

Ian Lockerbie, Ines Molinaro, Karim Larose and Leigh Oakes (2005) *French as the Common Language in Québec. History, Debates and Positions*. Québec: Éditions Nota Bene. (Collection *New Perspectives in Québec Studies*). Pp. 202.

Reviewed by Wim Remysen

In terms of population, Québec is the second largest province of Canada and home to approximately 6 million Francophones, representing about 82 % of Québec's population and about 86 % of the whole French-speaking Canadian community.¹ This province remains however rather enigmatic for a lot of Europeans – and even for a lot of North Americans for that matter – especially when it comes to its specific linguistic and sociolinguistic context (Remysen 2003). For instance, it is often assumed that Québec is an overall bilingual society, even though only some of its regions have an important English-speaking community.² Also, some myths and stereotypes still remain about the variety of French that is spoken in this province: Québec French (QF) is often wrongly accused of being a somewhat archaic form of French or is even considered as unintelligible for European Francophones. Despite its distinctive features, this is in fact not the case for QF, in the same way the Canadian or American variants of English (usually) are far from being unintelligible to speakers of British English. This stereotype is predominantly due to the fact that QF is often reduced to its informal, more casual register, in which such particularities abound, without taking into consideration its formal register.³

French as the Common Language in Québec tackles a few of the issues related to the particular sociolinguistic situation characterizing Québec. It is the second volume to be published in the collection *New*

¹ According to the 2001 census.

² The majority of English-speaking Quebecers live in the greater Montréal area. Anglophones are also to be found, but to a lesser extent, in the Eastern Townships bordering on the United States, as well as in some municipalities along the Ottawa River, which defines the border between the provinces of Ontario and Québec. In comparison, approximately 99 % of the provincial capital's population, Québec City, is Francophone (2001 census).

³ See, for example, Mercier (2002) and Verreault (1999) for further discussion on this topic.

Perspectives in Québec, edited by the Éditions Nota Bene (Québec City). This collection, directed by Daniel Chartier, aims precisely to diffuse academic articles about Québec, primarily by publishing English translations of articles that have previously appeared in the journal *Globe. Revue internationale d'études québécoises*. The volume contains four articles, all focusing on a different aspect of the situation of French in Québec: language planning (both corpus and status planning are discussed in chapters 1 and 3 respectively), the linguistic integration of immigrants (chapter 2) and French as the common public language (chapter 4). As Daniel Chartier describes in the presentation of this volume, the different articles examine “the French language as a social, political and identity-related tool” (p. 12).

Corpus planning and language quality

It is hardly an overstatement to say that Québec society tends to pay special attention to the language debate. In fact, the controversy over whether QF should strictly follow the language norm laid down in France or rather develop its own distinctive norm goes back to the mid-19th century, when intellectuals became more aware of the fact that the language of French Canadians was in many respects different from the language used across the Atlantic. In the first article of this volume, entitled “The debate on l'aménagement du français in Québec” (pp. 15-65), Ian Lockerbie (University of Stirling, UK) focuses on corpus planning attempts of QF, concentrating on the way Québec tries to define and describe its variety compared with French as used in France. As Lockerbie points out in the first part of his article, the debate opposes the more conservative adherents of a strictly French norm to those in favour of a specific Québec norm, defined from within the Québec linguistic community. The latter are usually called *aménagistes*.

The article gives an overview of some of the particularities of QF, especially in lexis and pronunciation, but its most important part is dedicated to the recent lexicographic history of QF. Lockerbie describes some of the most salient aspects of three significant Québec dictionaries: the *Dictionnaire du français plus* (DFP, published in 1988), the *Dictionnaire québécois d'aujourd'hui* (DQA, 1992) and the *Dictionnaire historique du français québécois* (DHFQ, 1998). The latter is a differential dictionary of QF, i.e. a dictionary describing only its distinctive, mostly lexical features, whereas the two former dictionaries are both general, i.e.

they describe QF in its entirety rather than focusing solely on its lexical particularities. The author also discusses the controversy that these works have often aroused, especially in the press. Lockerbie rightly notes that this controversy has generally concerned two aspects. First, the inclusion of informal colloquialisms of QF is rejected by some commentators who fear that they would be legitimized in this way. Second, there is disagreement over the use of geographic labels in the DFP and the DQA: in so far as these dictionaries consider QF an autonomous variety, they label particularities of French as used in France (so called *francisms*), rather than those usages which are specific to QF.

