



## **French-Language Books in a Minority Setting: A Report from Rural Saskatchewan**

Richard A. Russo

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### Résumé de l'article

Les bibliothèques publiques sont des espaces institutionnels susceptibles de contribuer à la vitalité des communautés de langue officielle en situation minoritaire (CLOSM). Cette étude examine en détail les collections des bibliothèques des six collectivités rurales qui comptent la plus grande proportion de francophones en Saskatchewan afin d'établir des données de référence sur le nombre et les caractéristiques des livres en français. La collecte de données faite lors des visites à ces bibliothèques secondaires a permis d'examiner plus de 5 000 titres destinés aux lecteurs adultes. Les résultats montrent qu'il existe une inadéquation géographique entre le nombre de livres en français qui sont disponibles dans les bibliothèques publiques et le nombre de francophones qui résident dans plusieurs localités. Les CLOSM devraient considérer les politiques d'acquisition stratégique dans les bibliothèques publiques pour mieux soutenir l'identité et la culture francophones par le loisir et l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie.

## **French-Language Books in a Minority Setting: A Report from Rural Saskatchewan**

**Richard A. Russo**

*Frostburg State University, Maryland*

### **Abstract**

Public libraries are potential institutional spaces for maintaining the vitality of official language minority communities (OLMCs). This study establishes baseline data on the number and characteristics of French-language books in Saskatchewan's minority Francophone communities, with a detailed look at six rural communities with the greatest proportion of Francophones. Data collection involved site visits to branch libraries and community centers during which more than 5,000 online catalogue library records of books intended for adult readers were reviewed. The results of the study show that a spatial mismatch exists between Francophone residents and French-language books held in Saskatchewan's public libraries. It is recommended that OLMCs collaboratively revisit library collection policies, so that book acquisitions can better support Francophone identity and culture through lifelong learning and leisure.

### **Résumé**

Les bibliothèques publiques sont des espaces institutionnels susceptibles de contribuer à la vitalité des communautés de langue officielle en situation minoritaire (CLOSM). Cette étude examine en détail les collections des bibliothèques des six collectivités rurales qui comptent la plus grande proportion de francophones en Saskatchewan afin d'établir des données de référence sur le nombre et les caractéristiques des livres en français. La collecte de données faite lors des visites à ces bibliothèques secondaires a permis d'examiner plus de 5 000 titres destinés aux lecteurs adultes. Les résultats montrent qu'il existe une inadéquation géographique entre le nombre de livres en français qui sont disponibles dans les bibliothèques publiques et le nombre de francophones qui résident dans plusieurs localités. Les CLOSM devraient considérer les politiques d'acquisition stratégique dans les bibliothèques publiques pour mieux soutenir l'identité et la culture francophones par le loisir et l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie.

In modern democracies, public libraries are institutions where communities place their shared literary culture – contested and in constant flux, to be sure. In the words of Saskatchewan writer Don Kerr (2005, p. 250), the public library “says what democracy is, the free access to information, ideas, and pleasure.” Communities in Western democracies are proud of their public libraries, which are complex institutions that serve as repositories of cultural capital and resources, as well as sites for community development and interaction. There are no federal legal requirements for Saskatchewan’s public libraries to offer equitable services to its Francophone official language minority population, nor does the provincial Francophone Affairs Branch discuss library services in its annual reports (Saskatchewan, Francophone Affairs Branch, 2018). It is because the province’s public libraries appear surprisingly peripheral to the linguistic and cultural objectives of Saskatchewan’s Francophones (referred to as “Fransaskois”) that French-language books are the primary focus of this research.

This research provides a place-based assessment of a specific cultural resource in particular communities. It inserts adult readers, French-language books, and public libraries into the discussion of language maintenance strategies and establishes a ground-level analysis of French-language books in a minority setting by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. The project describes the resources available in public libraries to adults in Saskatchewan who seek to read French-language books in an attempt to maintain a cultural, intellectual, and perhaps even spiritual life, *en français*. The (re)discovery, development, and maintenance of language, culture and identity among Francophone adults in a minority setting is less studied than that of school-aged children. Books, and the public libraries that house and circulate them, are important agents in creating and maintaining both the physical and socio-psychological cultural spaces of minority communities and, thus, are deserving of a bit of scholarly attention. With its emphasis on libraries as cultural spaces, this study targets hard-copy books, both fiction and non-fiction, not ebooks.

The results of the study show that there is a spatial mismatch between the majority of Saskatchewan’s Francophones, who live outside its two largest cities (Saskatoon and Regina), and the location of French-language books in the province’s public libraries. The results also demonstrate that the characteristics of French-language books available to adults through the public library system is not representative of vibrant global and Franco-Canadian literary cultures. Therefore, public libraries in the official language minority communities (OLMCs) of Saskatchewan do not serve as cultural spaces for Francophones as they do for Anglophones, even in the province’s most heavily-populated Francophone communities.

## Literature Review

Assessments of the vitality of Canada’s OLMCs focus, unsurprisingly, on speakers themselves and their individual and corporate linguistic behaviors. In the case of Francophone

minority communities, such measurements track linguistic continuity in the home, the use of French in the workplace, French-language media consumption, and participation in Francophone community groups and events. The vitality and daily linguistic practices of Canada's Francophone minority communities has been studied and measured by many scholars (Landry, Gilbert, & Forgues, 2005; Gilbert, 2010; Landry, 2014).

