

CHAPTER EIGHT

ANGLICISMS

The phenomenon of the anglicism in Canadian French is an ancient one: it goes all the way back to the earliest contacts in the Eighteenth century. It is inevitable that languages in contact will borrow from each other, and Canadian English has also borrowed extensively from Canadian French: words such as *portage*, *lacrosse*, *cache*, and *prairie*, borrowed originally from Canadian French, are now part of standard English, and known around the world. Marcel Juneau (1977:49) reports that he estimated that there are some 1000 words in the *Dictionary of Canadianisms* that are borrowings from Canadian French.

Many of the anglicisms in Canadian French are immediately noticeable, especially those that replace items of standard French vocabulary; others are more subtle, such as the use of a French word or expression in an English way: *année académique* for *année scolaire*, for example. Still others may only be spotted by highly trained observers such as Jean Darbelnet, with an extensive linguistic background in both languages, and a vast knowledge of the difference between European and North American usages.

Anglicisms are also considered a problem, because those that are not used by other speakers of French are not readily understood, and may thus lead to incomprehension and confusion. The problem has frequently been grossly exaggerated, however: studies of Canadian French have shown that average conversations heard on the street contain only about 1% of anglicisms. We have already seen that certain typical pronunciations — the laxing of high vowels in closed syllables — has been quite erroneously blamed on the influence of English, and many items of grammar and lexicon have been labelled anglicisms that are likewise not from English at all. In fact some Old French words that were borrowed into English during the Norman period, or later, survived in Canadian French as archaisms when they were lost from Metropolitan French. The use of *fleur*, for *fleur de farine*, for example, was lost from standard French which now uses *farine*. English borrowed the term from Norman French, and it gave us our word *flour*. But when one hears *fleur* in rural Quebec for the flour that is used for making bread, it would be a very serious error to conclude that this is an anglicism: the borrowing is older and goes in the opposite direction, from French to English. The use of *fleur* meaning “flour” came to Québec in the

native usage of the earliest settlers, and survived: it is a genuine Canadian archaism. One must be careful not to fall into the trap, which has ensnared so many of those who have discussed anglicisms, of declaring an item an anglicism without researching the facts.

Sources of Anglicisms

Historically the main influences that brought borrowings from English into Canadian French were industrialisation, intermarriage, and travel.

Industrialisation came to North America long after the loss of contact between France and her former North American colonies. The motor car, for example, came to Canada from the United States with all its terminology in English: tyres, clutch, wipers, etc, and no one in Canada knowing what these were called in French elsewhere in the world. The simplest solution was to use the English words that came with the artefact itself, and a lot of anglicisms had precisely this kind of origin. A lot of these can in fact still be heard, although popular education is now tending to eliminate them. Surprisingly, one often heard the standard French term used in rural Québec and the Maritimes, whereas the anglicism was the rule in major centres such as Montréal. The reason for this is that in rural Canada, especially in the thirties forties and fifties, most goods were ordered from Simpson's or from Eaton's catalogues, and these firms were meticulous in giving the standard terms in their French language catalogues. Consequently a child from a remote village might well be heard saying *ma bicyclette*, whereas *mon bicyc'* would be on the lips of the city child.

Intermarriage between the two linguistic groups in Canada frequently leads to bilingual homes where the francophone parent speaks French to the children and the anglophone parent speaks English to them. Such intimate and everyday contact between the two languages leads to a lot of borrowing and interference that affects both languages.

When jobs are scarce, Canadians have often gone to the United States to find work, and this is equally true of francophones as it is of anglophones. For the former, this necessarily meant learning English, at least enough English to survive in an English speaking community. The word *gang*, for example, was borrowed into Canadian French around the turn of the century, probably from experience working on the railway (railroad in the United States) and it has traditionally always been feminine: *toute la gangue*. The word was subsequently borrowed into European French along with the word *gangster* under the influence of America gangster films, and it is masculine in France: *le gang*.

