

Assessment of Multilingual Collections in Public Libraries: A Case Study of the Toronto Public Library

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Introduction

Considering the linguistic diversity in Canada, it is vital for public libraries to provide collection items in languages other than the official languages (Chilana, 2001). When libraries build multilingual collections it shows respect for that linguistic minority, allows them to preserve their mother tongue, and stay connected to their roots (Atlestam, Brunnstrom, & Myhre, 2011; Tanackovic, Lacovic, & Stanarevic, 2012).

While a collection should be representative of the linguistic diversity of the community, it is not necessarily feasible for public libraries to build an equitable multilingual collection.

Toronto Public Library (TPL) has been frequently recognized for their multilingual collection development efforts (Dilevko & Dali, 2002; Rogers, 2003; Zielinska, 1980). Smaller libraries can learn from larger libraries that have the resources to focus on ML collection development. This case study of the TPL ML collection sought to reveal how representative the collection is of the immigrant population and demonstrate how ML collections can be developed in practice.

Research Questions

To gain an understanding of the TPL multilingual collection, the following research questions are explored:

- How many different language collections are available at the library?
- How many items are available in each language collection?
- What formats are available in each language collection?
- Is the size of each language collection equitable to the size of the minority language community?

Methods

Using Statistics Canada (2017) Census of Population 2016 data for the Toronto census division, values from "mother tongue" and "language spoken most often at home" were collected and ranked. The top 18 languages listed in both categories were the same. These languages correspond to searchable languages in the TPL (2017) online public access catalogue (OPAC), however only "Chinese" can be selected in the TPL catalogue so Mandarin and Cantonese were combined. Therefore, 17 non-official languages were explored, as well as the official languages of Canada, French and English.

Using the TPL (2017) OPAC November 12, 2017, the total number of items available in every language was collected, as well as the number of items in each of the formats of the selected 17 languages and in English and French.

The proportions of language groups, library items, and formats were analyzed. Calculations for the number of items per capita were determined, but altered to consist of the number of items for a specific language and the number of people who speak it.

Results

Table 1. Amount of non-official language collections within each item range

Number of items in language collection	Number of non-official language collections
1-9	156
10-99	72
100-999	37
1,000-9,999	34
10,000+	6

