

### 3.5 A Plural Society: Who Speaks What?

If you walked around Toronto, Ontario, you would hear people speaking a variety of languages. Of course, you would hear English and French, but many other cultural groups live there as well. Toronto has one of the most multicultural school districts in the world. More than half of the students in the city speak a language other than English at home.

**The Atlantic Region** Most people in this region speak English as their first language because their families came from Great Britain to farm or fish many years ago. Some French speakers settled here as well, and French remains their first language.

**The Core Region** In Ontario most people speak English; in Quebec most people speak French. Other languages spoken in this region include Chinese, Italian, and Portuguese. For many years, Canadians argued about which language their government should use. The government finally ended the argument by making both French and English the country's official languages.

Some people in Quebec think their province should be a separate country. In 1995, the people of Quebec voted whether to make the province its own state, independent of Canada. In a very close vote, the measure was rejected by just 1 percent.

**The Prairie Region** European settlers first came to this region to farm. Now oil in Alberta attracts newcomers. English is the first language for more than four out of five people who live in this region. But people who speak French, German, and Ukrainian have moved here too, seeking work and homes.

**The Pacific Region** Here English is the first language, but many people from Asia also live in this region. Chinese is the second most common language. In addition, people from India speak Punjabi, and people from the Philippines speak Tagalog.

**The Northern Region** Almost two thirds of the people in the north speak English as their first language. Many are English-speaking Canadians who moved here to work for the government. Most of the founding peoples, such as the Inuit, have retained their cultures. The Inuit, for instance, continue to speak Inuktitut.



#### Canada's Official Languages

Canada has two official languages. Signs all over the country are in both English and French. The 2001 census showed that about 22 percent of Canadians speak French most often at home. Almost 68 percent speak English most often at home. The third most spoken language is Chinese.