The subjects of this study are not Francophones themselves, but rather French-language books in a minority setting. Books, and the literary culture that produces them, are both objects of political and cultural power and domination, as well as agents of cultural and linguistic maintenance and resistance. Thus, this study complements past research conducted on the number, geographic location and concentration, identity formation and maintenance, and other characteristics of Francophones in Saskatchewan (Bouchard-Coulombe, Lepage, & Chavez, 2011; Pilote & Joncas, 2016; Dubois, 2017), by providing data about French-language books in the province.

Since a key concern of studies on Canada's Francophone minority communities is the maintenance and transmission of French language in minority settings, another objective of the present study is to move beyond the usual subjects and locus of inquiry – children and adolescents in formal schooling. Robineau, Traisnel, Forgues, Guignard Noël, & Landry (2010), in their comprehensive study of La Francophonie in Canada's territories, are among the few to specifically emphasize the underutilized role of public libraries in maintaining linguistic vitality in Francophone minority communities. In understanding the vitality of OLMCs, Breton's (1964) concept of "institutional completeness" has served as a basis for assessing the capacity of a minority community to maintain its identity. Francophone entities in the realms of politics, culture, media, education, economic development, and health all factor into this concept of "completeness."

## The Setting

### *Francophone Saskatchewan*

Saskatchewan has the second smallest proportion of its population as Francophone (1.3%) among Canada's provinces and territories; only Newfoundland and Labrador has a smaller percentage (Statistics Canada, 2017). The 2016 Canadian census counted 14,435 Francophones in Saskatchewan, up from 14,290 in 2011. The number of residents in Saskatchewan in 2016 who declared French as their mother tongue (either alone or in conjunction with another language) was 17,740. In 2016, the rate of linguistic continuity in Saskatchewan (determined by the population reporting French as the language "most spoken at home" as a proportion of individuals with French as a mother-tongue) was just 33% (5,840 residents).

Saskatchewan's Francophones are geographically dispersed. There is no "Francophone region" in Saskatchewan. Forty-two percent of the province's Francophones live in its two largest cities, Saskatoon and Regina. The remaining 58% reside in smaller cities, such as Moose Jaw and Prince Albert, and in rural municipalities. There are just five municipalities where the population is at least 20% Francophone. The largest among these municipalities in terms of total Francophone population is the Rural Municipality of St. Louis No. 431 (total population 1,085, of whom 355 are Francophone). This municipality and the village of Zenon Park (population 195, of whom 65 are Francophone) have the highest proportion of Francophones, at 33%.

The origins of Saskatchewan's Francophone population are geographically and culturally diverse (Spry, 1985; Anderson, 2013). Beginning with Francophone Métis, migrants from Quebec and other parts of French Canada, Franco-Americans from the United States, and French, Belgian, and Swiss immigrants before World War II, the Fransaskois community has further diversified in recent years with the arrival of immigrants from Francophone countries in Africa and Asia. The representative organization of the province's Francophones, the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise (ACF), has adopted an official policy of inclusion which defines the Fransaskois community as consisting of individuals for whom:

L'action de choisir de vivre au moins une partie de sa vie en français en Saskatchewan fait partie de la définition de Fransaskois et de Fransaskoise: un Fransaskois ou une Fransaskoise est une personne qui s'identifie à la francophonie en Saskatchewan, actuellement ou dans le passé, que ce soit par la naissance, par le mariage, ou par l'adoption de la communauté fransaskoise ou l'identification à celle-ci, qui contribue à la vitalité de la langue française ainsi qu'à l'épanouissement et au développement des communautés francophones en Saskatchewan, tout en reconnaissant qu'il existe plusieurs façons d'y contribuer (ACF, 2008:11).

The inclusiveness of this definition is an acknowledgement of the diversity of Francophone origins and the high rate of exogamy, in the past, present, and likely the future. Today, 56% of Saskatchewan's Francophones were born in the province, 29% are from other provinces, and 16% from another country. Of this Francophone immigrant population, 57% are from Africa (Northern and sub-Saharan regions combined) (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada, 2017).

### ***Libraries in Saskatchewan***

Public libraries have been an essential part of Saskatchewan life since the establishment of the provincial government in 1905. The *Public Libraries Act* of 1906 laid out the regulations by which local municipalities could establish libraries and imposed a property tax to operate them, with matching funds provided by the provincial government (Kerr, 2005). Today, there are over 300 branch libraries, organized into seven regional libraries,

with a federated library system in the north of the province, and three municipal libraries in Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert (SILS, 2019).

In 2009, a non-profit corporation, the Saskatchewan Information and Library Services Consortium (SILS), was established. SILS rolled out an initiative in 2010 called “One Province, One Library Card” that allowed residents to search for and request resources from the entire combined collection of the province’s public libraries. This program was the “first province-wide seamless interlibrary loan system in Canada” (Shires, 2017, p. 3). This well-developed interlibrary loan service could act as the catalyst for promoting French-language books to a geographically-dispersed Francophone population. Proposed funding cuts for public libraries in the provincial government’s 2017-2018 austerity budget – to close a \$1.2 billion deficit – would have eliminated this popular program. The proposed cuts to the library system galvanized multiple organizations and communities to fight for their libraries, forcing the government to restore funding in the final budget. Shires (2018) calls this grassroots, readers’ revolt “The Saskatchewan Spring of 2017.”

