. They want to say, "Okay, no matter what you're reading, you're going to do numbers this way", as opposed to doing it...

Mrs. Shelly Glover: What numbering system do you read, Ms. Goulden, just so I can figure it out?

Mrs. Jen Goulden: I know the Nemeth system because that's what I learned in school, and I also know the way numbers are used in literary Braille. You just get a text document or any kind of document that just happens to have some numbers in it. I wouldn't say that I'm overly familiar with Antoine on its own, enough to read a math textbook in French or a science textbook. I haven't had the opportunity to do that.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I think the light bulb moment for all of us was the fact that a whole new mathematics system would have to be used, and we have students in various stages of development, so that would affect them.

Have you tried to read the standardized French that was developed in France, compared to the Quebec French Braille?

• (0935)

Mrs. Jen Goulden: Right now I'm in the process of figuring it out. I'm researching. At work we're still using Braille the way it has been used, so I'm in the process of researching what the differences are. Even with the new standardized English code, it isn't that it's incomprehensible to somebody. It's not a completely new system, it just has modifications. Some of the rules are modified. For example, in French, before, you couldn't abbreviate proper names, and in the new standardized Braille, I believe, you're going to be allowed to do that. So for the person reading it, it's more that they're going to look at it and think, did they make a mistake? They're not going to think, "I don't understand this."

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Right, but you're kind of guessing because it sounds like you haven't had too much opportunity to compare the Quebec French Braille to the new French Braille, and that's okay.

But what I think was brought to light for us, and I just want to share it because it really was a moment of discovery for all of us, was... In New Brunswick, we have a bilingual province, so our students of course are learning the French and the English language, which is already a large feat, plus they have to learn the Braille of both English and French, and they are people who are already facing life challenges. Now to have them learn a new... It just seemed to the people who are involved in the instruction and the training that it could be very overwhelming for many of those students.

And then we have to change all of the books from province to province. I come from a province where it's a French minority, so again, when you don't have a large population, you don't have necessarily the funding to do all of this. So these were the challenges that could be insurmountable and could cause some great emotional risk to our students should we go this way—and particularly those students interested in math and science, where they have to learn a whole new language because Antoine is very different from Nemeth and Nemeth seems to be, as far as we've learned here, the system of choice amongst French and English Braille users because it is a standardized, mathematical, scientific Braille that both English and French can use with ease.

I just wanted to share that with you, because it really was enlightening for all of us.

The Chair: Thank you. Thank you, Madame Glover, and Ms. Goulden can appreciate our learning curve in this field.

We'll move on to the second round, starting with Madame Lise Zarac.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): I would like to thank Ms. Goulden and Mr. Loyd for being here.

I don't have any questions. I think that you have covered the issues fairly well so far.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Madame Zarac.

Mr. Nadeau.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I simply would like a clarification from Ms. Goulden. Your studies in linguistics... That's what you are studying now, isn't it?

Mrs. Jen Goulden: I studied linguistics as a student.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Are you saying that you are currently studying linguistics?

Mrs. Jen Goulden: Yes.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Are you also studying Braille script and the Nemeth Code, or something else?

Mrs. Jen Goulden: When I said that I studied linguistics at university, it was simply to inform you that —

[English]

my educational background. It's not really connected to my knowledge of Braille. It's just what I studied.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Fine. I thought that you had pointed that out — that's what I understood — because we are studying the knowledge of Braille today. In that case, Mr. Chairman, I have no further questions.

Thank you very much.

• (0940)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlebourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Ms. Goulden and Mr. Loyd.

Ms. Monique Guay, from the Bloc Québécois, raised a very important issue, and I have the impression that we put some very strange questions last week to our witnesses. I might mention that most of the witnesses, or at least some of them, were from my riding, because there are three organizations run by blind people in my riding. We have schools and even some industrial production involving activities which are in Braille.

Ms. Goulden, here is the situation I want to explain to you. This is how I understood it. Please correct me if I'm wrong. As it now stands, Francophones from Quebec and New Brunswick use the Nemeth Code for their studies, mainly, for reading novels and books which are not school manuals. The school systems in New Brunswick and Quebec are different, but in France, they are even more different from our systems. Consequently, Braille is mostly used for novels and general reading material.

The issue Ms. Guay raised, and which I find very interesting, is that in Europe the code will be standardized. France, Belgium and Switzerland will use the new standardized code beginning in September 2009, and it will also be used in Quebec. For this reason,

if the code is adopted, people in New Brunswick and in Quebec will not be able to communicate or learn with francophones from other provinces, because the standardized code will introduce a new code, the Antoine Code, which will be used mostly in science and for the numbering of books. We learned that the number 12 is *a* and *b* in the current code, but that this would change under the Antoine Code. So that is already creating a problem. These people are already dealing with a handicap. Now in addition they will have to learn two languages. The third issue is that they will have to learn a script other than braille.

