CHAPTER ONE

REGIONAL LANGUAGE AND STANDARD LANGUAGE

The Languages of Canada

Some 25% of the population of Canada speaks French as a mother tongue. Although Québec is the only one of the ten Canadian provinces in which the Francophones form a majority (about 80% of the Québec population), a sizeable minority is found in the two neighbouring provinces of New Brunswick (40%) and Ontario (10%), and a Francophone minority exists in every one of the other provinces.

It would be wrong to conclude that the remaining 75% of the Canadian population is English speaking: about 20% of the remainder speak Cree, Ojibway, Blackfoot, Haida, and other indigenous languages, Italian and Portuguese (especially in Montreal and Toronto), Ukrainian, German, and other European languages (especially on the prairies) and Chinese, Japanese, Thai and other Asiatic languages (especially in British Columbia) — all of these as a first language or mother tongue. Consequently only some 55% of Canadians speak English as a mother tongue.

Given that 55% of the Canadian population is Anglophone and 25% Francophone with a further 20% speaking a great variety of languages, it is only to be expected that the Canadian state should give official status to its two principal languages, English and French. Their status is spelled out in the Official Languages Act, which details the requirements for using both languages.

Just as the English of Canada differs at times quite markedly from British English, in similar ways Canadian French differs from the French of France: in pronunciation, in vocabulary, in idioms, and so forth. These differences lead to a rather curious phenomenon: that some Anglophone Canadians may tend to downgrade Canadian French because it is different, and perpetuate all kinds of absurd myths: that it is incomprehensible to Frenchmen, that it is a jargon of its own called *joual*, and so forth.

But, of course, a speaker of English who travels to New York or London may well be surprised to find that the Brooklyn or Cockney speech of his cab driver is well nigh incomprehensible. It would be very foolish to conclude as a result that American and British English are both equally incomprehensible to speakers of English. In every language one finds societal and geographic

variation, and Canadian French is no exception: the language of every Québécois, except perhaps for those from remote rural areas and from the underprivileged classes is comprehensible to any Francophone. The English of a Yorkshire farmer, of a Tennessee hill-billy, or of a Bonavista Bay fisherman, show us how distinctively different remote rural speech can be, and the English heard in the slums of any great city will underline the problems of understanding the speech of the underprivileged which is what is normally meant by the term *joual*. Societal and geographical variations pose the same problems for every language, and Canadian French, and equally Canadian English, are no exceptions.

If, however, as has been said, Canadian French is as different from European French as Canadian English is from British English, can it be considered Standard French? The answer must be that if Ontario English can be considered Standard English, then Québec French must be considered Standard French. The question immediately arises: what is the standard of any language, and how may it be defined?

Standard Languages

A very great confusion exists in the popular mind as to the nature of a so-called "Standard Language", and as to the values to be placed upon the regional forms of a language. What is not realised is that the so-called standard language itself is only one of the regional forms of the language that for one reason or another has come to be accepted as a standard. In the case of English, for example, the so-called standard language is essentially the language of the south-east and the east midlands of the British Isles. The capital of the British Isles, London, is situated in this area, and historically it has been the seat of government and also of the sovereign's court. Consequently, it was for social and cultural reasons that this particular regional form of English became established as the standard language. With the emergence of national states at the time of the Renaissance, it was felt that the sovereign was the state, and that everyone who did not follow the sovereign in all things was essentially treasonous to the state. All the citizens, for example, were expected to be of the same religious persuasion as the sovereign, and it was not unusual for those who refused to be put to death. Likewise the sovereign's form of the language came to be the accepted standard, so that even today we still refer to the "Queen's English".

But English is no longer the language of a single national state. And certainly, we would not today adhere to the opinion that all members of a state should clearly model all their behaviour on that of the sovereign. Today we

recognise that there can be unity within diversity, and that an individual should be free to be himself, and to have respect for his own background and traditions.

As a result we have no difficulty in recognising that, as far as concerns modern English, there is no one standard language but instead a variety of Regional Standards. These Regional Standards are all forms of the language that may expect to be understood wherever English is spoken. We give these Regional Standards names such as Canadian English, British English, American English, Australian English.