Distinct from the public library system is Le Lien (le Centre francaskois de ressources culturelles et pédagogiques), which is housed at Collège Mathieu, Saskatchewan’s only Francophone post-secondary technical and professional college, in the town of Gravelbourg. Collège Mathieu, which celebrated its centennial in 2018, was originally founded as a French-language Catholic secondary school (*collège classique*) for boys. Le Lien was established in 1986 with federal funding and receives its operating budget from both federal and provincial sources (Le Lien, 2018). Le Lien’s resources include French-language books, pedagogical materials, magazines, videos, and games which can be borrowed by schools and individuals across the province. Individual books are mailed to registered subscribers, free of charge, with a pre-paid return envelope. There are over 42,000 titles available for all ages. It is unclear what proportion of its collection is for adult readers; its online catalogue is unable to generate a list of all adult titles. Through its “Res-o-Lien” service, “blocks” of books, magazines, and DVDs from Le Lien’s collection are sent out and returned three times a year to nine depositories in Francophone community centers. Le Lien is a valuable resource for adults in Saskatchewan wishing to access French-language books, but is arguably underutilized.

## Methodology

Research for this study was conducted between late August and early December of 2017. Public library holdings of books published in 2016 and earlier are included in the quantitative and qualitative analysis. The goal of the study was not to create an exact census of all Francophone books in all of Saskatchewan’s public libraries for adult residents, nor was it to analyze the historical collection development activities of libraries acquiring those

titles. However, before questions could be asked and answered, baseline data needed to be collected. In searching through thousands of titles, both on library shelves and in online catalogues, the goal of the project was to gain an understanding of the general quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the collection of French-language books for adult readers in the province.

Data collection involved 3,945 km of travel across Saskatchewan to conduct site visits to branch libraries and community centers in twelve geographically-dispersed Francophone communities (Bellegarde, Debden, Gravelbourg, La Trinité, Moose Jaw, Ponteix, Prince Albert, Regina, St. Isidore-de-Bellevue, Saskatoon, Willow Bunch, and Zenon Park). The author conducted “ground-truthing” at local branches of public libraries to verify that the methods of searching the online catalogue were effective in finding books that were actually on library shelves. For example, a shelf-check of French-language books in Prince Albert’s main branch allowed the author to discover that an initial online catalogue search strategy was not generating an accurate list of books. After experimenting with various search techniques, the author found that conducting a Boolean search and using specific online catalogue descriptors produced a more accurate list of books on the shelves. The translation of the online catalogue search string [LA=FRE AND TOM=bks] is “language is French and type of material is books.” The list of titles generated by this search was further narrowed by limiting the targeted audience to “adult,” “general,” and “unknown or not specified” categories. All titles were subsequently assessed and children and young adult books were culled from the revised list of search results. This refined search strategy was conducted at other branch libraries and was consistently accurate. The in-depth analysis of more than 5,000 online catalogue records of French-language books for adult readers available on the province’s SILS network of eight regional and three municipal library systems was the perfect indoor activity to conduct during the onset of a Saskatchewan winter.

An autoethnographic strategy was used to better understand how an adult in a Francophone community in the province might find French-language books in a public library. The author went to local public libraries and asked librarians for assistance; searched the online catalogue of the province’s library systems; visited the only French-language bookstore in the province, Bouquinerie Gravel in Gravelbourg, as well as Francophone community centers. Finally, the author visited Le Lien, the French-language lending library and resource center operated by Collège Mathieu.

The author encountered unexpected difficulties in seeking out French-language books, such as using an Anglo-dominant online library catalogue, incorrect posted hours of operation for some Francophone community centers, and unreturned emails and phone calls. One can conclude that there is a considerable amount of unaccessed French-language reading material.

## Findings

### Overview

The findings in this paper highlight the availability and accessibility of French-language books for adults outside of Saskatchewan's two metropolitan areas, Saskatoon and Regina. The analysis focuses on six rural Francophone communities (see Table 1). Five of these communities have Francophone populations of greater than 20%. Local government in Saskatchewan is *very* local; there are almost 800 municipalities in the province (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018). For example, the Francophone community of Gravelbourg includes two separate municipalities – the Town of Gravelbourg and the Rural Municipality of Gravelbourg No. 104. The latter completely surrounds the former.

**Table 1**  
Selected rural Fransaskois community demographics

Community & Regional Library	Municipalities	POP	FR	% FR
BDS / Bellevue, Domrémy & St. Louis <i>Wapiti Regional Library</i>	Town of St-Louis RM of St. Louis	1,500	395	26
Debden <i>Wapiti Regional Library</i>	Village of Debden	340	80	24
Gravelbourg <i>Chinook Regional Library</i>	Town of Gravelbourg RM of Gravelbourg No. 104	1,515	335	22
Ponteix <i>Chinook Regional Library</i>	Town of Ponteix	535	120	22
La Trinité <i>Wapiti Regional Library</i>	Village of Prud'homme Town of Vonda, RM of Grant No. 372	1,015	155	15
Zenon Park <i>Wapiti Regional Library</i>	Village of Zenon Park	195	65	33

Note: POP = total population; FR = Francophone (official language minority) population.

The quantity of French-language books for adult readers in Saskatchewan's public libraries is low and their distribution poor. The following statements describe the current environment of French-language books in Saskatchewan's regional libraries:

1. There is a spatial mismatch between the number of French-language books available in public libraries and the number of Francophones residing in various communities. Few books exist in the public libraries serving four Fransaskois communities (see Table 2), where more than 20% of residents are Francophone.



