

THE DEBATE  
ON L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU FRANÇAIS  
IN QUÉBEC

*Ian Lockerbie*

The debate on what is called *l'aménagement du français*<sup>1</sup> in Québec might to an outside observer seem a slightly arcane matter, of interest perhaps to some professional linguists and educationalists, but to few others. On the contrary, it is a topic that has generated a

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1. The term *aménagement* is quite often used to include the wider phenomenon of language legislation. In this article it is used only in its restricted sense, referring to the aim of identifying a distinct form of Québec French with its own range of registers, including a standard register.

surprising degree of conflict, with regular outbursts of controversy in the national media. The reason for this is that the issues involved are closely connected to questions of national identity, and arise from the often difficult and turbulent history of Québec, which has affected its language just as much as its institutions.

The quarrel is between two broad schools of linguists, whom we may call for convenience the *conservatives* (with no derogatory implication) and the *aménagistes*. What concerns both camps is the issue of *la qualité de la langue*. There is complete agreement between them that French in Québec, as the public language of the nation, should be of the highest possible quality. Where the dispute occurs is in choosing the standard by which language quality should be judged. The conservatives see the norms of good French as deriving directly from France, and requiring little or no adaptation for North American users. The *aménagistes* believe, on the

contrary, that French in North America has distinctive features which should be given an important place within any definition of the norm.

There is nothing unusual in discussion of language standards. All language communities develop a shared understanding of what is to be considered as the norm of correct language and are guided by this in a variety of ways. The norm, for example, is duly transcribed into grammar books and language teaching material and becomes the basis of what is taught in schools. It also implicitly determines the content of dictionaries and similar reference works which offer language guidance to the public at large. What makes the situation in Québec unusual is the abnormal history of French in North America and the sensitive memories that this has left in the group consciousness.

The key factor here is, of course, the long domination of French by English following the Conquest of 1759. For a long period

French Canada was isolated from France and its language. The use of English frequently became a condition of employment for French Canadians, and even where this was not the case, the high profile of English in the general language environment had considerable repercussions on the quality of French in everyday use. Québec French became pervaded by English words, used in the workplace, in commerce and in social life, with consequential effects on grammar and pronunciation. The result was a considerable impoverishment of the language which provoked feelings of alienation and dispossession in French Canada<sup>2</sup>. This is why the rehabilitation of French became a major cultural imperative of the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. For the new corrupted form of French that Québec had inherited was a mark of inferiority that had to be overcome by a public commitment to the

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2. See the excellently chronicled history in Chantal BOUCHARD, *La langue et le nombril. Histoire d'une obsession québécoise*, Montreal, Fides, 1998.

highest standards of language use. Correct French, “pure” French, became something to which every citizen should aspire as a condition of personal and national self-respect: *Bien parler, c’est se respecter.*

There is no doubt that these language aspirations have been largely achieved. Modern Québec is an upwardly mobile, very progressive society, and French as its public language has developed in pace with this process. This is not to say that language issues have ceased to be a preoccupation of Québec society, as the recent meetings (in 2001) of the *Commission des États Généraux de la Langue* have demonstrated. There are still many preoccupations with the pressures on French in a sub-continent which is overwhelmingly English-speaking. But in terms of the quality of the language, the problems faced now by Québec are no longer those of an abnormal linguistic situation, but rather those arising from social factors (*décrochage scolaire*, the integration of immigrants, etc.) which also occur in France

and many other modern societies. The language encountered in every sphere of public activity is indisputably a standard form of French which any user of French as a world language will recognize without difficulty. This is what leads Chantal Bouchard to the relatively optimistic conclusion that, after 150 years of trauma, Québec society is at last overcoming its *insécurité linguistique* and feels relatively secure in its status as a French speaking nation<sup>3</sup>.

Nevertheless, it is not an exaggeration to say that some sectors of public opinion remain haunted by the memory of the dark ages of linguistic degradation and that this colors their whole attitude towards the language. Even in the year in which Bouchard's book was published, a fierce confrontation broke out over the publication of the *Dictionnaire historique du français québécois*, a book which to the innocent outside observer would seem

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3. *Ibid.*

to be an admirable work of scholarship, but which, by conferring academic legitimacy on the Québec variety of French, triggered certain internal phobias. Equally, in normal everyday reading of the Québec press, it would be unusual, in any twelve month period, not to find a crop of polemical articles protesting about allegedly deplorable standards of language use in every area of Québec life. The inevitable villain in such protests is the popular form of speech known as *le jòual*, which has become the shorthand term by which the Québec variety of French in general is demonized<sup>4</sup>.

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4. See Ian LOCKERBIE, "The place of vernacular languages in the cultural identities of Québec and Scotland", *Québec and Scotland: an Evolving Comparison*, Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh, 2003. That article deals with the whole question of *le jòual* and the stigmatized popular registers of the language, which underlie and cast a baleful shadow over the work of the *aménagistes*. These matters are closely related to the present work but, to avoid duplication, are only briefly referred to here.

The conservative position on language quality is to some extent marked by the tendency to consider any local usage as linguistically inferior. While not rejecting Québec French totally, it sees its proper domain as being essentially the informal registers of popular, and mainly spoken, language. But for all public situations requiring serious, sophisticated and dignified use of language, only Standard French (SF)<sup>5</sup>, the one internationally recognized and respected variety, is acceptable.