It's true that there is no standardization now. You said that virtually everyone is doing something about it, but it is script, and you can translate script from French into English or vice-versa. It's a form of writing, but it's also a language. Those are the two official languages.

Today, anglophones and francophones can use the same code. In French and in English, the Abraham Nemeth Code is used, and it is also used in the United States, Australia, England, and perhaps in other countries, too, which don't come to mind right now. Consequently, if the new standardized code is implemented, we risk becoming illiterate compared to other groups. We will not be able to talk to each other anymore. A person from Quebec or New Brunswick will not be able to communicate, if the new code is implemented, with a francophone from Manitoba, or Saskatchewan, or Alberta, or British Columbia.

Is that the reality? That's what I think was explained to me.

[English]

Mrs. Jen Goulden: I guess I would say a couple of things.

One, as I said before, I am not a francophone. If this is how francophones feel about the issue, then obviously their opinion is worth more. Since French is their first language, I think their opinion should weigh more.

The other thing I want to say is that when I was learning Braille, I didn't find it an extra burden or an extra handicap. It was like a sighted student learning print. I don't really remember the process, to be honest. I just know that when I was very little, I couldn't read, and then I could read. So it wasn't a struggle.

The other thing is that the English and French codes are different regardless. I understand what you're saying about Nemeth and Antoine, but even just the abbreviations in the literary code are not the same from English to French. Anybody who's going to learn *braille abrégé* in both languages is going to learn completely different symbols. I know a completely different set of abbreviations for both French and English. The symbols are similar, but they represent different things in each writing system.

I just wanted to make those comments. I'm not trying to say something one way or the other; I'm just telling you that this has been my experience as a Braille reader.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Goulden.

Thank you, Mr. Petit.

Mr. Gravelle.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: I want to simplify. I don't understand this process, probably just like everybody else in this room.

You said a while ago that you don't like change. And I don't blame you, as I don't like change either. But wouldn't it make common sense to have the number four in English and French the same?

Mrs. Jen Goulden: They are right now.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: It would take a generation to get used to these changes in numbers and letters, but at the end of the day, wouldn't it benefit everyone if Braille were standardized?

Mrs. Jen Goulden: I would think so, but I'm just presenting what I do know. I use French Braille, but I don't teach it, unfortunately. So I don't deal with that side of it. Sometimes I hear comments along the lines of, oh, students are going to have such a hard time with this, and then I think, I didn't. So it's a bit hard for me to understand.

I do agree with you, but my understanding is that I am just here to talk about the effects, or some of the issues around it. So I'm not an expert in the new European standard of French Braille, because we don't use it at work. I do know about it, but I'm just presenting the issues of which I am aware. That's just for all of your information.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I think we have completed two rounds of questions. A couple of members said they wanted to follow up on some issues.

Would you like to go to a third round? Would anyone like to speak?

Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Thank you very much.

Ms. Goulden, I did not have enough time earlier. I would now like to ask you a second question.

Regarding standardization, the French do not want to impose it, but would rather like to see Quebec accept it, that is, the Antoine Code, for everyone who reads braille.

This is my question. To compare, the Abraham Nemeth system, which is currently used, uses Arabic numerals, whereas the Antoine Code uses Roman numerals. That's just one example. They are both very different. The symbols mean the same thing, but they are not the same.

Anglophones also read braille. Naturally, what you read with your hands in braille can be translated into your mother tongue, which is English. However, you cannot forget that the same symbols are used in English and French. It is the same alphabet featuring the letters *a* to *z*.

But now we have a new system: the Antoine system. Take someone who wants to become a scientist, but who has a serious accident at 15 or 16 years of age. Not only will this person have to learn braille to finish his or her studies, but this person will basically be forced to use the Antoine Code after the Quebec and New Brunswick codes are standardized, and so that person will be incapable of communicating with another scientist living in an anglophone province.

But there are no books available in the Antoine Code yet. Most science books for people who can see are in English. So reading

scientific books will be a problem, since the codes will be different. When two blind scientists will have to work together on a scientific project, one will read the Antoine Code with his fingers, and the other one will read the Nemeth Code. They won't be reading the same language. That will be a huge problem and things will not be able to move ahead.