2. The collection of French-language books for adult readers in rural communities does not reflect the cultural vitality and literary output of Francophone Canada or of the global Francophonie. Francophones in Saskatchewan do not have the same experience as Anglophones with respect to public libraries being cultural spaces, repositories of cultural capital, and places of discovery.

### ***Spatial mismatch between collections and community demographics***

As previously noted, 58% of Saskatchewan's Francophones live outside the province's two largest cities of Saskatoon and Regina. Yet, this study found that just 27% of the French-language collection for adults is located outside these cities (771 of the approximately 2,845 books with publication dates of 2016 or earlier). As shown in Table 2, adult readers in some communities with the greatest proportion of Francophones are poorly served by their local public libraries. Conversations during site visits to communities with both a public library and Francophone community center highlighted a general expectation that French-language reading materials were the responsibility – or at least the purview – of Francophone community centers. Yet, community centers relied on rotating “blocks” from Le Lien or donations. These community centers do not have a budget to acquire new books, nor do they have trained library staff (e.g. librarians, library technicians, and volunteers).

**Table 2**

### **French-language books for adult readers in selected rural Fransaskois communities**

Community	POP	SP FR	FR	FLMOSH	LIB BOOKS	CC BOOKS
BDS	1,500	550	395	170	2	15 (Le Lien block) 245
Debden	340	145	80	35	3	Closed*
Gravelbourg	1,515	610	335	160	8 Le Lien library**	
Ponteix	535	140	120	60	14	10 (Le Lien block)
La Trinité	1,015	290	155	90	(Vonda) 183 (Prud'homme) 6	Closed*
Zenon Park	195	110	65	45	0***	0 (Le Lien block)**** 180

Note: **POP** = total population; **SP FR** = population with “knowledge of official languages” (French only + bilingual); **FLMOSH** French is the language most often spoken at home); **LIB BOOKS** = number of books in public library branch; **CC BOOKS** = number of books in community center.

\* Community center office closed during site visit.

\*\* Le Lien, which has over 42,000 titles in French; it is not part of the public library system in Saskatchewan, but rather a lending library with a collection available to the public. An analysis of its collection is not part of the study.

\*\*\* No public library branch, nearest (Arborfield at 11 km) has 0 books.

\*\*\*\* Zenon Park receives a rotating block of books from Le Lien, but books in transit on day of site visit.

Holdings of French-language books for adults in select communities raises the question of what constitutes an adequately-sized collection to serve its residents' needs (see Table 2). The author was unable to acquire public library service guidelines for Saskatchewan, though several other Canadian provinces have published best-practice benchmarks. Best practices in the neighboring province of Alberta state that a minimum collection at a rural branch library should be 2,500 physical books with an ideal range of 1.5 to 2.5 books per capita. These guidelines also note that a large collection is not necessarily a good one, so "collections should be evaluated regularly by experienced staff to ensure their currency, accuracy, quality and appeal." Maintenance of the collection involves "weeding" 7% to 8% of the collection annually (Alberta Municipal Affairs, 2010). Guidelines in Ontario suggest that two-thirds of a collection should be for adults and one-third for young adults and children (Administrators of Rural and Urban Public Libraries of Ontario, 2017). Neither of these sources specifically address French-language books.

### **Community analyses**

#### *Debden*

The collection of French-language books for adults is clearly inadequate in the village of Debden. The community was established in 1910, mostly by migrants from Quebec who were encouraged by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Prince Albert to settle and farm the land along the newly-built Canadian Northern Railway line (Lapointe & Tessier, 1986). In 2016, out of a population of 340, there were 80 Francophones (24%) (Statistics Canada, 2017). The public library is housed in the bilingual community center which is also home to the village's offices, the Comité Culturel Fransaskois, a community museum, a senior citizens club, and a two-lane bowling alley. The total number of French-language books for adults in Debden's public library is three. The Debden Public Library is part of the Wapiti Regional Library, which has its headquarters in the city of Prince Albert. Neither the library nor the community center is a depository site for *Le Lien*, so Debden does not receive a rotating selection of French-language books from this lending institution. As such, an adult seeking a French-language book must either use the online public library catalogue to search for titles and then request materials be sent to the Debden library, or borrow books directly from *Le Lien*. Due to scarce resources, many branch libraries have limited service hours, creating yet an additional hurdle for accessing French-language books. At the time the author conducted this research, the Debden library was only open 11 hours a week: Monday (from 2:00 to 7:00 pm) and Tuesday (from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm). Library cardholders must use the province-wide interlibrary loan service by requesting materials online that are not readily available locally. Picking up holds can be challenging for many residents due to limited library service hours.

### *Gravelbourg*

In contrast to the dearth of French-language books for adults in Debden, the situation in the Gravelbourg area is quite different. The founding of Collège Mathieu in 1918 in Gravelbourg has led to the town having an important role in the history of French-language education in Saskatchewan. The town of Gravelbourg, and the rural municipality of Gravelbourg combined, have 1,515 residents, 335 (22%) of whom are Francophones (Statistics Canada, 2017). The public library in Gravelbourg is a branch of the Chinook Regional Library, which has its headquarters in Swift Current. The public library houses just eight French-language books for adults.