This article clearly illustrates how part of the French-speaking Québec community is reluctant to accept a more pluricentric vision of the French language that recognizes the existence of different language varieties.⁴ It is interesting to see how Lockerbie approaches the issue. For instance, he clearly believes in the existence of a QF standard variety, thus recognizing QF as a self-sufficient variety of French. He also has a very candid opinion of the concept of “français international” (“international French”): whereas some commentators try to convince Quebecers that “international French” or “universal French” is the standard variety that all Francophones have in common, it is in fact a veiled reference to the standard language used in France and is thus misleading, as Lockerbie rightly points out (p. 22, note 5). At the same time, Lockerbie has a very realistic attitude to QF, acknowledging the fact that it will never enjoy the same degree of autonomy as US English does in relation to UK English on account of Québec’s modest demographic weight. In my opinion, this article provides an interesting reflexion on QF that will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of this variety of French and its standard register. While some commentators try to bring this vision into disrepute, arguing that the recognition of QF leads to the ghettoization of Québec society, Lockerbie shows that this is far from being the case.

⁴ See Clyne (1992) on the concept of pluricentric languages.

Linguistic integration of allophone⁵ communities

The contribution of Ines Molinaro (University of Cambridge, UK), “Context and integration: the allophone communities in Québec” (pp. 67-115), gives an overview of Canadian and Québec policies with respect to cultural diversity and the integration of different ethnocultural communities. According to Molinaro, the Canadian and Québec models are very different in this respect, although they both seek to encourage the creation of an inclusive national community. One can easily understand the importance of this matter, especially considering Québec’s current circumstances: the province has to deal with the attraction English has for new Quebecers and has to encourage them to learn French in order to maintain the demographic weight of Francophones.⁶ It does this by promoting a Francophone civic culture.

On the one hand, Canadian nation-building is based on two main principles, namely bilingualism and multiculturalism. Whereas multiculturalism acts as a framework in which official bilingualism is guaranteed, the Canadian model dissociates at the same time language and culture, hence refusing to recognize biculturalism. As Molinaro argues, this federal policy is reluctant to accept the concept of biculturalism for merely political reasons and it aims to neutralize further demands for special measures to defend French in Québec. In other words, the Canadian model fails to endorse a special status for French Canadians, who are regarded as one ethnic group amongst others, thus ignoring the English/French duality of the country. This philosophy also explains why the federal government “denied the reality of linguistic practices” (p. 78) by favouring individual rather than territorial bilingualism when it passed the *Official Languages Act* in 1969. According to Molinaro, the Canadian model has only been partially successful, not only in Québec (where several commentators regret the non-recognition of Canada’s duality), but also in the rest of Canada (where commentators often plead for a more explicit expression of

⁵ The term *allophone* is used in Canadian English in order to designate a person whose native tongue is other than French or English, as opposed to *Francophone* or *Anglophone*. As a loanword borrowed from QF, it is especially used in reference to the language differences in Québec.

⁶ It is worth noting that Québec is the only Canadian province that is responsible for the selection of immigrants wishing to settle in its territory, despite the fact that immigration is usually a federal competence.

the “minimal demands for inclusion” (p. 81) in order to ensure the integration process⁷).