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5. SF as used in this article is to be understood as the educated form of French spoken and written in France. The term *le français international* is often used in this sense, but this term is misleading in its implication that there is a standard form of French common to all French speakers *which is distinct from that used in France*. This is not the case, and the term thus obscures all the issues involved in the concept of language variety. A better set of descriptive terms will hopefully emerge when these issues become better known. What is especially missing is a term to refer to the common core of French vocabulary, i.e. the large stock of "neutral" words used by all French speakers: *le français commun*, as suggested by Pierre MARTEL and Hélène CAJOLET-LAGANIÈRE seems possible (*Le français québécois. Usages,*

Perhaps it is true that, at a certain historical stage, it was necessary for Québec French to align itself on SF in order to rectify the abnormal linguistic situation referred to above. Probably the most important initiative in this sense was taken by the Québec state itself, in the early days of the Révolution Tranquille, through the specially created *Office de la Langue Française* which was made responsible for promoting correct usage. The OLF notably set in train an extensive and long-running project to create correct French terminologies in all the sectors of modern manufacturing and commerce where Québec French had adopted English or English-derived expressions. This exercise of linguistic recuperation can rightly be seen as socially and politically progressive in the historical circumstances of the time. Interestingly, the OLF's first director

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*standard et aménagement*, Québec, Institut québécois de recherches sur la culture, 1996, p. 73).

Jean-Claude Corbeil used the term “aménagement” to characterize this policy :

*En résumé, tous les travaux de l'Office sont orientés vers un même but : permettre à la collectivité québécoise de prendre en main le destin de la langue française au Québec [...]. Par analogie, [...] nous utilisons pour la désigner l'expression “aménagement linguistique” comme on parle de l'aménagement du territoire<sup>6</sup>.*

But the OLF also made pronouncements on the general language, alongside its work on the technical lexis, and here it could be said that its influence, at least initially, was less constructive. In 1967 it issued a list of expressions entitled *Les canadianismes de bon aloi* (1967) which does not seem entirely consistent with Corbeil's statement. By authorizing only a very few specifically North American

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6. Jean-Claude CORBEIL, *Guide de travail en terminologie*, Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, coll. “Cahiers de l'Office de la langue française”, n° 20, 1974.

expressions as fit for use by speakers of good French, this document fostered the notion that, with very few exceptions, Québec French was not legitimate. Rather than “taking in hand” its own usage, Québec, by implication, had to follow standards laid down across the Atlantic. While the OLF itself passed beyond this initial phase, evolving in later years towards more a liberal stance, other commentators in the conservative camp have clung steadfastly to a more purist position. Such has been the case with the numerous guides to good usage<sup>7</sup> whose principal aim is to provide their readers with the approved SF terms to replace what are deemed incorrect or inappropriate local usages. At its most extreme, this purist position asserts that if Québec

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7. Gérard DAGENAIS, *Dictionnaire des difficultés de la langue française au Canada*, Montréal, Éditions Pedagogia, 1967 ; Gilles COLPRON, *Les anglicismes au Québec*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1971 ; Marie-Éva DE VILLERS [ed.], *Multi-dictionnaire des difficultés de la langue française*, Montréal, Québec/Amérique, 1988.

adopted its own variety of French, it would be locked into a linguistic ghetto and unable to communicate with other French speakers throughout the world<sup>8</sup>.

The *aménagiste* case, on the contrary, is that the standards which define good usage can only be determined within the linguistic community concerned. They share with Corbeil and OLF the sociolinguistic view of language which sees it as being strongly conditioned by its geographical and social environment. The more distinctive the language environment, the greater will be the variation in language usage and the greater the need for different language norms. After nearly four centuries of separate development, in a community far removed from its original source in Europe, Québec French has inevitably, in this view, taken on distinctive

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8. See, for example, Lysiane GAGNON, "Oui, mais quelle langue?", *La Presse*, April 1<sup>st</sup> 1989 and Annette PAQUOT, "Conception identitaire de la langue et enseignement du français", *La Presse*, March 14<sup>th</sup> 2001.

features of its own. To accept only the forms of the language known in France, must lead, as the purist position shows, to an attitude that stigmatizes French Canadian forms that are completely natural to a North American user of the language. The aim of the *aménagistes*, therefore, is to “repatriate” linguistic judgments<sup>9</sup> and elaborate a Standard Québécois along the lines defined by the Association Québécoise des Professeurs de Français in 1977 :

*Le français standard d'ici est la variété du français socialement valorisée que la majorité des Québécois francophones tendent à utiliser dans les situations de communication formelle*<sup>10</sup>.

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9. Jean-Denis GENDRON, “Existe-t-il un usage prédominant à l’heure actuelle au Québec ?”, Lionel BOISVERT, Claude POIRIER and Claude VERREAULT [eds.], *La lexicographie québécoise : bilan et perspectives*, Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 1989, p. 89.