Within these Regional Standards we may also find local standards, that is a local form of speech that is perfectly appropriate when used in its own particular area but might be less appropriate when used on the world scene. Many speakers of English are able to use both a local standard and a regional standard and to switch back and forth from one to the other as they see what the situation requires. There is in fact a technical name for this ability to handle two distinct forms of one and the same language: it is called *diglossia*, and is common to other languages of the world as well as English. For example, Arabic which belongs to a totally different language family from the languages of Europe, has a classical standard which is based upon the Koran, and regional variants that have such names as Cairo Colloquial, Beirut Colloquial, that are quite different from each other.

In places that have been long settled there is normally a great richness of local standards. In the British Isles and France, for example, the regional variation is truly extraordinary, although much of it is disappearing under the standardizing influence of radio and TV. In the old days, if you got off the beaten track in the countryside in either France or England you would come across people who spoke only a very distinctive local speech that would normally be incomprehensible to an outsider. But since the whole country listens to the same programs on television and radio, the very strong differences are gradually being eroded.

Nevertheless, British English and the French of France are both composed of many regional varieties so that one can frequently tell where a particular speaker comes from geographically. The same is true of English along the Eastern seaboard of North America, where the settlement is ancient: Boston, New York and Philadelphia, for example, have very distinct regional accents. Along the eastern seaboard of Canada the South Shore of Nova Scotia is very different from Cape Breton Island, and Newfoundland has several distinct regions, so that one can often tell what part of Newfoundland a speaker comes from. Newfoundland is different from the rest of Canada in this regard because of its ancient settlement. Elsewhere in Canada settlement is more recent and one

finds more of a "melting pot" accent, where everyone speaks more or less alike. Even so, there are on the mainland of Canada pockets of very distinctive speech, such as southern Nova Scotia or the Ottawa valley.

Settlement in Québec is also very ancient, so that Québec City and Montréal have distinctively different accents, and they in turn can be distinguished from Chicoutimi to the north of Québec City, and from the Beauce, the rural area which lies on the right bank of the St. Lawrence River between Québec City and Montréal. The French of Acadia is different again, and there are those who can distinguish geographic variations within Acadian speech.

Because a single community normally develops its own single standard, those who never know any other speech but the speech of their own community will always think that the rest of the world speaks exactly as they do. Contact with other communities teaches us early in life, however, that other communities speak differently from our own. If the speech of another community is very different we may come to consider it as "quaint", but it must be realized that what is quaint for one speaker is perfectly normal standard for another speaker. "Quaint" is therefore a personal value judgment: what we find to be quaint is that which is not familiar to us, and much of what is familiar to us may be quaint to others. No regional or local form of a language is quaint by definition.

There is no one absolute standard form of a language such as English. The word *lorry*, for example, is a perfectly standard British word. Some American speakers would know the word from having watched British movies (which the British call "pictures"), but they would never think of using it, since they would always use the word *truck* instead. Likewise, American English has a past participle *gotten* that a British speaker would undoubtedly recognise and understand, but would never think of using; in Britain the past participle is always *got*.

If there is no absolute standard, the question naturally arises among language teachers as to what form of the language one should teach. Teachers normally teach their own regional standard, but at the same time should be always prepared to point out what the differences are between the different regional usages. Frequently, in fact, students who take different classes from teachers with different regional accents are themselves aware of the differences and often discuss these differences informally among themselves.

It is normal that a Francophone Canadian who has learnt English will speak Canadian English, both in terms of accent and vocabulary. But because both the Americans and the British tend to learn what is often called "Parisian" French, there is a certain amount of pressure on the English Canadian to learn "Parisian" French in like fashion. But if, in Canada, French Canadians learn Canadian

English, there is really no reason why an English Canadian should not adopt as his standard an acceptable form of Canadian French. If we do not expect a French Canadian to sound like Queen Elizabeth when he opens his mouth to speak English, why should we expect an English Canadian to sound like the President of France?