When Ms. Guay raised the issue, I wasn't sure what she was getting at, but there seems to be a problem. I understand that you are not mandated to talk about standardization, but the implications are profound. Standardization might isolate francophones who currently use the Abraham Nemeth system, but who might have to convert to the Antoine system, which will be implemented in Quebec, New Brunswick and in other francophone areas. Furthermore, francophones from other provinces who keep the old system will not be able to communicate with other francophones in Canada, because of the two different systems.

That's how I understand the situation. Could that be a potential problem, that is, that francophones will not be able to communicate with each other any more since there will be different systems in place in Canada?

● (0950)

[*English*]

Mrs. Jen Goulden: I see what you're saying, that it would be...in order for them to access things that are in English in the scientific world. That makes complete sense to me. It's like what you were saying along the lines that there shouldn't be two different systems being used, and I agree with that.

And I agree that everybody, or each province, or people, should have a say in this, because what you're raising is a good point. People need to have a say in this process because a lot of people have different points of view. For example, I wouldn't necessarily have a certain point of view because I haven't had a certain experience. So I think that with standardization or any real issue with Braille literacy, a lot of different input needs to be obtained.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Goulden.

I think we've completed the round of questions. I'd like to thank our two witnesses. Mr. Loyd, in addition to your presentation being succinct, it was very clear about the federal government's responsibilities in this area.

Ms. Goulden, the clerk has informed me that you got yourself here this morning without any assistance. That is to your credit and I'd like to thank you on behalf of all members of the committee for having come to our meeting on such short notice. It's very inspiring to have you here with us this morning. Thank you for your attendance.

While the witnesses leave the room, we'll move ahead with committee business. We have a couple of housekeeping motions to deal with, the first of which concerns the adoption of our budget for the post-secondary institutions study. That's what we did for the Braille standardization study.

The motion states:

That the proposed budget of \$26,950 for the study on federal government support for post-secondary institutions' efforts in promoting bilingualism in Canada be adopted.

For those that want it, I have the breakdown of the \$26,950 budget. The bulk of this, \$24,000, is witnesses' expenses; \$950 is for videoconferences; and \$2,000 covers other costs.

Is it agreed? We are going to have copies made and distributed.

From what I understand, Ms. Guay's initial concerns are about access to Braille services. I think we got a lot of information on this issue. And along the way, our attention was drawn to the issue of standardization. We are aware that Quebec is going to adopt a different code in September.

Minority communities are probably going to keep the existing code, which seems easier to transfer into English and anything that's science-based.

As far as we're concerned, that's essentially the crux of the issue. Our awareness of the issue has been raised and we can now move on.

Mr. Petit.

• (0955)

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Chair, with all due respect, I'd like to talk about the problem Ms. Monique Guay raised, and which in some ways concerns us. I started to make contacts, but I still haven't been successful in getting a meeting. I asked the woman representing Mr. Fraser to meet with him, but I'd also like the committee to have this opportunity.

Writing is language, our language. Ms. Goulden and the other witnesses made the point that in Quebec we're going to use the standardized French-language code. If we don't let blind people use standardized writing in French and in English so that they can work in both languages, and if we adopt a different code, francophones in minority communities both in New Brunswick and in the other provinces may no longer be able to communicate with each other. That's the danger.

Here is how I think we should tackle the issue. Perhaps we should ask...

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Petit, I'd like to recognize Mr. Nadeau on a point of order.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I understand what you're getting at, Mr. Petit, but when it comes to literature, they will be able to communicate. Now, that won't be the case for science and math. You need to make the distinction.

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau, we'll go back to Mr. Petit.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): That's not a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I'm glad to have made the point, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Indeed, based on the scant information we've received, the Antoine Code could be used for the study and transfer of scientific concepts. The Abraham Nemeth Code is currently in use. And it can

be used without too much difficulty in the transference of scientific texts in both English and in French as they both use the same signs, or the same language. Now, in this case, we'd have two different modes of writing. That would mean that francophones may be handicapped because they'd be incapable—unless they learnt the other code, because there would be two in effect—of interpreting data or discussing science. There are a lot of blind people who become blind after an accident and who teach, are scientists, are versed in the sciences, who work in various science-related fields—and God knows there are more and more fields of this type—and they'd become incapable of communicating and transferring their knowledge and wouldn't be able to discuss problems that affect them every day. These aren't necessarily the same problems we have.