10. Pierre MARTEL and Hélène CAJOLET-LAGANIÈRE, *op. cit.*, p. 77. The abbreviation SQ will be used in this sense. In

We are thus faced with a considerable conflict of attitudes and beliefs. At one level, there is a polemic among the intellectual élite arising from competing philosophies of language and ideologies, which explains why the exchanges are often heated. (There is not, however, an immediate equation between conservative and radical positions on language, on one hand, and politics, on the other. Some language conservatives are political nationalists and vice versa). At another level, and more innocently, there is a wider misunderstanding based simply on the fact that the issues have not been well documented until relatively recently. The notion that there is a Standard Québécois is recent and not yet in general circulation. Most Québécois, whether

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addition QF (Québec French) will refer to the wider totality of Québec French including the vernacular. It should be noted that there are differences between QF and other varieties of North American French, especially Acadian. The issues discussed in this article relate to QF, but not necessarily to the other varieties.

highly educated or not, are in the position of M. Jourdain : they use SQ every day without explicitly realizing it. The signs of confusion are to be found in every user poll. When asked, the general public prefers many aspects of the Québec French that they actually use, but sees Standard French as more “correct” and therefore “superior”<sup>11</sup>. The same reactions can be found in every minority language community, and simply reflect the predominance of a prestigious norm and general uncertainty about the status of language varieties and how they are to be distinguished.

## THE NATURE OF QUÉBEC FRENCH

It is no part of the *aménagiste* case to exaggerate the differences between language varieties. Quite on the contrary, it is freely admitted

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11. Hélène CAJOLET-LAGANIÈRE, “Attentes et besoins du public québécois en matière de langue”, Louis MERCIER and Claude VERREAULT [eds.], *Les marques lexicographiques en contexte québécois*, Québec, OLF/Gouvernement du Québec, 1998, p. 68.

that SQ is very close to SF, and in many respects becoming closer<sup>12</sup>. As a result of the normal processes of education and international exchange, many of the older vernacular expressions are disappearing in favor of standard counterparts. The large numbers of Québec people who follow events in France and watch TV5 will frequently adopt the words and expressions by which media events are transmitted to them, in the same way that citizens of the UK adopt expressions from the US and other parts of the English-speaking world. In this respect, language communities are no longer confined within national frontiers, and are increasingly permeable to influences from related cultures elsewhere and, in such a situation, Québec is much more likely to be influenced by France than vice-versa. Nevertheless, despite increasing conver-

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12. Claude POIRIER, "Le lexique québécois : son évolution, ses composantes", René BOUCHARD [ed.], *Culture populaire et littératures au Québec*, Stanford, Anima Libri, 1980, p. 52.

gence, many distinctive usages continue to exist and thrive – there seems to be no law by which one can predict the survival or death of vernacular expressions. More particularly, despite increasing uniformization, the ambient language environment remains distinctive. As Britain and America are, in Bernard Shaw's famous aphorism, divided by the same language, so are Québec and France, and for the same socio-linguistic reasons.

If differences in language environments are not always fully understood, one reason is that their effect varies, depending on whether receptive or productive competence in the language is involved. In the receptive dimension, a language user can understand virtually every statement in that language, wherever in the world it may be coined<sup>13</sup>. If there are differences among varieties, these either pose no

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13. Alain REY, "À la recherche de la norme : un dictionnaire québécois", Pierre MARTEL and Jacques MAURAI [eds.], *Langues et sociétés en contact*, Tübingen, Niemeyer, coll. "Canadiana Romanica", vol. 8, 1994, p. 312.

receptive problem or can be quickly learned with minimum inconvenience. On first going to Québec, a user of another variety of French discovers distinctive expressions like *babillard*, *brigardière*, *blé d'Inde*, *dépanneur*, *magasiner*, *sacres*, *échapper une assiette* or *barrer une porte*. While in Québec, he may well learn to integrate these expressions into his productive competence, motivated by courtesy and a desire to blend into the language environment. But he will always be aware of them as "foreign" elements which are not part of his own normal production. Back in his own language context, these are not the expressions he would spontaneously use, except as conscious "quotations" from another language source. This is the phenomenon which, multiplied over hundreds of instances covering a wide spectrum of variation, adds up to the elusive but undeniable difference immortalised by Bernard Shaw.

## PRONUNCIATION AND LEXIS

The two most obvious aspects of language in which variation occurs are pronunciation and lexis. Uniquely, the former arouses little controversy, because in SQ it is a feature that is so all-pervasive as to be unquestioningly accepted. Although some older pronunciations have disappeared from normal speech (the former [we] vowel sound, as in *moi*, *roi*, for example) other highly distinctive and equally old features (such as the affrication of *d/t* in certain positions) have been accommodated into the accepted norm<sup>14</sup>. To this extent, a norm for the spoken language in Québec is largely agreed upon, clearly different from the norm in France, with no serious disagreement between conservatives and *aménagistes*. But the existence of this variation has an obvious consequence if dictionaries produced in

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14. Luc OSTIGNY and Claude TOUSIGNANT, "Introduction", *Le français québécois : normes et usages*, Montréal, Guérin, 1993.

France are used in Québec without adaptation to pronunciation guides.

Lexis remains the main area of dispute because it is the most accessible feature of language and the one that is most usually taken to define it. Since, as pointed out above, SQ shares the overwhelming majority of its words with SF, it is lexis that also gives rise to the claim that the two varieties are, at least in written form, indistinguishable. Typically, Québec journalists or intellectuals have denied that a separate SQ exists by instancing their own texts, supposedly written in a language identical to SF, when in fact they are marked by numerous *québécoïsmes*<sup>15</sup>.