The integration policy promoted by Québec, on the other hand, evolves in a unilingual framework and is based on an intercultural approach. Unlike multiculturalism, the intercultural model is more explicit in defining the extent to which a society is willing to accommodate ethnocultural diversity. In this respect, it is clear that one of the main goals of the Québec’s unilingual policy is to ensure the preservation and further development of the French language, and encourage allophones to take part in what Molinaro calls “mainstream Québec society”.⁸ Even though Molinaro clearly favours the Québec approach over the Canadian one, she rightly mentions that the situation is anything but obvious for an immigrant settling in Québec: even though it is evident that it is in an immigrant’s interest to be proficient in French, one cannot deny the asset of mastering English, considering the geopolitical reality of Québec as part of North American society. However, statistics show that the unilingual policy of Québec has an important influence on the linguistic integration of immigrants who are increasingly shifting to French. On a more personal note, Molinaro concludes that French can only become a “shared civic good” (p. 115) if it enables immigrants to take part in a pluriethnic, heterogeneous society.

Status planning and Québec’s project of unilingualism

The concept of unilingualism is examined in its historical context by Karim Larose (Université Laval, Canada). “The emergence of unilingualism: archeology of the language issue in Québec” (p. 117-152) explains how the idea of turning Québec into a unilingual society arose in the late 1950s and especially the tumultuous 1960s, a period known in Québec as the *Quiet Revolution*. In so far as the term *unilingualism* is generally not used in France, Larose considers it a concept that is particular to Québec. Far from pursuing the establishment of a monolingual Francophone society, the idea

⁷ For instance, the Supreme Court of Canada recently officially approved the wearing in public schools of the *kirpan*, a ceremonial shortsword carried by Sikhs. In Québec as well as in the rest of Canada, this decision provoked much controversy and is one of the many examples that come to mind concerning problems of integration.

⁸ As Molinaro recalls, the recognition of Québec as a unilingual, Francophone province also implies the promotion of a civic rather than an ethnic identity. This aspect is further developed in chapter 4 by Leigh Oakes.

of unilingualism originally appeared as a reaction to the systematic lack of knowledge of French on the part of the Québec Anglophone community and the federal government.⁹

According to Larose, four circumstances encouraged the emergence of the concept of “unilingualism”. Besides the polemic against bilingualism already alluded to, Larose mentions the influence of the neo-nationalist philosophy of the *École historique de Montréal* developed in the 1950s. One of the main ideas of this new historiographic current was the necessity of a political intervention concentrating efforts within Québec rather than defending the French language in Canada as a whole. Moreover, the principle of nationality, boldly summarized in the well-known phrase *one state, one nation, one language*, gained in popularity during the 1950s and it had significant influence on the language debate in Québec, although it never questioned the existence of an Anglophone minority. Finally, one cannot comprehend the history of unilingualism without mentioning the rising nationalism during the Quiet Revolution, nourished by simmering social discontent in the Francophone community.

Although the idea of unilingualism first appeared during the 1960s, unilingualism was only officialized in 1977, when the National Assembly passed the *Charter of the French Language* (Bill 101). This charter pursues one essential goal: the recognition of French as the common language of Québec, thus enabling Quebecers to “live in their language” (Michel Plourde as cited by Larose, p. 146-147). Larose emphasizes that the philosophy of unilingualism as expressed in Bill 101 appeared to be the only solution to guarantee the status of French as the first language of Québec, and refuses to consider it an attempt to ignore Anglophone Quebecers. In my opinion, it is essential that Larose accentuates this aspect of Bill 101, often experienced as a coercive law, especially when it comes to its application to the area of education.¹⁰ However, as Larose rightly puts it, bilingualism on a provincial level would only benefit English, as was the case before the 1960s, when English was the dominant language of a minority of speakers.

⁹ For instance, Radio-Canada (the Francophone counterpart of CBC Canada) recently broadcast a documentary on the crisis in the aviation sector in 1976: despite the language act of 1969, the use of French was prohibited in Québec air traffic control towers, creating a lot of discontent among Francophones.

¹⁰ In the public sector, parents can only send their children to English-speaking schools in very strict circumstances: either one of the parents must have received their education in English in Canada.