Types of anglicisms

a. **Phonetic.** Phonetic borrowings from English are for the most part more rare in Canadian than in European French, where such borrowings as *un smoking* (=tuxedo), *un parking*, *du shopping* and even the derivation *du footing* (described in Larousse as *mot anglais*, which of course it isn't, since we use *walking* and *jogging* in this sense) have been borrowed with the *eng* sound which is not a French phoneme. Borrowed English words do tend to be pronounced à l'anglaise, however, so that the *ch* of *checker* and the *j* of *pyjama* are affricates, but these sounds do occur in Canadian French: *caoutchouc*, *tiens*, *diabale*.

b. **Graphic.** Punctuation and capitalization are subtly different in English and French. French, for example does not capitalize the title in *le docteur Dupont*, and when we see *la Reine Elizabeth* we should be aware that this is a graphic anglicism. There are many others that may be spotted by the careful observer, such as the abbreviation *ave* instead of the French form *av*. Some of the differences, however, are not between English and French, but between North America and Europe. In France one puts a comma after the house number on an address: *215, rue Leblanc*, and Canadian francophones are taught that this style of punctuation is correct for French and not the style which leaves out the comma, which is supposed to be English. The British, however, also put a comma after the number, so the style is European, and has nothing to do with writing English or French. In questions like this it would make more sense for Canadian francophones to identify themselves as North Americans, rather than ape European usage.

c. **Morphological.** The principal morphological influence is upon derivations, which may follow the English pattern rather than the established French pattern, as in *patronner* rather than *patroniser une entreprise*, in *voteur* rather than *voquant*, or *transformeur* rather than *transformateur*. Occasionally a plural may be used for a singular, as in *quartiers généraux* for *quartier général* (=headquarters). Or alternatively a singular may be used for a plural, as in *une vacance* for *des vacances*. Quite often a pronominal verb will be used in the non-pronominal form, as in *Il a spécialisé* for *Il s'est spécialisé*, and so on. We have already noted the use of *back* in Acadian as a verbal particle in *Il a venu back*, or *je vous phonerai back*. Verbal particles are normally treated lexically in Québécois, if borrowed: *J'ai été lay-offé* for *I was laid off*.

d. **Lexical.** Lexical borrowings of English words, such as *fun*, *can*, *shot*, even when dressed up in a French spelling (*canne*, *chotte*), are normally quite transparent and do not require comment. The more subtle kind of lexical borrowings, however, of which speakers are normally unaware, are those which

are normally called *calques*, which constitute a form of borrowing which requires a separate discussion.

e. **Calques.** The term *calque* is a French word meaning a *tracing*, as when one traces a diagram from one piece of paper onto another. Calques are of two main kinds: resemblances of form and resemblances of meaning.

When there is resemblance of form the French word is used because it closely resembles the English word or is identical to it, as in French *balancer* (=to swing) and English *balance* (=équilibrer). When we hear *balancer les roues* for the adjustment to a wheel of a car when a new tyre is installed, this is a calque on the form of the English word, as used in the phrase *balance the wheels*; the meaning in French is ridiculous and would baffle a European francophone.

When there is a resemblance of meaning the French word is pushed into an extended usage that the English word has but the French word does not, as in the example cited by Poirier (1978:81): “sept chambres sur le même plancher” instead of *au même étage*. In this case the attempt to make the meaning of *plancher* follow the meaning of the English word *floor* results in a calque that would be understood by another francophone, although it would probably provoke some amusement.

f. **Strengthening of archaisms.** Possibly the most interesting of all the anglicisms in Canadian French are those of the type that we have seen in the use of *fleur* for English *flour*. Here the French term is not borrowed, but existed in Old French and was borrowed into English, and then subsequently died out in Standard French, so that it could not be found in the modern dictionaries. Some of these terms survived in Belgian and Swiss usage as well as in Canada, but there is a strong probability that many of them survived in Canada because of the existence of an English counterpart with an identical meaning, as in the case of *fleur*. The most common of these are *appointment* instead of *rendezvous*, *audience* instead of *auditoire*, *bande* instead of *fanfare*, *bassin* instead of *évier*.