As always, the flashpoint occurs around highly marked colloquial items, stigmatized by one camp but more tolerated by the other. Fortunately, however, the *aménagistes* have been able to move the debate forward by

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15. Claude POIRIER, "Le français et les québécoïsmes", *La Presse*, May 25<sup>th</sup> 1989.

drawing our attention to less contentious areas of lexis which distinguish SQ. Thus even purists will accept that something like 20 % of the total lexis is made up of legitimate Québec words, most of them in active daily use<sup>16</sup>. Many are words and usages that have remained more active in a particular sense in Québec than in France (*s'écarter* for *se perdre*, *venir* for *devenir*, *marier* for *épouser*, *menterie* for *mensonge*, *dispendieux* for *coûteux*) or simply have a greater frequency of use (*hair*). But in addition, within the basic vocabulary stock shared with SF, the connotations that everyday words acquire through having functioned in different environments can vary significantly. This would appear to be the case even with such simple words as *innocent*, *avenue*, *cuisinière*, *torrent*, *fleuve*, *bois*, *pin*, *jaser* and *bas*<sup>17</sup>,

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16. Marie-Éva DE VILLERS, "Les marques lexicographiques : des points de repère essentiels pour l'usage des mots", Louis MERCIER and Claude VERREAUULT [eds.], *op. cit.*

17. See Jean-Claude CORBEIL, "Le régionalisme lexical : un cas privilégié de variation linguistique" and Claude POIRIER,

and it is not an exaggeration to say that examples of this phenomenon are endless. A word such as *province* cannot be used in Québec in many of the uses it has in France (*une petite ville de province, vivre en province, un jeune provincial frais débarqué*, etc. can all be recognized but not produced). Every Québécois knows the verbs *casser* and *aboyer* but the verbs most frequently used are *briser* and *japper*. *Congère*, if it is known, will never be used: *banc de neige* is the only acceptable term. *La colonisation* is a well known historical term in each country but what it refers to is radically different in each case. *Un petit suisse* is not the same thing in Québec as in France. The effects of connotation, frequency of use and historically determined differences of reference, are so widespread that these aspects

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“Les avenues de la lexicographie québécoise”, both in *La lexicographie québécoise : bilan et perspective*, and Jean-Claude BOULANGER, “Le pacte normatif du français québécois : réflexions sur les marques lexicographiques diatoniques”, Louis MERCIER and Claude VERREAULT [eds.], *op. cit.*

of language alone would justify the existence of separate dictionaries, as we shall see.

In addition SQ, as an autonomous variety, has proved fertile in adding to the lexical stock of French. If, in one respect, modernization has moved SQ nearer to SF, in other respects it has also fostered distinctiveness, because an expanding modern society naturally creates new cultural practices and new institutions of its own, which trigger new indigenous vocabulary. At the level of morphology, the feminization of titles occurred in Québec long before France, and is still more extensive and less contentious – a small but culturally revealing distinction. There are extensive areas of terminology, from geography (*nordicité*), culture (*téléroman*) and education (*collège*, *cégep*, *polyvalente*, even *baccalauréat*), to health care (*virage ambulatoire*), social security and government (one of the most fertile areas of distinctive lexis), finance (*REER*), and telecommunications (*courriel*) where new coinages have multiplied. Often, new technical

terms will take on extended meanings (*échancier*), some of which have spread elsewhere in *la francophonie*<sup>18</sup>.

But to limit discussion to discreet lexical items is to miss a key aspect of the subject. Rather than being simply a matter of individual words, it is as much in their combination and structuring into discourse that the distinctiveness of a variety occurs. Since every culture has its own traditions and habits of thought, it also generates its own patterns in language, and its own rhetorical strategies<sup>19</sup> which in turn lead to characteristic associations of words. These range from set idioms and expressions, of which there is a large number, many of them vernacular but many also used in SQ (*c'est de valeur*), to looser collocations of words habitually grouped together either semantically or syntactically.

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18. Jean-Claude BOULANGER, *ibid.*, p. 181.

19. Alain REY calls them *stratégies de discours* ("Intervention in discussion", *La lexicographie québécoise: bilan et perspective*, p. 168).

Hence connotation and difference of meaning can occur in a grouping of words that in themselves are not distinctive. The expression *l'aménagement du français* itself carries an immediacy of meaning and implications for a Québec speaker that it does not have in SF, and the same would be true of, for example, *le fait anglais* and a host of others<sup>20</sup>.

What this points to is the influence on meaning of paradigmatic clusters of words. It is because of the paradigm of constitutional terms in which it occurs in Québec that the word *province* cannot function in the same way as in France. Similarly it is because of paradigmatic relationships that the choice of terms to refer to a car is not the same in SQ as in SF<sup>21</sup>. One of the terms, *le char*, comes from

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20. Pierre MARTEL, Nadine VINCENT and Hélène CAJOLET-LAGANIÈRE give many others examples in "Le français québécois et la légitimité de sa description", *Revue québécoise de linguistique*, vol. 26, n° 2, 1998, p. 97-106.

21. Claude POIRIER, "Le lexique québécois : son évolution, ses composantes", p. 55.

the historic vernacular and in everyday use has been replaced by SF terms, but it survives very possibly, like many other vernacular terms, because it allows for stylistic variation within the paradigm. In this case *le char* can carry a tone of affectionate irony not present in *voiture* or *auto*, similar to the tone that English speakers sometimes obtain by referring to their car in the feminine. Elsewhere, other historic vernacular terms will be used as a fleeting mark of national identity, even though the user will normally choose the corresponding SF terms for everyday purposes. Such relationships among words involve few or no difficulties of communication between SF and SQ users, but they generate important nuances of meaning that add up to a distinctive form of the language.