So I'm concerned, Mr. Chair, that there's a problem there. We understand that all of the provinces are free to decide whether or not to standardize their code. However, if blind people in Quebec and New Brunswick are no longer able to communicate in a given subject area, the broad field of science in this case, then there's a problem. Right now it's a linguistic problem. Writing is a vehicle, but this is a linguistic problem. Don't you think it would be good to ask Mr. Fraser whether his mandate—and in any mandate, there's what is written and there's the spirit of the letter—would permit him to intervene. So that's the question and I think we need to think about it. And if we don't, it will mean that in September 2009, that's four or five months away, the standardized Antoine Code will be in effect in Quebec and it will create problems for francophones outside Quebec. Now, even though we're talking about a minority group within a broader minority group, I still think we need to do our job as parliamentarians and follow up on this. We need to ascertain whether or not we can help these people. There seems to be a problem here and I certainly don't want, at a later stage, for blind people in my province or in New Brunswick to have even more of a handicap.

So that's what I wanted to say, and I think that we need to ask ourselves these questions. We're good parliamentarians. Ms. Guay has raised an excellent matter and this is an opportunity for parliamentarians to demonstrate compassion. I think that this is very important and that the committee should ask Mr. Fraser to research this and take the time he needs to determine—provided that it is within his purview—whether writing, the representation of the two languages, should be standardized, with or without his approval. So that's the matter I submit to your attention.

• (1000)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Petit.

While I was listening to you I thought of a suggestion I'd like to share with you, colleagues. Basically, we've dedicated three meetings to this subject and we do not intend to write a report as such. Now as far as your proposal is concerned, Mr. Petit, perhaps we could share our findings and the fruits of our labour with the official languages commissioner and he can determine whether or not it would be in his mandate to consider this matter. That's just a proposal. If you wish, as chair of the committee, I could inform the official languages commissioner of the testimony we've received and of the issues facing the minority language communities, and more specifically blind persons within those communities. Maybe that is a way of tying up the loose ends on this issue.

Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My intervention will be brief and to the point.

We don't have to do anything. Since the people from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages follow committee business closely, they are already aware of this information. If they deem it to be important, I am sure that they will be able to perform a follow-up. They are very qualified people, and we don't need to go any further in this respect.

The Chair: Thank you for your opinion, Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to say pretty much the same thing. As you have already said, we have already held three meetings on this subject, and although it is important, we will not be preparing a report. The next time we hear from the commissioner, perhaps he could comment on the study we have just completed. However, it is not necessary to invite him to attend another meeting on this subject.

The Chair: Fine.

Are there other comments?

Mr. Gravelle.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: I'm not sure. Maybe we should carry out a follow-up to help us make a decision about the standardization of Braille. We heard testimony at a few meetings. If we don't do anything, what use will it have been to have sat here for three meetings lasting two hours each, and not made any decision? If we disregard everything we have heard without doing anything, what will we have accomplished as parliamentarians?

I don't know who should do this follow-up, but someone should do something.

• (1005)

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I would like to answer Mr. Gravelle. You probably already know this, but the minutes of each meeting are drawn up, so that those who are interested can see what is being discussed.

Generally speaking, we got an opportunity to explore the scope of the situation. In the end, it turns out that we don't have the skills necessary to legislate or to get involved in this area. However, we have gleaned a great deal of information.

As Mr. Petit said, the Commissioner of Official Languages will surely follow the discussions held by our committee, as his office usually does. I'm sure they will reflect on many things.

Now that we have been informed of the situation, it is up to the qualified authorities, for example, education stakeholders, to take action. During the first meeting, it was clearly explained that each province has a different viewpoint with regard to its education system. We compared the situation in Ontario with that in Quebec, in particular. These authorities are equipped to respond better.

It was not a waste of time, given that the minutes are available to everyone and that those concerned are aware of the situation. We

don't have the required jurisdiction, but at least we will have made the people who do have that jurisdiction aware of certain data.

I think that we have covered the topic, and we can't do much more.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

Ms. Zarac.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: I am of the same opinion as Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Loyd clearly pointed out that this issue is not our responsibility. And it's not because we want to wash our hands of it. Since this standardization will make a difference especially in the field of education, this does not come under our jurisdiction, and therefore, we have done everything in our power.

The Chair: Excellent. The subject is closed. Thank you for your comments.

I have been told that you have received a copy of the budget. Do you have any comments or questions on the budget regarding our study of post-secondary institutions?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I call for the adoption.

The Chair: Mr. Petit, you have a question.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Do you think that's sufficient? We have scheduled four meetings, and many witnesses will be coming from elsewhere. You won't go far with a budget of \$26,950.

The Chair: That's a good point. There are 20 witnesses. We will distribute the list of witnesses who are scheduled to testify for our study. That may answer your question, Mr. Petit. It is really the centrepiece of our main study. Members of the team are currently distributing documents, the list of potential witnesses.

As you can see, we have a lot of work before us. I will ask the clerk to explain the list of potential witnesses.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Isabelle Dumas): We met with the analysts and what is proposed in this list is what was most useful in helping us carry out a structured study.

