**Canadian English**

English is the second most widely spoken language in the world. It is the official language of The United Kingdom, Ireland, The United States, Canada, Jamaica, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand and it is widely spoken in India. It is the language of international business and science, of aviation and shipping. As so many people speak English in so many countries, there are many different "Englishes". The best form of English is called Standard English and is the language of educated English speakers. The government, The BBC, The Universities, uses it and it is often called Queen’s English. American English is the variety of the English spoken in the United States. It is different from English in pronunciation, intonation, spelling, vocabulary and sometimes – even grammar! An Englishman goes to the town center to see a film while an American goes downtown to see a movie. If an Englishman needs a pen he would ask you: "Have you got a pen, please?" but the American would say:" Do you have a pen?" Australian and New Zealand English, also called Australian English, are very similar. Especially in pronunciation they are also similar to British English, but there are differences in vocabulary and slang. Many terms, such as kangaroo, dingo, wombat and boomerang, come from the Aboriginal language and many others from the Cockney dialect spoken by the first settlers, The Londoners. Canadian English is different both from American and from British English.

Herbert Agar wrote in his article in 1931:

“The English should try to cope with their philological ignorance. They should train themselves to realize that it is neither absurd nor vulgar that a language, which was once, the same should in course of centuries develop differently in different parts of the world. Just as French and Italian may be described as divergent forms of modern Latin, so it would be helpful to think of the language of Oxford and the language of Harvard as divergent forms of modern English. It is perhaps a pity, from the point of view of international good feelings, that the two forms have not diverged a little further. At any rate, when an Englishman can learn to think of American as a language, and not merely as a ludicrously unsuccessful attempt to speak as he himself speaks, when he can learn to have for American only the normal intolerance of the provincial mind for all foreign tongues, then there will come a great improvement in Anglo-American relations. For even though Americans realize absurdity of the English attitude toward their language, nevertheless they remain deeply annoyed by it. This is natural, for a man’s language is his very soul, it is his thoughts and almost all his consciousness. Laugh at a man’s language and you have laughed at the man himself in the most inclusive sense…” This statement may refer to any of “Englishes” mentioned above.

Another American linguist – John Algeo states in his essay “A Meditation on the Varieties of English”, that “all linguistic varieties are fictions. A language system, such as English, is a great abstraction, a fiction, analyzable into large areal varieties – American, Australian, British, Canadian, Northern Irish, Scots, Welsh, and so on. But each of those is in turn an abstraction, a fiction”. The point, Algeo argues, is that even though these terms – American, Australian, Canadian English – describe the reality that is in fact not there, they are nonetheless useful fictions.

“Useful” is the key term in Algeo’s argument, but unfortunately he fails to adequately define in what way these fictions are useful. The only definition of usefulness he offers is this: “without such fictions there can be no linguistics, nor any science. To describe, to explain, and to predict requires that we suppose there are stable things behind our discourse”. This explanation hardly seems to clarify the situation. The claim that the fictions of national Englishes are useful because they are the foundation for linguistics is a tautology that serves more to undermine linguistics than to justify those fictions. Further, Algeo’s point that all science is based on certain necessary fictions is perhaps true, though usually science attempt to resolve known fictions into more stable, at least less fictional truths. Finally, the role of predicting language change hardly seems an essential component of linguistics.

Algeo returns to the term “useful” in his conclusion. He suggests that the common practice of equating “English” with UK English, and the English of England in particular, is one of these useful fictions. How or in what way he never makes clear.

The suggestion that national boundaries are convenient regional groupings for studying a linguistic community is valid, and perhaps there is some “usefulness” in studying that linguistic community as such provided there is indeed a unique or binding set of linguistic features shared by that group. But by emphasizing Algeo’s remark that “all linguistic varieties are fictions”, we may argue that in certain circumstances, “Canadian English” being one, the “usefulness” of the fiction is so limited, that not only is it almost purposeless but it can and does result in negative social and political effects.