In all discussions of regional forms we should never lose sight of the fact that all these different local forms are standard forms in their own right, none of them being *linguistically* superior to any other. In short, each dialect is a coherent linguistic system in its own right; *it is not a disordered variant of a so-called standard language*. If any form of a language gets to be considered superior, such a judgment is based on social or societal reasons, not on linguistic reasons. Linguistically all these variant forms have the same status: they are local geographical variants that have evolved in that particular location with the passage of time. And if one of them is chosen as a standard language, rather than another, that is a pure historical and geographical accident. Such standards, as we know, tend to be based on national capitals such as Paris or London at a certain period of history. Had Winchester remained the capital of England as it was in the late Old English times, standard English would today be quite a bit different: we would probably say "He sees I and I sees he", since in West Country English the subject pronouns may also be used as object pronouns when one wishes to stress the object. We would probably also say "Where is he to?" and "I knows where he be", and other forms that are typical of the South Western counties of England, but not typical of the South Eastern counties whose dialect became the standard for English.

It is not always a political reason that determines a standard language. England, France and Spain were strongly centralized monarchies at the time of the Renaissance, consequently their standards are based on London, Paris and Madrid. But Germany and Italy remained collections of small states until late in the nineteenth century. Standard German is based on Luther's Bible, the sixteenth century translation from Latin into German, and is consequently based on a central German dialect. Standard Italian is based on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, written in Dante's native Tuscan, a dialect of the more northern part of central Italy.

The other dialects of these countries that did not become the national standard, could equally well have done so. It is important, in consequence, not to lose from sight that every form of language deserves our tolerance and our respect.

The Regional Forms of French

Modern discussions of the regional forms of French usually centre around the French of Belgium, Switzerland and Canada, and how these differ from the French of France. This perspective, unfortunately, again, gives too great an emphasis to the political situation — it discusses the variation between national states — and tends to ignore the regional differences within states. It also says nothing of the French spoken in countries that are not particularly settled by Europeans, such as the African or Asiatic states where French is spoken.

Political boundaries are important, of course, because they inhibit the movement of populations, and whenever there is lack of contact between populations, a language will tend to diverge on either side of the boundaries. We know, for example, that Latin which was spoken throughout the Roman Empire almost two thousand years ago, evolved differently in France and Italy, separated by the Alps, becoming French on one side and Italian on the other. We also know that when the Europeans queued up for food during the Second World War, what was called *faire la queue* in France was *faire la file* in Belgium.

Political boundaries also lead to cultural differences, such as different educational systems: what is an *athénée* in Belgium would be called a *lycée* in France, a *gymmase* in Switzerland, and *école secondaire* in Canada. The European metric system is also a late comer to Canada, where the ancient measurements, such as *once* "ounce", *pouce* "inch" and *chopine* "pint" survived long after they had died out in Europe. And the ancient tradition of rural populations, that the main meal is eaten midday, survives in Canada, Belgium and Switzerland: *déjeuner* is breakfast, *dîner* is midday, with *souper* in the evening, whereas in France one has *petit-déjeuner*, *déjeuner* and *dîner*. This is a good example of how the cultural system of city dwellers has imposed itself on the standard language: city dwellers have to travel to work and often take their lunch with them as a result. Consequently the only time for a family meal in their households is in the evening.

And where France and Canada share the curious *soixante-dix*, *quatre-vingts*, *quatre-vingt-dix*, in Belgium and Switzerland one hears variations on the more regularized *septante*, *huitante*, *nonante*.

Nevertheless the fact remains that the regional French of Northern France is much more like the speech of Belgium than it is like the speech of Southern France. There is in fact a major regional difference between the North and South of France, but no major difference between the North of France and Belgium.

The distinction between the North and the South in France goes back over a thousand years. After the breakup of the Roman Empire the Romance (i.e. Roman or Latin) dialect that was spoken in Gaul, which we call Gallo-Romance,

changed with the passage of the centuries and soon broke into two quite different dialects, the *langue d'oïl* in the North, ancestor of Modern French, and the *langue d'oc* in the South, ancestor of Occitan, a language that has regional forms such as Gascon, Provençal and Limousin. During the Middle Ages Provençal had a flourishing literature, even more important than the French literature of the time, but because Paris was the capital, the dialect of the Ile-de-France became the national language and Occitan itself was doomed to obscurity to survive only as the language of farmers and peasants.

The speakers of Occitan who learned French, however, spoke it with a distinct regional accent and vocabulary. In the regional speech of the Midi (the South of France) today, for example, the final *e* of French words, silent in standard French, is frequently pronounced, and the nasal vowels of Standard French are heard as sequences of vowel plus consonant: *chante* would be pronounced [ʃantə] not [ʃɑ̃ːt].