At the first meeting, we must meet with the federal organizations. As Jean-Rodrigue explained to me, they are the lead agencies. They are grouped this way to make our study meaningful. I don't know whether Julian wanted to add anything.

• (1010)

Mr. Julian Walker (Committee Researcher): No, not today.

The Chair: So we have four very busy, full-up meetings. As for the fifth meeting, Mr. Chong's proposal sought to hear from private institutions. We could hold one or two meetings for that purpose.

There are several associations and we have scheduled five meetings. Should we not add to the list of witnesses?

That brings us to the budget. We could discuss the budget and finalize it. If the committee members agree, we could increase the number of meetings.

Mr. Rodriguez, do you have a question? And then Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Do I understand that the five meetings deal with the subject, but that there are other meetings in between? The Olympic Games for example, are a fairly pressing issue.

The Chair: Yes, that's right. The idea was to conduct our main study on Thursdays and to alternate with other topics on Tuesdays.

Next week we will have two meetings to lay the groundwork.

Mr. Nadeau

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Chair, concerning the fifth meeting, I presume that these are the institutions that were suggested, but that you have not yet contacted them to find out whether they will be testifying. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes. We could make a selection, on the recommendation of the members, or increase the number of meetings. I am sure that we can constitute a representative sample.

[*English*]

Mr. Chong, I'm pleased to have you intervene on this issue you've been championing for a while.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thanks.

Why has the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada refused to appear?

The Chair: To answer your question, as we are entering into our own study, the Commissioner of Official Languages is also entering into a study.

We got their comment expressing the fact that they were to meet the commissioner and they felt... I made it clear that we were doing our own study and were willing to have them as witnesses even though they were to testify elsewhere. It would be in the Senate or elsewhere.

Are there any suggestions?

[*Translation*]

There are a dozen universities. We could make two or three groups.

I'm going to remind you of the committee's role. By inviting the institutions, we'll be sending them a very clear message. They will have to prepare.

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: In addition to the universities that appear here, I would like the Université du Québec en Outaouais, the UQO, to be represented. It won't cost us any more than a taxi ride, so we'll save a lot of money.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Chong.

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong: Just to reiterate, I don't really care which particular anglophone university we invite. I don't think we need to invite all of them, but I think it's important to have at least one or two anglophone universities in front of our committee so that we can ask

them some questions about why they're not producing the graduates we need for the bilingual public service.

If we're only inviting francophone universities, they're clearly fulfilling the need we have—generally, francophones tend to be bilingual—but clearly the anglophone universities in most parts of the country aren't coming anywhere near producing the kinds of graduates we need. I think it's important that we have at least two, possibly three, anglophone universities present, to be able to ask them these questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to encourage the committee to follow some of the direction the commissioner provided when he said that Manitoba is an example.

A voice: Yes, that's right.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: And we're not represented in this list. I would encourage us to consider inviting

• (1015)

[*Translation*]

the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface because it is an extremely forward-looking institution. I don't know why it's not on the list, but I would like it to be invited.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's a done thing now, Madam Glover.

Is there anything else?

[*Translation*]

In any case, we can hold two or three meetings with universities.

If we hold two meetings with the universities, given that we're in budget mode, we will have to provide for some flexibility. Is the budget sufficient, to come back to Mr. Petit's question?

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Chair, let us adopt the budget as it stands, and if needed, we can come back and see if we can stretch the elastic. Is that in the rules?

The Chair: We can come back with an amended budget at our next meeting; unless we have to pass it immediately.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: We have the right to make amendments.

The Chair: Of course we have the right, we are sovereign over our own committee. Let us adopt the following.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I am a great fan of sovereignty, Mr. Chair. Repeat the word often enough, and you will feel its effect.

The Chair: What word are you talking about?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I'm talking about the word "sovereign". I am not referring to the Queen.

The Chair: That's a very beautiful word, I agree with you.

Mr. Petit.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Mr. Chair, if I understood your first decision properly, the budget will be circulated at the next meeting. Are we adopting it immediately?

Some hon. members: We are adopting it.

Mr. Daniel Petit: What happens if we adopt it and no longer are able to amend it afterwards?

The Chair: Yes, we can amend it. We are sovereign.

Mr. Daniel Petit: We will be needing sovereigns for these supplementary amounts.

The Chair: Some will be able to take the bus, so we'll be able to stretch the budget.

Mr. Daniel Petit: That's perfect. Call in all those who are going to take the bus then.

The Chair: I therefore have unanimous consent from members of the committee to adopt the budget.

Thank you for your attention and have a good weekend.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.