**Unique nation, unique language?**

The fundamental political problem is that a language, or a variety of a language, is too often equated with a nation. Léandre Bergeron emphasizes this in his Charte de la Langue Québécoise by selecting as an epigraph this sentence by Michelet: “La langue es le signe principal d’une nationalité” [Tr.: “Language is a principle symbol of nationality”]. The association between a unique language group and a unique political nation is not necessarily incorrect or worthless. Our oldest political boundaries are clearly a representation of the fact that a common language at one time was one of the crucial determining factors in how a group of people delimited their community. In England they speak English, in France French and so on. But in Canada they do not speak Canadian, nor do they speak “Canadian English”, for there is hardly such a thing. Historically, the geographic isolation of these nation states must have contributed to the development of unique languages. The political reality of this century is that the existence of a language, or a unique variety of a language, cannot necessarily be equated with the existence of a unique political nation. To point to the problem more directly: a group of individuals speaking a shared language that is different from that of the majority of the people outside of that community, does not constitute a nation.

Thus, the desire to create a term such as “Canadian English” is born from a reversing of the process. There is a nation Canada. Therefore there must be a unique language to complement it. The assertion of a national language is an assertion of political existence, as Léandre Bergeron makes very clear in his introduction to The Quebecois Dictionary (1982). And while many writers on the subject are clear to point out that they are not discussing a Canadian Language, but a “variety of English”, emphasis is placed on the uniqueness of that variety and its geographical integrity, essentially using, or allowing the terms to be used interchangeably.

The role of dictionaries and lexicography in this assertion of a national language and thus nationhood is interesting, and as old as Johnson and his desire to enter into “contest with united academies” of France and Italy and permit English to rival those “more polished languages” (Plan of an English Dictionary, 1747).

**English in Canada**

The term “Canadian English” has a pedigree dating back to 1857, at which time the Reverend A. C. Geikie referred to it as “a corrupt dialect growing up amongst our population”. Geikie’s preference was obviously for the British English spoken ‘at home’. In the 1950s and 1960s an awareness of, and a concomitant amount of scholarship, developed that was dedicated to the subject. In 1962 Gage Publishing of Canada began its Dictionary of Canadian English series with The Beginning Dictionary in 1962, followed by The Intermediate Dictionary, and The Senior Dictionary in 1967. The Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles (DCHP), also published by Gage, appeared in the same year. As was to be expected, the primary justification made for preparing Canadian Dictionaries was a lexical one. As Walter Avis states in his introductory essay to The Senior Dictionary (1967), “That part of Canadian English which is neither British nor American is best illustrated by the Vocabulary, for there are hundreds of words which are native to Canada or which have meanings peculiar to Canada”. He goes on to elaborate that much of this new vocabulary is the result of the unique Canadian landscape, flora, fauna, weather, etc.

M. H. Scargill, writing a decade later, structures his book, A Short History of Canadian English, around essentially the same idea: that the defining feature of Canadian English is its unique lexicon. He does add a brief chapter on grammar, but as he states the unique vocabulary is “the most obvious and major item to answer the question ‘What is Canadian English?’»

It is impossible to object to most of the words Scargill presents as “Canadian” on grounds that they are not truly so. The problem of defining a “Canadianism” is one that DCHP comments upon, citing a great difficulty in distinguishing between a “Canadianism”, an “Americanism”, and a “North Americanism”. Nonetheless, they do in the end manage to come to a conclusion. One possible objection to Scargill’s word list is that it for the most part contains specific technical words or proper names, very limited regional words, or words that are either rare, obsolete or obsolescent. This method of attempting to establish the periphery of Canada as its center is one of the seemingly inevitable tendencies of discussions of “Canadian English”. In a review of Scargill’s work by the American linguist Raven I. McDavid, Jr., opposition to Scargill’s “Canadianisms” is founded on the observation that Scargill seems consciously “to ignore the existence of the United States”. He argues that in fact “many words cited by Scargill are well known in various parts of the United States”. McDavid provides a list of several specific examples from Scargill’s text. It seems disputable how many of the lexical claims made by Scargill are indeed incontrovertible.