Whereas the French of Switzerland, like that of Belgium is an ancient regional variant descended from the *langue d'oil*, the situation of Canadian French is quite different. French was brought to the New World as a colonizing language as recently as the seventeenth century, and as often happens when new territories are developed by a new populace spreading into them, the language underwent what may be called the "melting-pot" effect: all the different regional forms of speech were fused into a single norm.

In France at the time there was a great deal of regional variation, so that regional speakers could not understand each other, and many could not speak Standard French. In 1794, for example, it was estimated that 3 million French people spoke Standard French as a mother tongue, that another six million could speak the standard language although their
mother tongue was a regional dialect or *patois*, and that another 6 million could speak only their *patois*.

This means that in the eighteenth century only 20% of the population of France spoke a standard form of French. The emigrants who came to Canada would have difficulty understanding each other if they spoke only their local *patois*: consequently there would be an urgent need to learn to communicate in the standard language, which, in a "melting-pot" situation could be soon achieved. At any rate early visitors to Canada record with some astonishment that, unlike France, Standard French was the rule, and spoken *plus purement que partout ailleurs en France*.

The melting pot would be helped by the fact that the administrators and the clergy spoke Standard French and that a significant percentage of the population

was from Ile-de-France and the nearby provinces of Normandie, Poitou, Aunis and Saintonge.

With the passage of the centuries of course, the French of Canada and the French of France have evolved in their own different ways, as would happen to any other two forms of speech separated by an ocean. And similiar evolution, the fruit of ancient settlement, has led to regional variation within Canadian French itself, similar to the regional variation found in European French.

After the passage of centuries it is normal that many words of the regional speech, which are not to be found in the dictionaries of the standard language, have become so frequent that they are an irreplaceable part of the regional language, part of the regional standard. The Province of Québec in the 1960's established an *Office de la langue française* to advise and report on the status of French in Québec. One of their earliest publications, in 1969, was a brochure entitled *Canadianismes de bon aloi*, that is to say Canadian regional terms that any speaker of Canadian French may consider a part of his standard vocabulary, even if he cannot find them in such dictionaries of Standard French as the Larousse or the Littré. The 62 terms in this little book contains borrowings from Indian languages such as *ouananiche* "landlocked salmon", old French words that have either changed their meaning, such as *carriole* "sleigh" (which would be a horse-drawn carriage in Standard French), or died out in France, such as *once* "ounce". It also includes French expressions for things that are not found in Europe, such as *cabane à sucre* "sap house" (for the maple sugar industry), Old French words that in France have survived only in the regional dialects, such as *catalogne* for a bed cover, and Canadian coinages such as *souffleuse* "snow blower".

Sometimes these regional words find their way into Standard French, especially where they relate to such elements as distinctive flora and fauna. The word *caribou*, for example, was borrowed early into Canadian French from Micmac, an Algonkian Indian language spoken in the Gaspé peninsula of Québec as well as in the four Atlantic Provinces of Canada. Canadian English borrowed it from Canadian French — hence the spelling with *-ou* rather than *-oo* — and from these origins the word has become a part of both Standard English and Standard French.

Place names also start life as regional terms and may then receive a much larger distribution. The name *Québec* itself, for example, is of Algonkian origin, perhaps Micmac or Maliseet or even some now extinct Algonkian language. The word *kepe'k* [kebeːk] in Micmac means "where there is narrowing" and is typically used of a narrows in a lake or river. The Micmac used the term for the narrows in Halifax harbour between the outer harbour and Bedford Basin. The

River St. Lawrence below Québec is about 5 kilometres wide. At Québec it passes through a narrow slate passage below Cape Diamond that is only one kilometre wide and then spreads out into a mighty estuary. This Indian word gave its name to both the city and the province, and is now known around the world.

From the beginning of human language it has been the fate of languages to diverge first of all into separate dialects, then, as the dialects become no longer mutually comprehensible, into separate languages. We are the first generations of humanity to see this trend reversed: the electronic media have created a new melting-pot. Sitting in our homes we now hear everyday the speech of other regions, other states, other continents. Such experience has led us to a better understanding and tolerance of regional variation. But the melting pot so created will also ultimately destroy this same regional variation. It is consequently important to record much of this wealth of linguistic individualism before it disappears from the face of the earth.