## ANGLICISMS

Historically, anglicisms have been central to the whole concern about North American

French, an importance encapsulated in the title of Jules-Paul Tardivel's famous nineteenth century tract: *L'anglicisme, voilà l'ennemi!* (1880). But, as a result of the general social progress of Québec, that situation has now changed dramatically. On the one hand, as linguistic normality has been restored, there has been a marked reduction in the number of borrowings in common use. On the other hand, there is now also a growing awareness, in every sector of opinion, that all world languages, including SF itself, are exposed to the invasive influence of English. France, despite its position as a powerful nation with a prestigious culture, has had to follow the example of Québec in enacting legislation to protect its language in its own public arena. As a result, there is no longer a tendency to hold up Québec as a unique case of French adulterated by English and anglicisms no longer dominate the language debate.

Nevertheless history has given anglicisms a distinctive place in North American French,

and in some cases they still divide the linguistic camps. In France, anglicisms have been introduced through the intellectual and fashionable interests of the middle classes, and, more recently, via youth culture and pop music. As a result, they have mainly retained their original form as manifest borrowings. In Québec, on the other hand, they were more extensively adopted by the working class and have penetrated more deeply into both the sound system and morphology of the receiving language<sup>22</sup>. Hence, the more popular and familiar the register, and the longer they have been established in popular use, the greater the degree of transfiguration in form (*enfirouapé, bécosse, mâche-mallo, l'apenuillère*) or meaning (*une fille bien le fun, ma blonde, son chum, smatte*). But their double identity as anglicisms originating in the vernacular makes them typical of the language

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22. *Ibid.*, and Claude POIRIER, "Problèmes et méthodes d'un dictionnaire général du français québécois", *Revue québécoise de linguistique théorique et appliquée*, vol. 7, n° 1, p. 13-45.

features deprecated by purists, who tend to associate popular usage with debased language and often prefer an outright anglicism if it is used in France to a correct French term used only in Québec: *square*, for example, is recommended in preference to *carré* as an architectural term<sup>23</sup>. The *aménagistes*, on the contrary, are more disposed to welcome naturalized anglicisms as a manifestation of linguistic creativity which enriches the language and gives QF a flavour of its own. This particular class of terms thus falls into the main territory of dispute about language variety and the extent to which they will become fully embedded as acceptable items in SQ will depend on the outcome of the current debate.

One also finds in SQ many expressions which give the impression of being anglicisms (*incidemment, présentement, habiletés*), although in fact they exist in SF, but are not used

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23. Marie-Éva DE VILLERS [ed.], *Multi-dictionnaire des difficultés de la langue française*.

as extensively or in the same stylistic ways in that variety. Rather than being anglicisms in the strict sense, therefore, they illustrate the general tendency for words to acquire different frequencies and types of use as they cross the Atlantic, and in these cases they seem to do so under the influence of corresponding words in English. Many such "false anglicisms" occur in political and economic journalism, possibly reflecting the fact that the sources of documentation and published research used by Québec journalists will be very largely American. In this respect, although they do not clash fundamentally with the general French idiom of the writing in which they occur, they act as stylistic markers which point to the Québec language environment.

## GRAMMAR

Space precludes a full discussion of grammar, but the reader should at least be aware that variation is also to be found in this aspect

of language. It has elicited less public discussion so far, because the main activity of *aménagement* has been in lexis. Yet a comprehensive study of the grammar of QF exists<sup>24</sup> and an increasing number of detailed studies are appearing in academic journals. All of these sources give evidence of departures of various kinds from the grammar of SF. This is hardly surprising. If even a highly regulated language like SF experiences changes in grammar over time<sup>25</sup>, one would expect grammar also to vary as a result of transfer to a different environment.

## DICTIONARIES

The publication of dictionaries has been, with education, the main field to which *l'aménagement* has applied itself, and it is largely

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24. Jean-Marcel LÉARD, *Grammaire québécoise d'aujourd'hui*, Montréal, Guérin, 1995.

25. Henriette WALTER, *Le français dans tous les sens*, Paris, Laffont, 1988.

through the controversy aroused by these dictionaries that the language debate has been brought to the attention of the general public. The focus on dictionaries is no more than one would expect. Where a language community has a strong sense of its distinctiveness, there is inevitably a demand for dictionaries to reflect its specific usages, but often a certain amount of opposition to such innovation. One celebrated example of this is Webster's dictionary of American English, which was the linguistic counterpart of the Declaration of Independence of the United States, but was not received with unanimous favor. Elsewhere in the English-speaking world, the same phenomenon can be seen, not least – in more recent times – in English-speaking Canada. New Canadian dictionaries of English make a positive virtue of their specific national nature. The Penguin dictionary proclaims its "100 % Canadian content", while the Oxford Dictionary of Canadian English, after noting in its preface that Canadian English was

initially scorned as an uncouth dialect, asserts that English Canadians now take pride in their own variety.