According to McDavid, this tendency to over-exaggerate difference vis-à-vis Americans is evident in Scargill’s discussion of pronunciation as well. To cite only one example: he argues that “the phonemic coalescence of such pairs as ‘cot’ and ‘caught’ is not a peculiarly Canadian phenomenon: it occurs in northeastern New England, the Pittsburgh area, much of the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast”.

**Language, nation, and dictionary**

There have been a great number of accounts recently which question exactly what or whose history is reflected in language change. Literacy was the province of the few, and historical texts represent the writing of a certain exclusive segment of the society. Yet each of the Canadian dictionaries preface their work with a history of the settlement of English Canada, and then proceed to a generalization explicitly or implicitly equating the history of the language and the history of the nation. Here are few examples:

“Foreword”, DCHP, 1967:

By its history a people is set apart, differentiated from the rest of humanity… That separateness of experience, in the bludgeoning of the Atlantic waves, the forest overburden of the St. Lawrence valley, the long waterways to the West, the silence of the Arctic wastes, the lonesome horizons of the prairie, the vast imprisonment of the Cordilleras, the trade and commerce with the original Canadians – all this is recorded in our language.

“Introduction”, Gage Canadian Dictionary, 1983,1997:

The Gage Canadian Dictionary is thus a catalogue if the things relevant to the lives of Canadians at a certain point in history. It contains, therefore, some clues to the true nature of our Canadian Identity.

J. K. Chambers, “Canadian English: 250 Years in the Making”, Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 1998:

In the living language there is a reflection of where we have been and where we are likely to go next, and what we have considered important on the way. It is the codification of our common understanding.

These accounts conflate political history and the history of the language, and in doing so leave out significant events and aspects of Canadian political reality. Not the least of these is the omission of the issues surrounding Quebec and Canadian French, which for twenty years have dominated Canada’s political landscape. Further, as in so many of the features of Canadian English and its study, these histories gloss over certain very real distinctions in order to accentuate others. In their mini-histories of the settlement of Canada as read through the language, the exchange between Aboriginals and Europeans, and between French and English is made to seem flawlessly smooth and equitable. Sample token Aboriginal words are often cited as examples of this harmonious interaction and implicit assimilation of Native and French words and people into the dominant “Canadian English”. Such a method of reading history through language is a mode of propagating a myth that serves to heighten underlying tensions in Canadian society, and interfere with the process of mutual understanding and tolerance.

Separate from this more philosophical problem encountered with the historical implications and assumptions of these Canadian dictionaries, there are other reasons to question their intention and use value. The first is the circumstance of their publishing. Many of the Canadian dictionaries embrace the fact that they are overtly political acts. The firs wave of dictionary publishing came in the late 1960’s, with a push for the DCHP and the Gage Senior Dictionary to be published in time for the Centenary in 1967. Both dictionaries refer to this event. At the conclusion of the Foreword to the DCHP, W. R. Wees states: “The publishers hope that, as a contribution to Centennial thinking, the Dictionary of Canadianisms will assist in the identification, not only of Canadianisms but of whatever it is that we may call ‘Canadianism’”. Elsewhere in the Introduction it is essentially revealed that the work was rushed to print, not wholly error-free, in order to be published in 1967. The Senior Dictionary likewise acknowledges this event: because a dictionary is a “catalogue if the things relevant to the lives of Canadians”, the editor suggests “it is therefore fitting that this book should be first published in the year of Canada’s Centenary”.