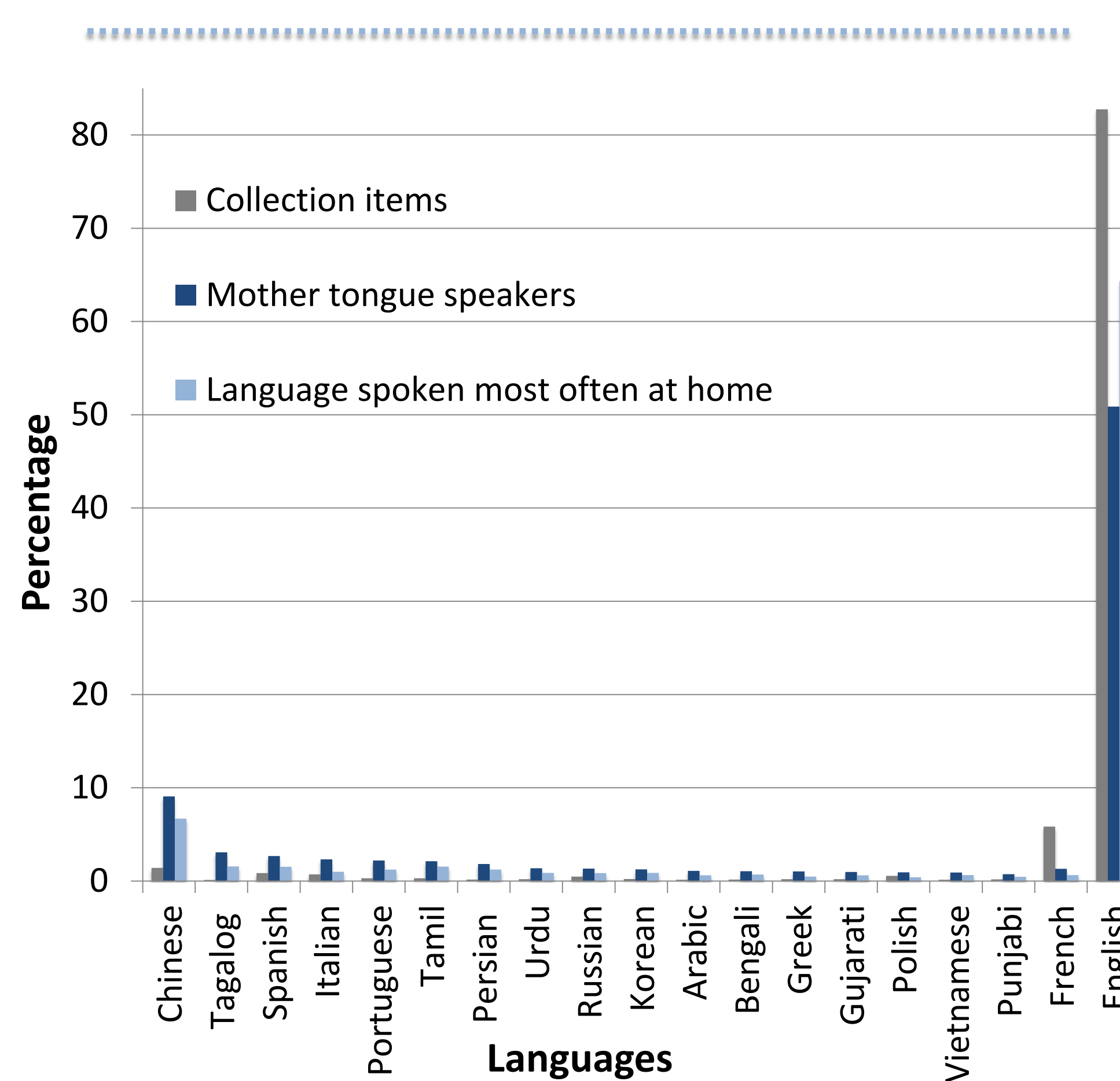


Figure 1. Proportions of collection items and mother tongue speakers

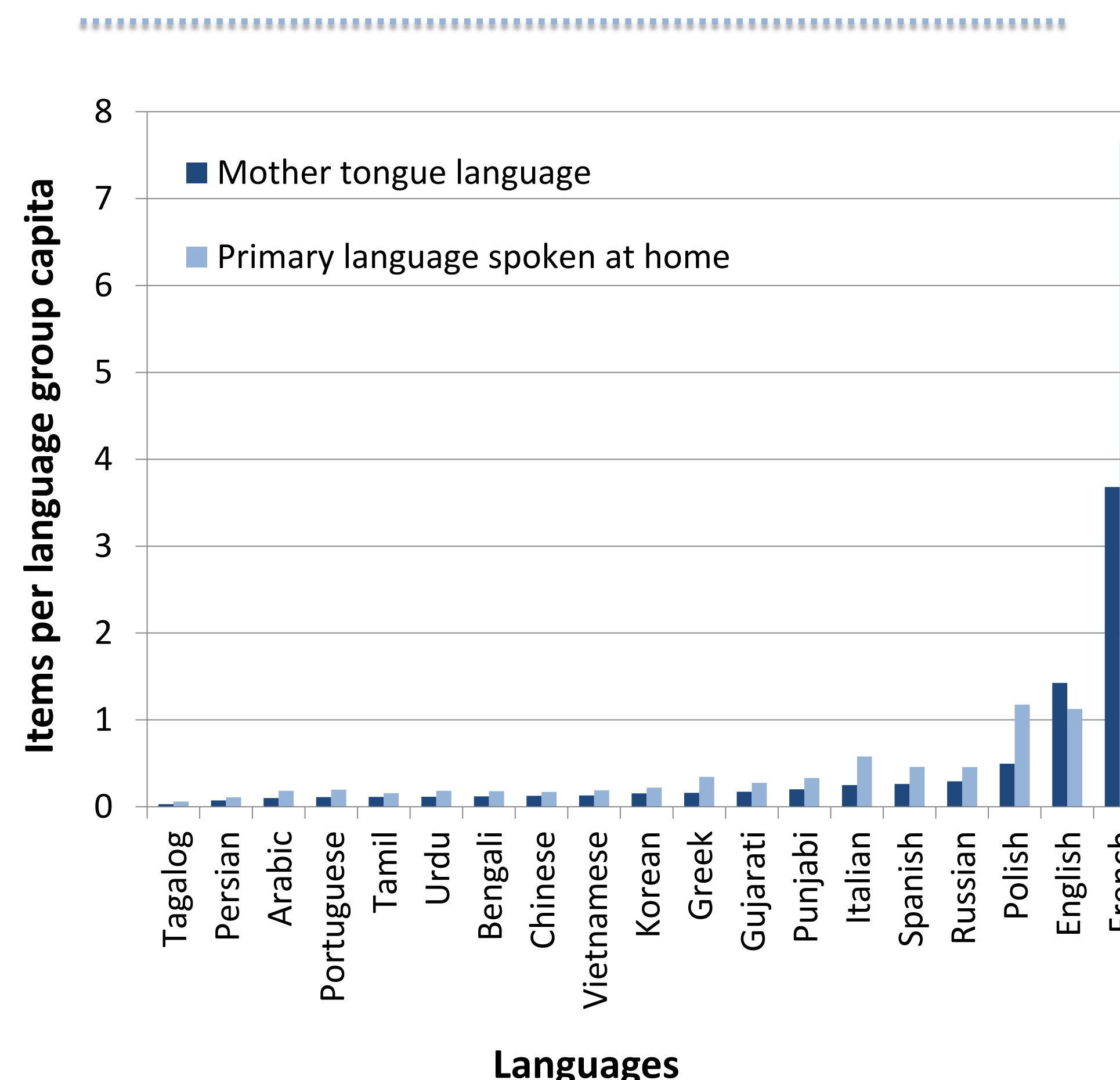


Figure 2. Items per language group capita based on mother tongue speakers and primary language spoken at home