The situation has been different in the French-speaking world, however, where the high diversity of usage throughout *la francophonie* has been in manifest contrast with the exclusive domination of dictionaries emanating from France, reflecting (until very recently) only SF usage. In this context, it is revealing that Québec has been the exception to the rule, even prior to the emergence of the *aménagiste* project. The ambition to record the distinctive form of French that has evolved in Canada goes back at least to the end of the nineteenth century with the formation of *la Société du Parler Français au Canada*, but found its first major expression in dictionary form in Bélisle's *Dictionnaire général de la langue française au Canada* in 1957. What distinguished this dictionary from previous glossaries or differential dictionaries (i.e., those that catalogue only distinct vernacular terms)

was that the French-Canadian lexical items which it recorded were presented as integral parts of the French language in general. Nevertheless this pioneering effort was the result of a compromise since its method was simply to expand an already existing SF dictionary by augmenting it with French Canadian terms. This is a significantly different procedure from attempting a complete description of how *all* French words are used in North America.

A more ambivalent milestone was reached in 1980 when Léandre Bergeron published his *Dictionnaire de la langue québécoise*, with a preface entitled *La charte de la langue québécoise*, vigorously making the case for the distinctiveness of QF. While this dictionary is not without merits, Bergeron spoiled his case by vastly exaggerating the difference between Québécois and French, speaking in terms of separate languages rather than of distinct varieties<sup>26</sup>. As

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26. Claude POIRIER [ed.], *Dictionnaire du français plus*, Montréal, Centre éducatif et culturel, 1988, p. 135.

a result he tends to favor the supposedly colorful popular registers, where QF is at its most distinctive, over more formal registers, thereby blurring the distinction between a dictionary and a glossary of the vernacular language<sup>27</sup>. The outcome was inevitably a hostile reaction from those who feared that the notion of a distinct variety could only lead to greater vulgarity in the language.

Since Bergeron, however, Québec lexicography has made great strides. On the basis of a large volume of theoretical and applied research, there has been an increasing flood of lexicographical publications of different kinds. Among these, three dictionaries are particularly significant and represent the main

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27. Lionel MENEY (*Dictionnaire québécois français*, Montréal, Guérin, 1999). This work, although excellent on its own terms, falls into the same trap by encouraging the notion that SF speakers need a “bilingual” dictionary to understand QF. He can only sustain this fiction by giving pride of place to vernacular registers rather than the standard language. The work is thus the best current glossary of popular expressions, rather than a dictionary in the full sense of the word.

achievements of the *aménagiste* project to date. The *Dictionnaire du français plus* (1988) and the *Dictionnaire historique du français québécois* (1998) are both edited by Claude Poirier, who leads the long-running research project known as *Le Trésor de la langue française au Québec*, based at Laval University. The *Dictionnaire québécois d'aujourd'hui* (1992, new edition 1993) is edited by Jean-Claude Boulanger, also based at Laval.

The DFP and DQA are general dictionaries of French, aimed at the general public, and based on the premise of SQ being a distinctive variety. Like *Bélisle* they both derive from dictionaries already published in France (by Hachette in the case of *DFP* and by Le Robert in that of *DQA*). The crucial distinction from *Bélisle*, however, is that the source works have been entirely revised and adapted for North American use. As well as having a vastly greater range of specific North American vocabulary, the entries concerning the common core of French vocabulary define words

as they are used in North America, rather than in Europe. In the great majority of cases, there is no marked difference from the treatment accorded to the same words in the source works. In other cases, however, the treatment is different in a variety of ways. North American examples are naturally used rather than European ones (*le bas Saint-Laurent* rather than *le bas Rhin*)<sup>28</sup> and, especially, there is a full recording of all the *nuances* of meaning, connotation, frequency of use and extended use (addition of *le Bas du Fleuve* to the above example) which give a different profile to many words for a Québécois user. Perhaps controversially, as we shall see, they extend the logic of this approach by reversing the convention hitherto applied to descriptive labeling of items. Distinctive labels for Québec words or usages are not used, since the readership is assumed to take Québec usage

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28. Each also has an encyclopedic section in which Québec geographical, historical and social data have been incorporated into the original entries compiled in France.

for granted. Instead differences of use in other francophone countries, including France itself, are signaled by descriptions such as *surtout en France*, *en France* and *francisme* to draw attention to a different meaning or association for a Québec user. The latter include not simply words which relate to French institutions that do not exist in North America (*préfet*), but also common words that are virtually never used in Québec, but are part of the “passive” general vocabulary of any French speaker (*marron*, *enquiquiner*).

The *DHFQ* differs from the other two in being a differential, rather than a general, dictionary, but it gives much more extensive historical information on the derivation and evolution of lexical items than previous differential dictionaries. Its second original feature is to apply this treatment not only to specifically French Canadian words, but also to words belonging to the core vocabulary of French (even such simple words as *pain* and *bois*, among others) which have evolved differently

in Québec. In this respect, the *DHFQ* represents the blueprint of the lexicographic philosophy which has been applied in the two general dictionaries. In due course, it will presumably become a multi-volume work which will underpin the general dictionaries with a fuller, more scholarly treatment of large parts of their corpus. For the moment, it is a work in progress which draws on only a fraction of the documentation which the Laval research team has compiled in more than 20 years of research, but it is one that shows the high level of scholarship that is now devoted to the subject.