The town of Gravelbourg is home to the aforementioned French-language library and resource center, *Le Lien*, which is open to the public as a lending library and effectively serves as Gravelbourg's Francophone library. Given the size of its collection, with over 42,000 titles (including non-book resources), there are certainly more French-language books per capita in Gravelbourg than in any other community in the province (Collège Mathieu, 2018a). *Le Lien* is open to the general public and provides many resources and services that are available in a public library. However, for many working adults, browsing the institution's in-house collection is challenging due to its hours of operation (Monday to Friday, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm and 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm). As previously noted, *Le Lien* loans books free of charge by mail. However, its antiquated online catalogue interface is not particularly user-friendly and there is no browsing feature (Collège Mathieu, 2018b).

### *Vonda*

In Vonda is one of the two branches of the Wapiti Regional Library that serves the Fransaskois community of La Trinité – so-named because of its three individual settlements of Vonda, St. Denis, and Prud'homme, the latter of which also has a public library branch (with just six books in French for adults). St. Denis is home to the Francophone community center. Vonda has a K-12 Francophone school (École Providence) that serves La Trinité.

Of the rural communities studied, Vonda's public library is the only one whose collection of French-language books for adults exceeds the minimum number of volumes recommended in the collection guidelines for rural libraries from neighboring Alberta. Of the 183 titles, 144 are fiction and 39 are non-fiction. Two other distinguishing characteristics include the relatively small proportion (32%) of translations in the collection and the fact that 66% of books were published after the year 2000. It is evident that there was capacity to build this collection in the first decade of this century. One hundred and eleven titles were added from 2000 to 2009 compared to just nine for 2010 to 2016.

### **Public libraries as repositories of cultural capital**

Public libraries are a key cultural, educational, and community resource. The province's public library system, as a cultural space for lifelong learning and discovery, does not provide an adequate French-language collection for Francophones, even in communities where they make up at least one-fifth of the population. There is a spatial mismatch between the number of French-language books and the number of Fransaskois. Local collections are unrepresentative of the French-language literary culture of Canada and the global *Francophonie*. The fact that French-language books in Saskatchewan can be transferred to these communities through a province-wide interlibrary loan system does not necessarily strengthen these local branch libraries as cultural and community spaces for Francophones.

#### *Discovering books*

The author determined that browsing Saskatchewan's public library online catalogues was not a positive experience from a Francophone perspective. All of the eight regional and three municipal libraries have browsing interfaces that allow patrons to scroll through cover images of new books, staff picks, and highlighted books by genre. For example, on the Wapiti Regional Library homepage, there are tabs to click to scroll new fiction titles, new non-fiction, new movies, new for kids, and new for teens (<https://wapitilibrary.ca>). The "Explore" drop-down menu provides a list of 16 categories in which to browse titles. French-language books for adults are almost completely absent from the browsing feature. In the non-fiction browser's scroll, there were two French titles (without loaded cover images). Otherwise, no French titles are showcased, even under the "Governor-General [Literary] Awards" tab under "Award Winners-Adult", which lists all 20 English winners and finalists in four categories from 2017 (fiction, poetry, drama, and non-fiction), but *none* of the 20 French-language winners and finalists from the same year. The library holds some of these award-winning French-language titles, but does not showcase them in its browsing function. However, it does showcase the winners of the Man Booker Prize and the U.S. Pulitzer Prize. The fact that so many other browsing categories exist but *not one* for French-language books, in an officially bilingual country, uncomfortably straddles the line between gross oversight and mild insult. The online patron experience for Francophones is not welcoming nor does it invite them, or Canadians who read French regardless of their mother tongue, to explore and engage with the literary culture of Canada's other official language.

#### *Age of the collections*

There are significant differences in the age of the collections at branch libraries. In the North Battleford Public Library, only 6 of the 92 French-language books for adults have been published since the year 2000, and only one since 2010. In Debden, located in the Wapiti Regional Library system, none of the three French-language books in its collection

has been published since 2000. There are 407 English-language books for adults with publication dates between 2000 and 2016 in the collection at Debden.

Some branches have significantly higher proportions of Francophone collections published since the year 2000. In the Prince Albert and Vonda libraries, 65% and 66%, respectively, of their French-language books have been published since 2000. Numbers in Ponteix and Redvers are 86% and 100% respectively. However, to provide context, the total number of French-language books in discussion is 12 in Ponteix and 6 in Redvers.

### *Translations*

Another observation from analyzing the French-language adult-level book collection in Saskatchewan public libraries is the high proportion of works which are translations from English. For instance, in the Moose Jaw Public Library, 42% of the 172 available titles in French are translations from mostly English-language authors. In the North Battleford Library, 74% of 92 French-language titles are translations. (See Table 3)

**Table 3**  
**Translations in selected SK public libraries**  
**with greater than 50 French-language titles**

Community	POP	FR	% FR	No. FR titles	% Translations*	Top 3 Authors**
La Trinité (Vonda)	1,015	155	15	189	32	Denis Monette Jean-Pierre Charland Max Gallo
Moose Jaw	33,280	535	< 2	172	42	Michael Connelly Antonine Maillet John Grisham
North Battleford	14,045	205	< 2	92	74	Danielle Steel Barbara Taylor Bradford Mary Higgins Clark
Prince Albert	35,120	820	2	54	17	Roch Carrier Kim Thúy

\* Refers to the percentage of French-language titles that are translations from other languages

\*\* Only two authors had more than two titles in Prince Albert library collection

Since 96% of Francophones in Saskatchewan claim knowledge of English (Statistics Canada, 2017), acquiring French translations of English books that are already in circulation undermines the community- and identity-building potential of the French-language collection in OLMCs. While translations of popular English-language works into French may encourage Francophones to read more books written in their mother tongue, these translated

works do not strengthen Francophone literary and cultural identity in Saskatchewan. Acquiring French translations of books that already exist in the collection in English seems an unwise use of scarce public library funds, while a rich world of Francophone literature is underrepresented on the shelves.