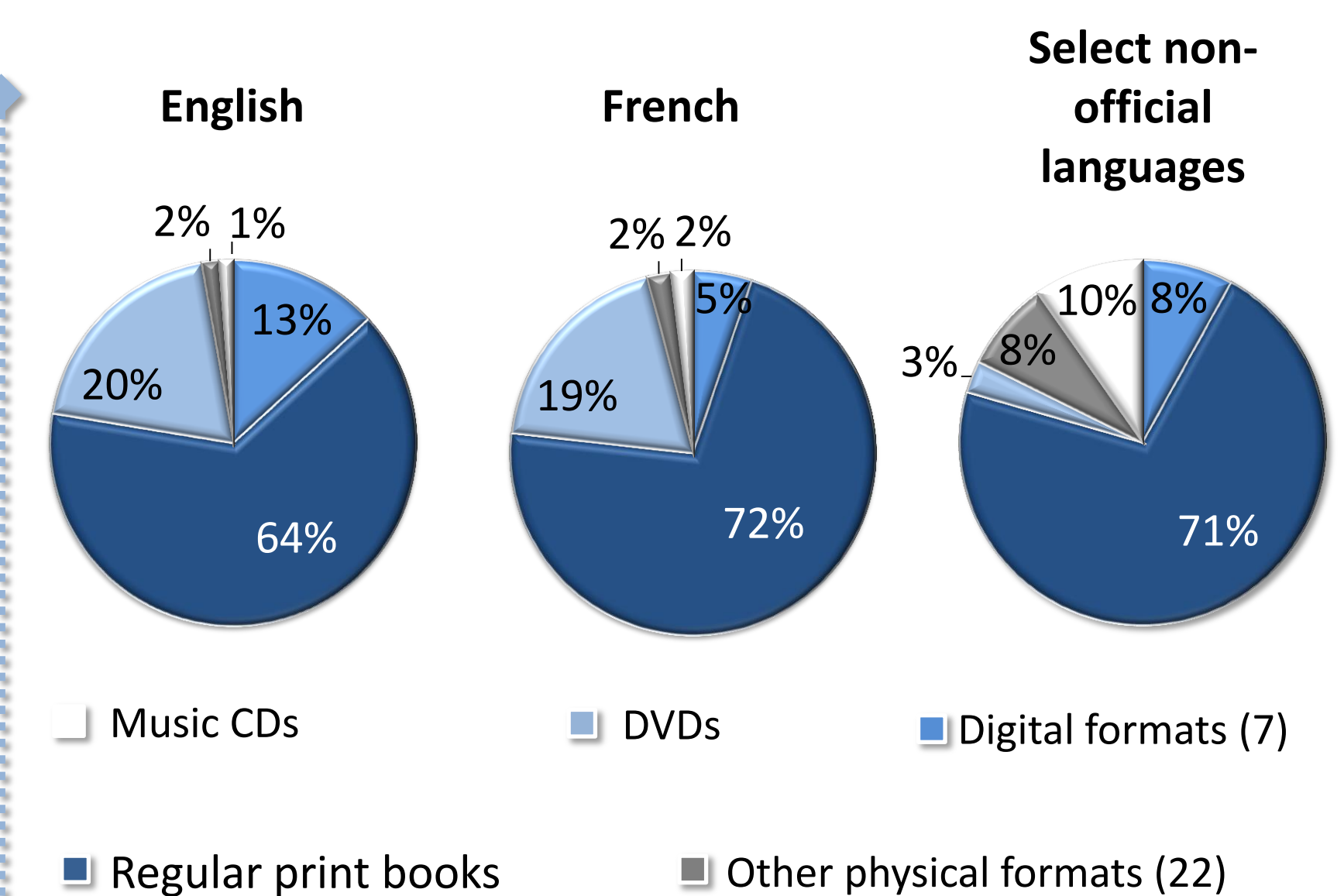


Figure 3. Proportions of select format types

Conclusion

- While the collection comprises many languages, there is significant collection development for very few non-official languages.
- The collection is mostly focused on English and French materials, which is not representative of the mother tongues spoken in Toronto.
- English and French speakers have more selection and variety when it comes to the number of items and format types available to them, whereas speakers of other languages have fewer options.

There are many challenges for libraries when it comes to multilingual collection development that providing equitable service is difficult; even a large library system like TPL cannot meet the benchmark.

While public libraries should continue to strive to meet the information needs of all members in the community, it would be more realistic to use the existing TPL multilingual collection as a guide to collection development.

This study will allow public libraries to implement collection assessments for comparative analytics to the TPL multilingual collection.

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