Taken together, these three publications can be said to have established the scholarly case for the recognition of a distinctive SQ. The validity of the case is now well accepted internationally, not least in France itself. It is somewhat ironic, that while some in Québec continue vociferously to insist on rigorous adherence to the norms laid down in France<sup>29</sup>,

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29. Diane LAMONDE, *Le maquignon et son joual. L'aménagement du français québécois*, Montréal, Liber, 1998.

informed French opinion is moving in the opposite direction. Dictionaries published in France now regularly include entries concerning usage in other francophone countries, especially in Québec<sup>30</sup>, and there is increasingly close collaboration between French lexicographers and their Québec colleagues. The publishing house of *Le Robert*, headed by Alain Rey, is the most closely involved : a team from *Le Robert* worked collaboratively with Jean-Claude Boulanger on the *DQA*, making it the product of a unique transatlantic partnership.

Yet in Québec itself, while all three works were warmly welcomed by knowledgeable

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30. Another sign of this widening interest was the publication in 1997 by Hachette of the first *Dictionnaire universel francophone* ([www.francophonie.hachette-livre.fr](http://www.francophonie.hachette-livre.fr)), the stated aim of which is to give equality of status to all the varieties of French within *la francophonie*. No less significant is a renewed interest in regional varieties within France : see, for example, Pierre RÉZEAU [ed.], *Dictionnaire des régionalismes de France. Géographie et histoire d'un patrimoine linguistique*, Bruxelles, Duculot, 2001.

commentators, the general press reception was largely hostile, to the extent of affecting the commercial success of the two general dictionaries. The hostility from conservative quarters was predictable, simply on grounds of principle, which is why it affected even the *DHFQ*, a model of enlightened scholarship it would be hard to fault. But it was especially the *DQA*, in its first edition (1992), which fuelled the worst fears of the *anti-aménagistes* by somewhat misjudging the extent to which it could include vulgar colloquialisms. Even some admirers of the volume conceded that editorial policy had been over-permissive in this respect, given the sensitivity of public opinion on language issues in Québec. As a result a revised edition (1993) was hurriedly issued, in which the offending items were either withdrawn or were more clearly marked as being vulgar in register. While this remedial action has adequately corrected what was never more than a marginal flaw, affecting a mere handful of items, the more fundamental

damage was that done to the concept of SQ itself. Opponents felt reinforced in their belief that recognizing Québec usage essentially meant trying to legitimize vulgarisms and lowering language standards and with rare exceptions ignored the positive achievements of both *DQA* and *DFP*<sup>31</sup>.

A second bone of contention was the decision in both *DFP* and *DQA* to take Québec usage, including the common core of French vocabulary, as the norm, and label only departures from Québec usage. Lexicographers here tend to divide according to their wider convictions, rather than on simply professional grounds. Conservative linguists allege that Québec readers will feel more linguistically secure by knowing how their usage diverges

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31. A good example of a review facing both ways is that of Philippe BARBAUD ("Le dictionnaire québécois d'aujourd'hui : coup de Jarnac", *Québec français*, n° 90, 1993), who virulently attacked *DQA*'s supposed concessions to vulgarisms, while recognizing the great progress in description of SQ that it represented.

from that in France<sup>32</sup>, while *aménagistes* believe that this perpetuates the ambiguity of a norm situated outside the language community. There is limited evidence that, if directly asked, poll respondents prefer the former position of having *québécoismes* specifically labeled<sup>33</sup>, but this may well be a conditioned belief. It is a well known feature of polls on language that responses are often colored by insecure reactions from users of a minority variety<sup>34</sup>.

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32. But the terms in which de Villers states her belief are sometimes ambivalent. An example is her statement: “le locuteur [québécois] aura le choix entre des mots partagés par tous les francophones de la planète ou uniquement par ses compatriotes, voire par les seuls habitants de sa région” (“Les marques lexicographiques : des points de repère essentiels pour l’usage des mots”, p. 160). This may give the impression that, throughout *la francophonie*, only *québécoismes* fail to conform to general French usage. If so, this is the myth of *le français international* and is plainly false, as the *Dictionnaire universel francophone* quoted in note 29 testifies.

33. Hélène CAJOLET-LAGANIÈRE, “Attentes et besoins du public québécois en matière de langue”, p. 69.

34. Marie-Louise MOREAU, “Pluralité des normes et des appartenances”, *Terminogramme*, vol. 91-92, 1999, p. 49.

In practice, the issue seems often less acute than the positions adopted on principle imply. There seems little to choose between the way many SQ items are reported in the ostensibly conservative *Multidictionnaire* and in *DFP* or *DQA*, and compromises are clearly possible<sup>35</sup>. In large measure the most sensible practice will depend on the kind of readership that editors have in mind. For a public interested in full linguistic descriptions, including the etymology and history of words, national variants may be enlightening, but this will be less true of readers seeking the level of information that shorter dictionaries generally provide – and both *DFP* and *DQA* deliberately chose the short, general dictionary format as being the most useful one at the present juncture. What the majority of Québécois, who will spend their lives in their own language community, need to know is, for example, how to spell *vadrouille*, the only word for this

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35. Claude CORBEIL, *Dictionnaire du français plus*, p. 42.

domestic implement that they know, rather than that the French *serpillière* (or, more remotely still, *wassingue*) in this sense. In any case, the growing number of specifically Québec items to be recorded will make labeling them all as *québécismes* appear increasingly inflationary and superfluous<sup>36</sup>, especially in the context of a short dictionary.

