Morphology and Syntax

All the accounts by French and foreign visitors cited in the article by Lothar Wolf are clear and consistent on the purity of the language spoken in New France, that is to say the respect of proper usage in the turns of phrase and the use of words. Thus, the particularities of traditional Canadian French have their origins in everyday usage which, though, were being much debated in Paris in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The following examples are good indications of this:

- cy / icy adverbs linked to substantives in expressions such as *cet homme-icy, cet homme-cy*, two competing forms in the seventeenth century. Vaugelas wrote:

  Everyone in Paris says, for example, *cet homme-cy, ce temps-cy, cette année-cy*, but most people of the Court say, *cet homme-icy, ce temps-icy, cette année-icy* and find the other intolerable…

The Canadian French of *c’moment-ici* and *c’te maison-ici* thus uses an expression which used to be common in the proper usage spoken by the Court, by Vaugelas himself, but not in that of Paris. However, the popular language of the twentieth century in Paris uses *ci* and *ici*. The turn is also attested to in Norman and Nantais:
The use of *y* for *à lui, à elle*, when speaking of people (for example, j’y ai dit que…). According to Vaugelas, this use was a common mistake among courtiers. For the Academy, it was a real mistake and, when used, it could only be in a conversation that was very careless. Thus, neither Vaugelas nor the Academy accepted this use as belonging to proper usage irrespective of the language of the Court and its use by Corneille, Molière, Pascal or Mme de Sévigné. In spite of this condemnation, the traditional Canadian use of *y* in this particular function thus had a solid social basis dating back to the seventeenth century as well as a geographical basis confirmed by regional ways of speaking.

Other similar features of morphology and syntax, such as *dont* or *d’où*, *résou* or *résolu*, *assisez-vous* or *assez-vous*, etc., were much debated by Vaugelas, the Academy and other grammarians.

All these uses, often perpetuated today in traditional Canadian French 35 (today mostly rural or again popular or dated), go back to the seventeenth century and are rooted in the French of that era, be it that of the Court or of Paris, and moreover are often reinforced by the support that they had in regional parlances. Therefore, these Québec uses, out-dated today, were at the time in keeping with proper usage or again complied with variations of this proper usage.
French Pronunciation in Canada

There is a second clear and consistent observation that was made by visitors throughout the French Regime: the absence of an accent among Canadians. It is easier to understand these laudatory accounts today. A connection can now be made between the pronunciation of French in Paris in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the pronunciation in use in Canada during the same period, thanks to a study of the written forms in archives of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this long-standing Canadian pronunciation furthermore having been largely perpetuated until today in the traditional form of this way of speaking.

This is the case, for example, in the following pronunciations:

- *Ustache* and *Ugène* for *Eustache* and *Eugène*, pronunciations which were only rejected in France during the nineteenth century;

- *Parche*, *ouvarte*, etc. for *perche*, *ouverte*, etc., pronunciations debated throughout the seventeenth century and which the Court belatedly imposed on the bourgeoisie and the people of Paris;

- *Fret*, *pleyer*, *breyer* and *coreyer* for *froid*, *ployer*, *broyer* and *corroyeur*, pronunciations debated throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries;

- *Pognet*, *pognée*, etc. for *poignet*, *poignée*, words whose pronunciation with [O] was common in Paris until the nineteenth century, while the written form *oign* came gradually to be pronounced [wa];
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- **Menusier, menuserie, essue-mains, culrière, julliete, tuliau and rousseau** for *menuisier*, *meniserie, essuie-mains, cuillère, juillet, tuyau* and *ruisseau*, words for which the Parisian speech long hesitated between the pronunciations [y] and [Hi], only choosing the [Hi] pronunciation during the nineteenth century;

- **Corialle, choronerie and chaurette** for *carriole, charronnerie* and *charrette*, pronounced with the back [A], widespread on both sides of the Atlantic throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and which posed the problem of the two /A/, the front [a] and the back [A]. While Québec French remained loyal to the old distribution of the two /A/, Parisian French moved to a new distribution of the two vowels from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, thus widening the highly marked gap between the two ways of speaking (examples: *tache* and *tâche, patte* and *pâte*);

- **Quin, tourquière, inguienne, raquiette, chaquieun and bayette, etc.** for *tiens, tourtière, indienne, raquette, chacun* and *baguette*, a trend towards the palatalization of the dental consonants [t] and [d] and the velar consonants [k] and [g] which goes far back in the Parisian way of speaking, where it even left its mark in polished speech until the end of the nineteenth century and which has been perpetuated until today in polished and traditional Québec parlance;

- **Beu, neu and chéti** for *boeuf, neuf* and *chétif*, words whose pronunciation without the [f] was maintained in Paris until the end of the eighteenth century only to be completely rejected at the beginning of the nineteenth century.
Other examples could be added to further highlight the relationship between the pronunciation in use Paris and that in Canada under the French Regime. Moreover, this connection was strengthened by the fact that a large number of colonists came from the western provinces (Poitou, Saintonge, Aunis) \(39\). For it has been noted that, between their way of speaking and that of the Île-de-France, there were quite a few common features of pronunciation which could, at the time, have favoured a greater rapprochement and an early phonetic alignment with the way of speaking in Paris. It is easy to understand, therefore, that “the phonetic forms that were not quite characteristic of a province and were linked to a common type” persisted instead \(40\).

