The study of language contact in Canada cannot be isolationist. National frontiers do not bound a phenomenon that characterizes all mankind, everywhere, since time immemorial.

The consequences of language contact in Canada are universal; in specific details only are they particularistic. The number of speakers of the indigenous languages has diminished in confrontation with languages representing dominant and oppressive peoples. The English and French languages continue to diverge from their original sources. Whole groups of speakers of other languages have switched to the major national languages, and mother tongues, when retained, have experienced changes ranging from minor to massive. In other words, where populations have retained their mother tongues instead of shifting to another one, their languages have changed in both form and function.

The patterns of Canadian language contact will be seen best in cross-cultural perspective. While one eye examines local phenomena, the other retains the image of what is reported to have happened in New Guinea, Morocco or Asia Minor. An a priori position on the uniqueness of the Canadian case will inevitably distort our research. Asserting, for example, that in contrast with the United States, "cultural groups in Canada have not usually been conceived of as either 'ethnic' nor 'minority' groups which are undergoing obligatory transition to some fairly common and homogeneous national culture" (J.W. Berry, p. 301) is to ignore what has happened to many immigrant groups, not only the Doukhobors and Mennonites. To belittle the influence of a "mainstream culture", on the assumption that this perspective is "an imported framework" (op. cit., p. 309) is to deny something that is problematic. That is, why have some people, both Canadian and American, experienced assimilation and others not - or to a lesser degree? In fact, what can be said of similar events for any part of the world?

There is no need for a "Canadian ... theory of minority relations" (Driedger, p. Ms. 14). If a theory is really needed, a search must indeed be made for an adequate one. The consequence will be the
enrichment of social science irrespective of national boundaries. And if we find one, it will not be Canadian. A true theory will have universal applicability. National boundaries will mean nothing.

The fact of the matter is that it is premature to grasp after theories for the study of language maintenance. This field of study at this time is not illuminated either by theories of sociocultural change or by theories of intergroup relations. This is J.A. Fishman's conclusion after a survey of the field (1966, p. 440), and it would be seconded by most of his colleagues. What we need most, as he goes on to declare, is information of cross-cultural and diachronic regularities. This is one reason why Canadian cases must be researched. And they must be examined by constant reference to the concepts, models and case studies produced by other workers.

One useful approach would be to test each term and each generalization that is pronounced in the Canadian context. For example, what does multicultural mean in each of its various uses? Thus, "multiculturalism is a reality in all of Canada except perhaps ..." and "many groups seek support" for multiculturalism (Driedger, pp. 222-223). The symmetry of prefixation creates categories that are more fanciful than they are real:

| Uni-lingual | Uni-cultural |
| Mono-lingual | Mono-cultural |
| Bi-lingual | Bi-cultural |
| Tri-lingual | Tri-cultural |
| Multi-lingual | Multi-cultural |

These are lexical, not phenomenological, paradigms. For one thing, the linguistic systems are much more discrete than the cultural ones. Languages have grammars, but the same cannot be said of cultures. Yet Canadians discuss bi-/multi-lingualism and culturalism as if they knew what they were talking about. Rarely (and not once in the papers I have so far seen for the Consultative Group on the Individual, Language and Society) are these terms rigorously, or even carefully, defined.

As for generalizations, we can find numerous examples in the papers already referred to. For example, "multilingualism may be impractical in an urban society"; "it seems increasingly more difficult to maintain the boundaries of the minority ethnos in the urban environment" (Driedger, p. 220, p. 231. It would appear that these assertions are ad hoc and commonsensical. They are related to what Fishman (1966, p. 443) calls "the most reasonable and best documented generalizations" in the study of language contact. However, he is careful to add that the urban environment has not always favoured change in the direction of language shift. In India, ethnic groups have maintained their languages many
centuries after migration to a linguistically very diverse area. Russian Molokan sectarians have retained their language in the heart of Los Angeles after 70 years, whereas other Russian-speaking sectarians (viz., New Israelites) are almost entirely Spanish-speaking in rural Uruguay (Colonia de Russo or Colonia de San Javier) even after founding a completely Russian village (James J. Samarin, personal communication).

I summarize to this point by saying that we endanger our research by restricting ourselves to the use of the methodological and terminological artifacts of Canadian studies.

My intention, one should understand clearly, is not to denigrate the creation or use of conceptual models for the study of language maintenance and language shift. On the contrary, I call for intensive search. Driedger has suggested a few. Their primary weakness is in fact that they are too few. (His first category I find entirely devoid of explanatory power. It is not clear how his six regions are social-structurally identified and how they explain the dynamics of language contact in the nation.) Rather than propose an alternative or supplementary schema that incorporates individual and social factors, I should like to call attention to one concept that seems to be ignored by all contributors at this conference. Let us call it variability.

Linguistic systems - language being the best example - are more or less discrete and self-contained. But it is entirely different with language use: speech or parole is not necessarily digital ("either language x or language y") but gradient, incremental, variable. This is what people are reacting against in talking about "poor Ukrainian" or "Franglais". Yet the phenomenon is comprehensive, and it cannot be ignored in our study. A speaker's use of mother tongue and second language, to take only the example of code switching, can be variable with respect to topic, situation, domain, and so forth. "Home language" is not a pure category. What happens linguistically in the home depends on a variety of factors. Ignoring such variability in any study whatsoever assures its incompleteness if not invalidity.