

French-speaking world: institutions and varieties

French B2 (upper intermediate) · Lesson

Quick answer: The Francophonie is both the community of French speakers and an international organization, the OIF, founded in 1970. French has a different status in each member country, and its vocabulary varies between France, Québec, Belgium, Switzerland and Africa, while grammar stays almost identical.

Level: French B2 (CEFR upper intermediate) · **Standards:** CEFR B2, Reading

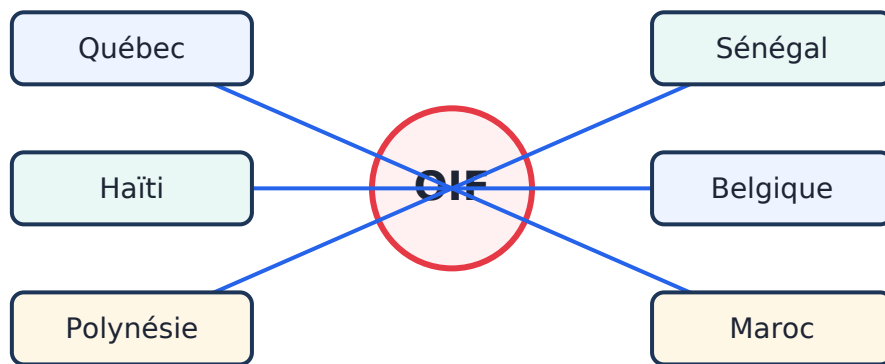
What is the Francophonie, and who belongs to it?

The word covers two ideas. La francophonie (lowercase) is the community of people who speak French. La Francophonie (capital F) is the political organization, the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), which links states and governments on five continents. Today most of the world's French speakers live in Africa, not in Europe.

Definition

Un pays francophone is a country where French is official, widely used or taught as a main language. Status varies a lot, as the table shows.

Place	Status of French
le Québec	only official language of the province
le Sénégal	official language, next to national languages such as Wolof
la Belgique	one of three official languages
la Suisse	one of four national languages
Haïti	co-official with Haitian Creole
le Maroc	not official, yet common in business and media



A few members and partners linked by the OIF (the network is much larger).

How does French change from one country to another?

Grammar and spelling stay almost the same everywhere. The differences appear in vocabulary, accent and a few number words. Native speakers understand each other without difficulty.

Meaning	France	Québec	Belgium, Switzerland
70	soixante-dix	soixante-dix	septante
90	quatre-vingt-dix	quatre-vingt-dix	nonante
evening meal	le dîner	le souper	le souper
e-mail	un e-mail	un courriel	un e-mail

Watch out

English speakers learn that déjeuner means lunch. That is true in France only. In Québec, Belgium and Switzerland, le déjeuner is breakfast, le dîner is lunch and le souper is the evening meal.

What does the Québec language law require?

Rule: the Charter of the French Language

Adopted in 1977 and known as la loi 101, it makes French the official language of Québec and the normal language of government, work, education and business. On commercial signs, French must be clearly predominant; other languages may appear, but smaller. Children of most newcomers attend French-language school.

Examples

- Cette enseigne respecte la loi : le français domine. — This sign respects the law: French dominates.
- L'Office québécois de la langue française veille à son application. — The Office oversees how it is applied.



Four landmarks of the French-speaking world.

How do you discuss language policy at B2 level?

- promouvoir / défendre une langue — to promote / defend a language
- le plurilinguisme — the use of several languages
- un locuteur — a speaker
- à l'échelle mondiale — worldwide
- veiller à ce que + subjunctive — to make sure that

Culture note

Each year on 20 March, the French-speaking world celebrates the Journée internationale de la Francophonie.

Zoé's tip

When a French friend says dîner, ask where she lives. In Lyon it is the evening meal; in Montréal it is lunch.

Key points to remember

- The OIF links states and governments on five continents.
- Most French speakers in the world live in Africa.
- Québec's Charter of the French Language dates from 1977.
- Septante and nonante are used in Belgium and Switzerland.
- In Québec, le souper is the evening meal.

French-speaking world: institutions and varieties: frequently asked questions

What does OIF stand for?

It stands for Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. It brings together states and governments that share French and promotes education, culture and cooperation.

Is French the only official language of Québec?

Yes. The Charter of the French Language of 1977 makes French the sole official language of the province, although English remains widely spoken and protected in some public services.

Why do Belgians say septante instead of soixante-dix?

Belgian and Swiss French kept older, more regular number words. Septante (70) and nonante (90) are standard there, while some Swiss areas also say huitante for 80.

Does French differ a lot between countries?

Mainly in vocabulary, expressions and accent. Written grammar and spelling are very close, so a B2 learner can read texts from every French-speaking region.

When is the Journée de la Francophonie?

It is celebrated on 20 March every year, with events in schools, libraries and cultural centers across the French-speaking world.