However, the similarity of accent between the Parisian and Canadian ways of speaking in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was later called into question because, throughout the nineteenth century, the Canadian accent was perceived and judged by French and foreign travellers \(41\) to be provincial. The fact is, with the beginning of the French Revolution (1789) and the social upheavals it brought about, Parisian French would make choices in pronunciation that markedly distanced this polished way of speaking \(42\) from traditional Québec French which itself had remained almost stationary and fixed in the form it had taken at the end of the French Regime which, with a few variations, had then been common to both parlances. And the Québec way of speaking, especially in public usage (radio and television), only began to collectively evolve at the beginning of the Quiet Revolution (1960) when it adopted, in its polished form, a new standard which was closer to that of Paris \(43\).
What remains to be determined is where the meeting between the phonetics of regional languages and those of Paris took place: in France or in Canada? Today, the inclination is to believe 44 that it was in France itself that the process took place and the study of phonetic evidence as well as the precocity of accounts of the absence of a provincial accent, contribute to strengthening this argument. If “de-dialectalization” did in fact occur, it would have had to have been very rapid and, in regard to phonetics, it is based on very little evidence 45, most of which attests, supported in this by comparative data 46, that French was the language of the vast majority of emigrants upon their arrival in Canada.

The Vocabulary

What also came as a surprise to French-speaking Europeans at the end of the French Regime were not the lapses in proper usage or accent but rather the vocabulary of Canadians, which had begun to diverge. Several observers have pointed out these differences, including Montcalm (1756), Bougainville (1758) and, above all, d’Aleyrac (1755), who is worth citing:

All Canadians speak a French that is the same as ours. Except for a few words which are specific to them and usually borrowed from the language of sailors such as *amarrer* (to moor) for *attacher* (to tie), *haler* (to tow) for *tirer* (to pull) and not only for a rope but anything else. They have made up some of them, such as *tuque* or *fourole* to designate *bonnet de laine rouge* (red wool hat)… They say *poche* for *sac* (bag), *mantelet* for *casaquin sans pli* (pleatless cape)… *rafale* for *coup de vent, de pluie ou de neige* (gust of wind, rain or snow); *tanné* instead of *ennuyé* (annoyed), *chômer* for *manquer de rien* (to
lack nothing); relevée for après-midi (afternoon); chance for bonheur (joy); miette for moment (moment); paré for prêt à (ready for). The most widespread expression is: de valeur meaning that something is too tiresome to do or too unfortunate.

These accounts clearly show that at the end of the French Regime what differentiated Canadians from French-speaking Europeans, were vocabulary and expressions. This was amply confirmed by Father Pierre-Philippe Potier, a native Belgian of French education, who, while a missionary in Québec City, Lorette and especially Detroit and the Île-au-Bois-Blanc between 1743 and 1758, went to the trouble of listing over a thousand new expressions and phrases without ever mentioning the accent of Canadians.

Potier abundantly demonstrates that, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an everyday vocabulary developed in Canada, made up of archaisms and regionalisms, as well as borrowings from Amerindian languages 47. For various reasons, this vocabulary differed from the usual French vocabulary of the time, as well as being part of the traditional fund of Québec words which can be found recorded in the different glossaries from 1880 onwards and in the linguistic atlases published in recent years 48.

Here are a few examples of the Canadian regionalisms that Potier found:

- **Abrier, s’abrier [couvrir, s’abriter]** | To cover, to take cover
- **Être allège [vide, sans charge]** | Empty, without a load
- **Attisée [bon feu, non renouvelé]** | Good fire, not renewed
- **Bordages [bordures de glace]** | Inshore ice
- **Bûcher [abattre, couper] du bois** | To cut down, chop wood
Thus, apart from these few differences in vocabulary, all the accounts cited above on the quality of the language spoken in New France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries clearly show that the foundations for the French language in Canada lie, in regard to morphosyntax and phonetics, not so much in the dialects which could have existed for a certain period of time in the colony, but first and foremost in the shared French language of the times which was soon the most prominent and prevailed over all the other ways of speaking, thus precociously imposing itself on all Canadians.