The second wave of dictionary publishing comes in the early 1980’s, with Gage refurbishing its Senior Dictionary as the Gage Canadian Dictionary. 1980 marked the height of Quebec nationalist fervour (publication of Bergeron’s overtly political Dictionnaire de la Langue Québécoise) and, with the inaugural Referendum on Sovereignty, the first real threat to Canada’s political integrity since 1812. Perhaps this is the reason for the passage acknowledging the inclusion of “regionalisms” in the 1983 edition of the Gage Canadian Dictionary, as well as a striking change from a mention of the Centenary to a reassuring comment on Canada’s fragile “identity”. This era marks the rise to national consciousness of Canada’s “identity crisis”, a rise fuelled by both an anxiety over differentiation from the United States and the fear of internal disintegration. The final passage remains unchanged in the most recent version of the Gage Canadian Dictionary (1997), but the passage on regionalisms has changed, to include among other things a reference to “tourtiere” and, instead of borrowing from a Native Language, the term “residential school”.

The current period of the late 1990’s, in which we are witnessing a renewed outburst of dictionary production, is also a period of supposed national identity crisis. Canada narrowly survived politically intact from yet another Quebec referendum in 1995 and increasingly the “Aboriginal question” has risen to the political forefront. Does the inclusion of “residential school” reveal a rising political awareness and shifting consideration of the treatment of the First Nations of Canada? We may suggest that the pressures and desires to create a National Dictionary arise from more than linguistic sources. These dictionaries, consciously unconsciously, carefully present a picture of a Canada that is relatively free of division and strife by presenting a coherent account of a “Canadian English” that serves to ease anxieties about the fragility of the political nation.

**Consistently inconsistent**

Speaking reductively, though not necessarily erroneously, the primary use of dictionaries is for consultation in a question of the definition or spelling of a word. It is obvious, from the special mention given in the prefatory material to the dictionaries, that the more famous thorns of Canadian orthography such as the colour/color debate remain unresolved, and no effort is made to do so by the dictionary makers. As a litmus test, then, we may choose a less controversial, though equally unresolved spelling dilemma of Canadian English: do we analyze or analyse?

The following descriptions are given in the Gage Canadian Dictionary (1997), the ITP Nelson Canadian Dictionary of the English Language (1997) and the Canadian Oxford Dictionary (1998). Gage lists the both under the headline “analyse”, citing them as entirely neutral equivalents. Under the headword “analyze” are the instructions “see ‘analyse’”. Nelson provides no headword for “analyse” but does list the s-spelling under the headword for “analyze” – the reverse of Gage. The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines “analyse” as “a variant of analyze”. Under the headword for “analyze”, the variant spelling is repeated in parentheses. Each of these dictionaries appears to pronounce neutrally on the subject of the ‘correct’ spelling, by choosing to list the definition under one or the other headword preferences. It is interesting that not at all three stress the same headword. It is perhaps surprising that Nelson is not the odd case, considering it is one of those dictionaries put out by an American publisher with token Canadian content often deplored by purists (although its complete omission of a headword for “analyse” is perhaps indicative of this American bias).

This example illustrates two things. The first is that in a desire for clarification on usage the Canadian dictionaries provide no overt guidance; only through the suggestion of definition placement do they advocate one spelling over another. Thus either version is “correct”. Further it reveals that there is not even consistency between the dictionaries on which spelling is stressed.

So is there in fact any pragmatic value in a Canadian Dictionary? Dictionaries are designed to be consulted, and we still long in Canada to be able to go to “The Dictionary” and know once and for all how to spell the generic name for red, white, etc. The search for a standard is precisely what dictionary making is about, but this arbitrary cross-section of Canadian Dictionaries yields no consensus.

The result of the realization of the highly variant nature of “Canadian English” and the inability to appeal to any convenient authority to resolve conflicts is that ideal conceptions of Canadian dictionaries become impossible – unrealizable projects.

**Canadian slang**

Canadian slang as a variation of substandard speech is obvious nowadays. The lexical constituent of Anglo-Canadian slang is very dissimilar. There can be singled out the following units:

Units that are common for American and Canadian Languages, North-Americanisms;

Units, that appeared and are used in USA, but that gradually get into Canadian language;

Units that appeared and are used in Canada, but can be met in American language;

Units that appeared and are used exceptionally in Canada.