Taking the long view, the commercial failure of *DFP* and *DQA* seems only a temporary phenomenon. What it tells us is that language is an area of human behaviour in which conservatism is deep-seated and in the case of Québec perhaps understandable. But their very existence, together with that of *DHFQ*, has radically changed the landscape and made the basic conservative assumption about language standards untenable.

The best proof of this can be found in the evolution that is taking place in the many

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36. Jean-Claude BOULANGER, "Le pacte normatif du français québécois : réflexions sur les marges lexicographiques diatoniques", p. 181.

guides to good usage which have traditionally dictated standards in Québec. Where such works have tended in the past to indulge in outright condemnation of North American expressions, outside the restricted list of *canadianismes de bon aloi*, there is now a more open acceptance of legitimate Québec usage. While the second edition of Dulong's authoritative *Dictionnaire des canadianismes* (1999) continues to include the hitherto inevitable symbol signifying à proscrire, it is actually applied to very few terms, mainly now obsolete anglicisms, with the result that the contrast with Dulong's own pride in the linguistic richness of Canadian French is even more marked than in the first edition<sup>37</sup>.

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37. Gaston Dulong is a distinguished dialectologist. The fact that he ever felt obliged to combine such a scholarly interest with a proscriptive approach is as good an indication as any of the conformist linguistic pressures which were rife at a certain stage in Québec.

Even more significant are the change of title and editorial policy in what is usually considered to be the flagship of the proscriptive approach : the *Multi-dictionnaire des difficultés de la langue française*. The 1999 edition of this work adopted the shorter title of *Multi-dictionnaire de la langue française*, a change that seems intended as a step away from the corrective emphasis. More revealingly, while in the 1988 edition the standard adopted was “*la norme du français international telle qu’elle est décrite dans les grammaires et les grands dictionnaires*” (i.e. as emanating from France), the 1999 edition adopts a stance with quite different implications, accepting that : “[t]out dictionnaire s’élabore en fonction de la norme sociale admise par les membres de la communauté linguistique à laquelle il est destiné.” A *norme du français québécois* is now therefore recognized, together with a range of usages that can be classified as SQ. The prohibitive emphasis has not disappeared, since there has been no general revision of

entries, but the difference in attitude from an unreformed purist work like *Dagenais*<sup>38</sup> is already perceptible and will no doubt become more marked in future editions.

This evolution clearly owes much to the distinguished lexicographer and former director of the OLF, Jean-Claude Corbeil, who chaired the supervizing committee and signed the prefaces from which the above statements are taken. Here Corbeil again shows his firm belief in the legitimacy of different national varieties of French, and specifically in that of Québec. Although differing from the *aménagistes* on tactics and details (notably on the labeling of different varieties), he is at one with them on the necessity of a complete description of QF as a self-sufficient variety, which is what the dictionaries seek to provide<sup>39</sup>.

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38. Gérard DAGENAIS, *Dictionnaire des difficultés de la langue française au Canada*, Montréal, Éditions Pedagogia, 1967, with many subsequent reprintings.

39. Jean-Claude Corbeil's position is made particularly clear in his call to abandon the concept of *le français régional*

With such increasing recognition of the case for *aménagement*, in France as in Québec itself, one may expect the dictionary project to be revived, drawing lessons from its temporary set-back. The main handicap that it has suffered from until now, apart from internal resistance, has been the technical one of the absence of a comprehensive database of Québec usage. It is easy for the general reader to forget, or fail to realize, that the production of authoritative dictionaries depends on the prior existence of a detailed corpus of lexical

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and to describe Québec French “*exactement comme si nous étions la seule communauté linguistique de langue française qui existât*” (“Le régionalisme lexical : un cas privilégié de variation linguistique”, p. 60). This chimes perfectly with the phrase of another senior lexicologist, Jean-Denis Gendron, advocating “*une conception autonomiste de soi-même comme communauté linguiste*” (“Existe-t-il un usage lexical prédominant à l’heure actuelle au Québec?”, p. 89) and later demanding “*le rapatriement du jugement sociolinguistique*” (“Les arguments pour ou contre un projet de dictionnaire décrivant les usages du français du Québec”, *Actes du colloque sur l’aménagement de la langue au Québec*, Québec, Conseil de la langue française, 1990, p. 37-38).

items from which to compile the works. In the case of SF and standard English this corpus has been in existence for several centuries, so that ongoing lexicographical work of recording change and updating has a firm foundation on which to work. In the case of Québec, however, the whole preliminary constitution of the corpus is still in progress, with several teams involved on different projects.

In the fullness of time, however, it is already clear that a still more comprehensive account of QF and SQ will be available which will feed into revised or new dictionaries and other types of publication. There will only be gain and no loss in such an outcome. The existence of dictionaries that inform users lucidly on the language environment within which they themselves live will in no way endanger the access of Québec speakers to the full richness of the French language as it is used in France and elsewhere. The demographic and political weight of Québec will never be sufficient to give it the relative autonomy that the

United States enjoys as a language community – if indeed such autonomy is even possible in the contemporary world. But the participation of Québec speakers in the wider francophone language community can only be enriched by the fuller appreciation of language variation that the work of Québec linguists is now making available.