Conclusion

The question of the anglicism, it must be realized, is not as simple as it might appear to be, and the student of Canadian French needs to be forewarned of some of the problems and pitfalls. A good general overview of the whole question is given in the article by Darbelnet in the bibliography below, and expanding in the Perguier volume by Darbelnet’s students and colleagues. A penetrating analysis of the problems involved in the long article by Poirier, which discusses problems of all kinds and the information that is required in order to solve them.

The largest collection of anglicisms is that to be found in Colpron 1971 (originally an MA thesis) and 1982, a rewrite of the earlier work. The student is warned, however, that although there is much valuable information in this work which is not available from other sources, the author has spread his net too wide, and has been insufficiently discerning as to what is an anglicism and what is not.

Caveat lector

Finally it is of interest to note the information published by Park on the anglicisms to be found in St-Pierre-et-Miquelon, the remaining French territories in North America, namely two small islands off the coast of Newfoundland in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Here, as might be expected, we find European anglicisms alongside Canadian anglicisms and even the occasional borrowing from the regional English of Newfoundland.

Further Reading

- Colpron, Gilles. 1971. *Les anglicismes au Québec, répertoire classifié*. Montréal: Beauchemin.
- Colpron, Gilles. 1982. *Dictionnaire des anglicismes*. Montréal: Beauchemin.
- Darbelnet, Jean. 1976a. "Le maintien du français face à l'anglais au Canada et en particulier au Québec", in Valdman (ed.) 1976.
- Darbelnet, Jean. 1976b. *Le français en contact avec l'anglais en Amérique du Nord*. Québec: Centre Int. de Recherche sur le Bilinguisme.
- Park, Felix. 1972. "Some Anglicisms from the islands of St-Pierre and Miquelon", *Regional Language Studies* 4:5–14.
- Perguier, Maurice, ed. 1988. *Le Français en contact avec l'anglais. En hommage à Jean Darbelnet*. Paris: Dider érudition, Collection linguistique no. 21.
- Poirier, Claude. 1978. "L'anglicisme au Québec et l'héritage française" *Travaux de linguistique québécoise* 2:41–106.

EXERCISES

1. From the writings on anglicisms in Canadian French, find examples of English influence as follows:
 - (a) two examples affecting punctuation
 - (b) two examples affecting abbreviations
 - (c) two examples of a plural instead of a singular
 - (d) two examples of a singular instead of a plural
 - (e) ten examples of the use of French word with a purely English sense (semantic anglicism)
 - (f) two noun phrases that are *calques*
 - (g) two combinations of verb + object that are *calques*
 - (h) two prepositional usages that are *calques*

2. Colpron (*Les Anglicismes au Québec*) claims that the following are anglicisms:

barniques = lunettes (supposedly from *barnacles*)
 pissou = lâche (supposedly from *pea-soup*)
 temps cru = raw weather
 pinte de bière = pint of beer
 bassin = cuvette (wash-basin)
 appartement = pièce (room)
 audience = assistance (audience)

Using the *Glossaire* and a variety of dictionaries investigate the probability of these claims, and state your results and conclusions.

3. What anglicisms are heard in France, but not normally in Canada, to replace the following Canadian terms?

fin de semaine	carré (d'une ville)
stationnement	chandail
annonceur (à la radio)	débardeur
chèque de voyageur	bâtisse
magasiner	canot
autobus interurbain	billet d'autobus
(chaise) berceuse	la lutte

ascenceur	marche à pied
couvre-chaussures	poudre à pâte
campement	arrêt
quai	

4. From what English words are the following Canadian French words derived, and what do they mean?

les bécosses	un canisse	smatte
la robine	une gamique	stimé
une tausse	une poutine	drable
une tinque	un trimpe	cheniquer
les avarâles	un scrigne	boster
une borberine		domper
une clipse		drâper
une bête		flailler
une bourzaille		souigner

5. Under the influence of English the following French words have become more general in sense. What other French words have they thereby replaced?

régulier	notice
opérer	pratiquer
référer	projet
trouble	
record	

6. Certain borrowings from English, being general in sense, have replaced more than one French word. What sets of words have the following anglicisms replaced?

une job	slack
un rack	une stall
un set	un stand
tough	un top

7. From the *Dictionary of Canadianisms* find 10 words that Canadian English has borrowed from Canadian French.