1. North-Americanisms:

These units appeared in the slang in XIX-XX centuries. They are different in their origin but are gut assimilated by Canadian and American languages.

1.1. Units that were registered first in USA and then in Canada:

- Nouns denoting living beings:

buff (enthusiast) AE 1930; CdnE 1940; floozie (prostitute) AE 1935, CdnE 1940; ripstaker (a conceited person)AE, CdnE 1833

- Nouns denoting inanimate objects:

jitney (a cheap taxi) AE 1915, CdnE 1924; beanie (a freshman's cloth cap) AE 1945, CdnE 1946; dump (a pub, a bar) AE 1903, CdnE 1904.

- Nouns denoting process:

bend (outdoor party, feast) AE 1903, CdnE 1904; shellacking (defeat) AE 1919, CdnE 1938

- Nouns of material:

lightning (cheap whisky) AE 1858, CdnE 1959; weeno (wine).

- Collective Nouns:

bull (idle talk) AE 1915, CndE 1916; guff (nonsense, lies) AE 1888, CdnE 1890.

1.2. Units that were first registered in Canada and then in USA:

- Nouns denoting living beings:

boomer (seasonal worker) CndE 1910, AE 1926; flannel-mouth (smb who is fond of backbiting) CdnE 1910, AE 1912.

- Nouns denoting inanimate objects:

bug (a small automobile) CdnE 1919, AE 1920; jolt (a mouthful of alcohol drink) CdnE 1900, AE 1920.

- Nouns denoting process:

hush-hush (confidential talk) CdnE 1940, AE 1950; fakery(insincere behavior) CdnE 1912, AE 1925.

- Collective Nouns:

bushwa(h) (nonsense, rubbish) CdnE 1916, AE 1924.

It should be mentioned that the nouns with expressive meaning are easier borrowed from American into Canadian and vice versa:

gunsel (murderer) CdnE 1950, AE 1951; split (sharing of the profit) AE 1917, CdnE 1919.

2. Units that appeared and are used in USA, but that gradually get into Canadian language:

- Nouns denoting living beings:

eager-beaver (boarder) AE, the beginning of the XX cent; CdnE 1950; fink (unpleasant person) AE 1925; CdnE 1965.

- Nouns denoting inanimate objects:

Doodad (a thing for reminding about smth) AE 1900; CdnE 1931.

3. Units that appeared and are used in Canada, but can be met in American language:

These units were not well spread, because:

a) there were American equivalents for the Canadian words:

noodle, CdnE: nut, AE (head);

b) this word appeared in the language later, than its equivalent:

fink (strike-breaker, blackleg) AE, CdnE 1925.

In this part of lexis a great influence of American on Canadian language, but not vice versa, is evident. Canadian units are often of the regional nature, so they are twice called in question before getting into the American variant.

4. Units that appeared and are used exceptionally in Canada.

The common Canadian slang can be subdivided into two groups: the common slang that is described in the previous points and the professional slang of the following professions:

- railway men’s slang: pig (locomotive), plug(a small train);

- musicians' slang: canary (a female singer), to blow(to play);

- military slang: Joe boy (a recruit) , moldy(torpedo);

- sport slang: rink-rat (a boy, cleaning the rink),arena rat(fan, supporter);

- criminal argot: pod (cigarette with narcotic), skokum house (prison).

So, we can say that Canadian slang is a very complicated system that unites chronologically different layers of the American and Canadian slang. And in the whole it is a new and quite original system that doesn't copy either American or British system. This system appeared due to the co-operation of all these systems and the national tendencies.

In conclusion we could mention with the statement of Walter Avis who wrote in his essay “Canadian English” which introduces the Gage dictionaries, that “unfortunately, a great deal of nonsense is taken for granted by many Canadians” when it comes to language issues. And into that category of nonsense we may add a notion that there is such a thing as “Canadian English”, and that this fiction has any value linguistically, pragmatically, socially, or politically.

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