### *Titles by Western Canadian Francophones*

The author investigated the composition of French-language book collections in the Saskatchewan's public library systems. Of 173 Western Canadian Francophone authors (from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon, and Northwest Territories), 31 can be considered Fransaskois through ancestry or residency [compiled from anthologies and dictionaries of Francophone writers (Hamel, Hare, & Wyczynski, 1989; Morcos, Cadrin, Dubé, & Godbout, 1998; Wilhelm, 2000; Harvey, 2012)]. Of these 31 Fransaskois authors, 23 have works available in the province. Forty-six separate works (excluding children and young adult titles) by these 23 writers are in the public library system. In total, only 36% (62 of 173) of Western Canadian Francophone authors appear in the collection. There are 121 distinct Western Canadian Francophone titles by these authors, representing 171 books, due to multiple copies in the collection. Seventy-nine percent of these books are on the shelves in the central or branch libraries of Saskatoon and Regina, whereas only 42% of the province's Francophones live in these two cities.

### *Award-winning Francophone titles*

To increase the quantity and quality of French-language books, libraries should acquire more prize-winning Francophone works. Examples are authors who have won either the Prix Athanase-David (for Quebec literature) or Prix Champlain (for Francophone Canadian authors outside of Québec). One hundred and fourteen authors won one of these prizes between 1957 and 2016 (Gouvernement du Québec, 2019; Regroupement des éditeurs francophones canadiens, 2019), and 65 of these authors have works that are available in Saskatchewan public libraries. Only three communities have more than 10 titles by these authors on their shelves – Saskatoon (80), Regina (34), and Moose Jaw (27). The likelihood of finding a book written by one of these award-winning authors on a library shelf in Saskatchewan's rural Francophone communities is small. Among the six highlighted Fransaskois communities in this study, there are just five books in two libraries (four in Vonda and one in Ponteix), representing four authors (Anne Hébert, Antonine Maillet, Yves Thériault, and Michel Tremblay).

Looking specifically at award-winning titles from 2016, searches in public library collections revealed 25 works that were French-language winners and finalists of the Governor General's award in five categories (fiction, poetry, drama, non-fiction, and translation). Also included were 15 other works awarded French-language literary prizes in Canada and 18 works awarded prizes in France the same year. Of these 58 award-winning

titles from 2016, only 13 were in hard copy in Saskatchewan public libraries. None of these books were in branch libraries outside of Regina and Saskatoon (see Appendix A for prizes and award-winning titles).

## Discussion and Recommendations

This study shows that French-language books in the rural OLMCs of Saskatchewan are geographically mismatched with Francophone populations and fail to accurately display the vitality and diversity of Francophone literary cultures. In order for French-language books, and the public libraries that house them, to act as *agents* of Francophone identity formation and linguistic maintenance, they must be recognized as such. The Fransaskois community should consider the development of a *politique de la lecture et du livre* similar to the current process underway in the Franco-Ontarian community under the direction of the Association des auteurs et auteurs de l'Ontario français (Vachet, 2017). Though the proposed policy in Ontario focuses heavily on schools, a similar one in Saskatchewan could be designed to promote existing resources and strengthen partnerships with public libraries that serve Francophones across the province, especially in smaller municipalities where they represent a significant proportion of the population.

It may not be surprising that a provincial initiative would seek to promote its own literary culture, as is the case in the future Franco-Ontarian *politique de la lecture et du livre*. However, such a move in a minority setting restricts the potential power of other Francophone literary cultures to support Francophone identities in Canada's OLMCs. Therefore, such a policy in Saskatchewan must not limit itself to Fransaskois works. Emphasizing Fransaskois literary production is important to Saskatchewan's Francophone writers and readers, but developing Francophone literary culture in Saskatchewan requires a larger corpus of French-language titles targeting adults. Fransaskois literary output alone is too small to create such a reading culture. Even in Quebec, only about one third of titles in public libraries and bookstores are published in the province, with another third coming from France, and the remaining third being translations (Palladino, 2012). It is too much to ask Saskatchewan's Francophone community of fewer than 15,000 to shoulder the burden of creating and maintaining its own literary culture.

### **Public Libraries as Cultural Spaces in Francophone Minority Communities**

A *politique de la lecture et du livre* should establish public libraries as key cultural spaces in minority Francophone communities. Given the long and arduous struggle for French-language education in Canada's Francophone minority communities, and the declining role of the Catholic Church in an increasingly secular country, schools have become important loci of Francophone identity and community action (Landry, Allard, & Deveau, 2011;

Meunier, Wilkins-Laflamme, & Grenier, 2013). However, there is a danger in having primary and secondary schools serve as the *de facto* focus of language maintenance in OLMCs. Francophone schools serve only a minority of the community at any given time and engage individual Francophones for only a portion of their lifespans. Public libraries serve a community-building function by providing safe, intergenerational physical spaces and online environments for self-discovery, community gatherings, and offer various lifelong learning opportunities. Therefore, in Fransaskois communities, a library building is more than just a repository for housing a comprehensive French-language book collection. A public library should be as accessible as possible by having convenient operating hours and, in OLMCs, be clearly acknowledged as a space in the public realm where the French language is expected to be seen, read, and heard.