Further reading

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1660: 2,000 habitants
1700: 15,000 "
1750: "

COLONS DU 17e SIECLE
Les Archives de folklore
(Vol. I, 1946, p.32)

		Lortie I	Lortie II	AG	%
33.2	Normandie	683	958	547	18.5%
	Ile-de-France et Paris	567	621	508	14.7%
	Poitou	370	569	352	10.9%
27.3	Aunis, îles de Ré et d'Oléron	403	524	332	10.6%
	Saintonge	212	274	185	5.8%
	Marche	187	238	64	3.9%
	Bretagne	121	175	117	3.5%
	Anjou	129	139	89	3%
	Champagne	114	129	83	2.8%
	Maine	126	113	78	2.7%
	Guyenne	94	124	85	2.6%
	Limousin et Périgord	84	120	86	2.4%
	Picardie	84	96	77	2.2%
	Angoumois	69	93	71	2%
	Touraine	79	91	58	1.9%
	Beauce	46	105	74	1.9%

Un reliquat de 10% revient à toutes les autres provinces réunies.

COLONS DU 18e SIECLE
Les Archives de Folklore
(Vol. I, 1946, p. 33–34)

	E.–Z. Massicotte		A. Godbout	
1. Ile-de-France	401	11.9%	516	12.2%
2. Normandie	350	10.3%	464	10.9%
3. Bretagne	265	7.9%	346	8.2%
4. Poitou	205	6.1%	255	6.0%
5. Guyenne et Angoumois	211	6.3%	244	5.8%
6. Saintonge	180	5.4%	232	5.5%
7. Aunis et Ile de Ré	153	4.6%	238	5.6%
8. Languedoc	159	4.7%	219	5.2%
9. Gascogne	151	4.5%	196	4.6%
10. Champagne	119	3.5%	142	3.4%
11. Lorraine	99	2.9%	111	2.6%
12. Anjou	80	2.4%	109	2.6%
13. Franche-Comté	81	2.4%	91	2.1%
14. Picardie	76	2.3%	93	2.2%
15. Bourgogne	71	2.1%	91	2.1%

EXERCISES

1. The following regional expressions from Belgium and Switzerland are also to be found in Canada, but with a different meaning. Point out the difference of meaning and the possible misunderstandings that could consequently arise between speakers from the different regions.
(SF glosses are italicized).

Belgium

bloquer v.tr. *potasser*, *préparer un examen*
chique n.f. *friandise*, *bonbon* (also give meaning of *chique* and *chiqué* in Standard French and of *chiquée* in Can. Fr.)
galette n.f. *sorte de gaufre*

Switzerland

suçon n.m. *biberon*
lessiveuse n.f. *lavandière*

2. The following terms are found in Belgium and Canada, but differ as indicated from Standard French. Why do we have these differences? Where do they come from? (SF terms are italicized).

bottin n.m. *annuaire de téléphone*
berce n.f. *berceau* (also *berce* in Switzerland)
échevin n.m. *adjoint au maire*
galoches n.f. pl. *caoutchoucs qui se chaussent sur des chaussures* (also give St. Fr. meaning of *galoches*)
pain français n.m. *baguette*
sacoche n.f. *sac de dame*
youghourt ou yoghourt n.m. *yaourt*

3. The following terms are found in Switzerland and Canada. Trace the different origins of the regional and standard terms. (SF italicized).

case postale n.f. *boîte postale*
égousser v.tr. *écosser*
fréquenter v. intr. *courtiser*
hydrant n.m. ou hydrante n.f. *prise d'eau*, *bouche d'eau*.

4. What is a "Canadianisme de bon aloi"? How would one decide what words fit this category? Translate the following words, then describe each of the sets in which they have been placed. (All of these words have been designated as *Canadianismes de bon aloi* by the Office de la langue française).

   (a) achigan, atoca, cacaoui, maskinongé, ouananiche,
   (b) arpent, canton, comté
   (c) avionnerie, érablière, poudrerie, souffleuse
   (d) bleuet, carriole, outarde
   (e) boisseau, chopine, demiard, livre (f), pinte
   (f) brunante, catalogne, goglu
   (g) coureur des bois, ceinture fléchée, banc de neige, cabane à sucre