### ***Collections Policies***

The author recommends that the Fransaskois community, in order to achieve full cultural benefits from their public libraries, have more engagement in the decision-making process of acquiring French-language books and other print/textual media, with a focus on providing resources for adults to encourage the lifelong maintenance of French-language use. Francophones can also join their public library boards to be more involved in local policy-making. It is also recommended that Saskatchewan's public library systems draft best practices for building and maintaining quality book collections that would benefit Fransaskois communities. For example, adopting the Province of Alberta's minimum guidelines of having 1.5 titles per capita (Alberta Municipal Affairs, 2010) would greatly benefit adult Francophone readers and French-language collections in these communities (see Table 4).

The findings of this study also show that award-winning French-language works that have captured the attention of Francophone readers in Canada and France are largely absent from the library shelves in rural Fransaskois communities. There should be a concerted effort by library workers to purchase bestselling, award-winning, and even short-listed books that appear in Franco-Canadian media outlets, ensuring they are available in Fransaskois community libraries.

### ***E-books***

Francophone communities should be wary of the trend toward acquiring e-books. Though it may seem a strategic move in terms of serving a small, geographically-dispersed Francophone population, the current e-book acquisition model is not conducive to Fransaskois cultural maintenance or development. The author's analysis of the province's public library catalogue showed that 506 French-language titles for adult readers were added to library



collections in 2016. E-books, 92% of which were translations of English-language works (mostly from vanity presses), represented 281 of these titles, compared with 225 hard-copy titles in French, of which just 24% were translations. Of the 225 French-language titles in hard-copy, just one (a translation of Danielle Steel's *Ambitions*) was added to a branch library outside of Saskatoon or Regina. A follow-up analysis of the online catalogue in February 2019 revealed that most of the French-language e-book titles that were added to collections in 2016 were no longer in the catalogue. This example underscores the ephemeral nature of e-book collections.

**Table 4**  
**Size of public library French-language book collection for adult readers:**  
**comparison of best practice to actual**

Community	POP	FR	% FR	Best Practice*	Actual
BDS	1500	395	26	397	2
Debden	340	80	24	80	3
Gravelbourg	1,515	335	22	337	8**
Ponteix	535	120	22	121	14
La Trinité	1,015	155	15	156	189
Zenon Park	195	65	33	65	N/A
(w/Arborfield)	815	100	12	101	0

\* Best Practice = minimum 1.5 titles per capita, 2/3 of collection for adult readers  $[0.67(\text{FR} \times 1.5)]$ , rounded]

\*\* Gravelbourg is home to Le Lien, which has over 42,000 titles in French; it is not part of the public library system in Saskatchewan, but it is a lending library with a collection available to the public. An analysis of its collection is not part of the study.

## Conclusion

Francophone culture in Saskatchewan will continue to operate within an Anglo-dominant environment. For public libraries to provide more meaningful spaces to support minority Francophone culture in the province, there *must* be larger and more diverse French-language hard-copy book collections in Fransaskois communities. More French-language signage and a dedicated space within libraries to celebrate Fransaskois culture can complement books. French-language reading clubs for various age groups, library programming, and other literary activities can help extend the domain of the French language from the private sphere and into the public sphere of OLMCs. Some of these initiatives and activities exist in public libraries in Francophone minority settings elsewhere in Canada, but in Saskatchewan they are scarce.

To realize the potential of public libraries as a source of cultural vitality in Fransaskois communities, stakeholders such as the Conseil culturel fransaskois and regional Fransaskois associations should work with Saskatchewan public libraries to develop vibrant French-language book collections. Fransaskois communities can more strongly advocate to have their tax-supported public libraries better support Francophone linguistic and cultural maintenance through the lifelong learning and leisure opportunities available from books.

## Appendix A

### Availability of 2016 French-language prize-winning titles in Saskatchewan public library collections as of December 2017

No titles were present in the rural Fransaskois communities included in this study.

CANADA			
Prize	Author	Title	Library Collection
<b>Governor-General Awards Winners &amp; Finalists</b>			
<b>Fiction</b>	Barbeau-Lavalette, Anaïs	<i>La femme qui fuit</i>	CAÉB*, Regina**, Sask./Cliff Wright
	Corriveau, Hugues	<i>Les enfants de Liverpool</i>	CAÉB
	Delvaux, Martine	<i>Blanc dehors</i>	CAÉB, Regina
	Fortier, Dominique	<i>Au péril de la mer</i>	CAÉB, Regina, Saskatoon
	Grenier, Daniel	<i>L'année la plus longue</i>	CAÉB, Regina
<b>Poetry</b>	Bouchard, Louise	<i>Personne et le soleil</i>	CAÉB
	de Bellefeuille, Normand	<i>Le poème est une maison de bord de mer</i>	0
	Dumas, Antoine	<i>Au monde. Inventaire</i>	CAÉB
	Nepveu, Pierre	<i>La dureté des matières et de l'eau</i>	0
	Saint-Éloi, Rodney	<i>Je suis la fille du baobab brûlé</i>	0
<b>Drama</b>	Bouchard, Hervé	<i>Le faux pas de l'actrice dans sa traîne</i>	0
	Bouchard, Michel Marc	<i>La divine illusion</i>	0
	David, Sébastien	<i>Les hauts-parleurs</i>	0
	Kemeid, Olivier	<i>Five kings: l'histoire de notre chute</i>	0
	Mouawad, Wajdi	<i>Inflammation du verbe vivre</i>	CAÉB, Saskatoon

<b>Governor-General Awards Winners &amp; Finalists</b>			
<b>Non-fiction</b>	Habib, André	<i>La main gauche de Jean-Pierre Léaud</i>	0
	Morin, Michel	<i>Être et ne pas être</i>	CAÉB
	Rivard, Yvon	<i>Exercices d'amitié</i>	0
	Viau, Roland	<i>Amerindia : essais d'ethnohistoire autochtone</i>	Saskatoon
	Warren, Louise	<i>La vie flottante</i>	0
<b>Translations</b>	Martel, Yann (tr. Christopher Bernard)	<i>Les hautes montagnes du Portugal</i>	CAÉB, Regina, Sask./Alice Turner
	Daschuk, James W. (tr. Catherine Ego)	<i>La destruction des Indiens des plaines</i>	CAÉB
	Saul, John (tr. Daniel Poliquin)	<i>Le grand retour : le réveil autochtone</i>	0
	Richler, Mordecai (tr. Lori Saint-Martin et Paul Gagné)	<i>Joshua</i>	CAÉB
	Apostolides, Marianne (tr. Madeleine Stratford)	<i>Elle nage</i>	CAÉB
<b>Prix Champlain</b>	LeBlanc, Georgette	<i>Le grand feu</i>	0
<b>Prix des écrivains francophones d'Amérique</b>	Ménard, David	<i>Neuvaines</i>	0
	Bérubé, Sébastien	<i>Sous la boucane du moulin</i>	0
<b>Prix France-Acadie</b>	Comeau, Phil <i>et al.</i>	<i>L'Acadie hier et aujourd'hui</i>	0
<b>Prix Hubert-Reeves</b>	Mathieu, André et Moana Lebel	<i>L'art d'imiter la nature</i>	0
<b>Prix Arthur Ellis</b>	Lemieux, Jean	<i>Le mauvais côté des choses</i>	0
<b>Prix du livre d'Ottawa</b>	Landry, Pierre-Luc	<i>Les corps extraterrestriels</i>	0
<b>Prix littéraire Le Droit</b>	Castéran, Nicole	<i>Pour l'œil du diable</i>	0
<b>Prix Rina-Lasnier</b>	Blais, Mathieu	<i>Notre présomption d'innocence</i>	0
<b>Prix Nelligan</b>	Lamy, Jonathan	<i>La vie sauve</i>	0
<b>Prix France-Québec</b>	Barbeau-Lavalette, Anaïs	<i>La femme qui fuit</i>	CAÉB, Regina, Sask./Cliff Wright
<b>Prix Robert Cliché</b>	Charbonneau-Demers, Antoine	<i>Coco</i>	CAÉB
<b>Prix littéraire Antonine Maillet – Acadie Vie</b>	Dugas, Daniel	<i>L'Esprit du temps</i>	0
<b>Prix Trillium</b>	Kaye, Véronique-Marie	<i>Marjorie Chalifoux</i>	Regina
<b>Prix Victor Barbeau</b>	Daunais, Isabelle	<i>Le roman sans aventure</i>	CAÉB
<b>Prix Alain Grandbois</b>	Lessard, Rosalie	<i>L'observatoire</i>	0

FRANCE			
Prize	Author	Title	Library Collection
Prix Goncourt	Slimani, Leila	<i>Chanson douce</i>	CAÉB, Saskatoon
	Forest, Philippe	<i>Aragon</i>	0
	Lafon, Marie-Hélène	<i>Histoires</i>	0
	Andras, Joseph	<i>Des nos frères blessés</i>	0
Prix Renaudot	Reza, Yasmina	<i>Babylone</i>	CAÉB
	Blonde, Didier	<i>Leïlah Mahi 1932</i>	0
	Janicot, Stéphanie	<i>La mémoire du monde</i>	0
Grand Prix de l'Académie française	Clermont-Tonnerre, Adélaïde de	<i>Le derniers des nôtres</i>	CAÉB
Prix Décembre	Bottière, Alain	<i>Comment Baptiste est mort</i>	0
Prix de Flore	Yargekov, Nina	<i>Double Nationalité</i>	0
Prix des Deux Magots	Adrian, Pierre	<i>La piste Pasolini</i>	0
Prix Femina	Malte, Marcus	<i>Le garçon</i>	CAÉB, Regina, Saskatoon
Prix Féneón	Boncenne, Colombe	<i>Comme neige</i>	0
Prix roman Fnac	Faye, Gaël	<i>Petit pays</i>	CAÉB, Saskatoon
Prix Interallié	Joncour, Serge	<i>Repose-toi sur moi</i>	CAÉB, Saskatoon
Prix Valéry Larbaud	Kaddour, Hédi	<i>Les prépondérants</i>	CAÉB
Prix Médicis	Jablonka, Ivan	<i>Laëtitia ou la fin des hommes</i>	CAÉB
	Henric, Jacques	<i>Boxe</i>	0

\* CAÉB, 2018 (Centre d'accès équitable aux bibliothèques : services de bibliothèque publique pour les Canadiens incapables de lire les imprimés). These titles appear in Saskatchewan's online library catalogue, but are limited-access, available only to registered patrons with proof of disability. These are not hard-copy books found in libraries.

\*\* Regina and Saskatoon indicate the central libraries. Branch libraries in Saskatoon are indicated in three instances.

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## Correspondence

[rarusso@frostburg.edu](mailto:rarusso@frostburg.edu)