French as the language of public use and civic nationalism

Since French has become the official language of Québec in 1977, it is considered to have become a common public language for all Quebecers regardless of their different ethnic origins. Especially in political circles, French has been gradually dissociated from the concept of “French-Canadian ethnicity”, which has led to a more inclusive definition of the national identity of Quebecers. In his article “French as the ‘common public language’ in Québec” (pp. 153-194), Leigh Oakes (Queen Mary, University of London, UK) examines whether it is possible to completely “de-ethnicize” language, to quote the author’s words, as is sometimes suggested when defending the concept of French as language of public use in this province.

The first part of this article can be regarded as a continuation of the previous article in so far as it gives a historic overview of how French gradually became the public language since the adoption of Bill 101. In this respect, Oakes mentions that the concept of “public language” was introduced in order to analyze more adequately the dynamics of the use of French in the province: as from the 1990s, the notion is used in official documents to distinguish between the mother tongue and the language used at home on the one hand and the language used in different public activities on the other hand. At the same time, the notion of “common language” opened the door for a renewed conception of Québécois identity, focused on French as a common value for all Quebecers, but no longer based on French Canadian ethnicity. Over the past years, official authorities have thus been promoting a language policy based on more civic terms, giving the impression that language and culture are clearly separate. However, as Oakes stresses, language plays an important role in both ethnic and civic nationalisms, although in different ways. Whereas ethnic nationalism focuses on language as a symbol of “mythical ancestry” (p. 168), language is seen as a unifying value in civic nationalism that can bring together people from different ethnic origins.

This observation leads us to the second part of the article. In spite of the recent ethnoculturally neutral position of language politics in Québec, striving towards a citizen-orientated conception of identity, Oakes clearly demonstrates that it is not possible to completely “de-ethnicize” language. For instance, Oakes notes that the distinction between Québécois *de souche* and those who are not of French Canadian descent is still made: only the former are usually called *francophones* whereas immigrants usually are

referred to as *allophones*. Oakes argues that this situation is far from being unique to Québec and discusses, amongst others, the situation in France, Sweden and the US. Moreover, Oakes is opposed to the idea that identity should be completely “de-ethnicized” because ethnicity plays an important role in the maintenance of a language, which is not an insignificant detail when taking into consideration the situation of Québec in its North American context. Especially when it comes to the integration of immigrants, Québec has to provide incentives for newcomers to learn French as a second language rather than English. Oakes mentions the “integrationist” model as an interesting alternative to an exclusively civic model. This model creates a civic framework in which people can express their attachment to the French language, but to different degrees.

In short, given that language is an important element of the identity of the French Canadian ethnic group, Oakes considers that Québec should not completely “de-ethnicize” the French language, because it would have the opposite effect on the preservation of French. At the same time, the author is very much aware of the challenge involved in convincing immigrants to adhere to French as the public language. The integrationist model could provide an interesting alternative in this respect. I find this article provides an interesting contribution to the language debate in the province. For instance, the expression of a Québec identity based on language is often criticized, not only by Canadians outside Québec, but also by some Québec intellectuals, because it is often considered too exclusive. In this way, it is very often used as a point of contention in the debate opposing federalism and separatism, the latter being accused of being too exclusive.¹¹ This article however succeeds in demonstrating that ethnicism should not be confused with ethnocentricity, although it is often the case when issues related to identity are discussed.

The volume ends with a selected bibliography on the language issue in Québec (pp. 195-200). Although one cannot expect such a bibliography to be complete, I was rather surprised not to find the proceedings of the lexicography congress held in 1985 (Boisvert, Poirier and Verreault 1986) nor the issue that the *Revue d'aménagement linguistique* dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the *Charter of the French Language* in 2002.

¹¹ This is partly due to a speech made by Jacques Parizeau in 1995 following the defeat of the second referendum on the separation of Québec: Parizeau attributed this defeat in part to “ethnic votes”, to quote his words, by which he meant the votes of the different immigrant communities. It goes without saying that this statement provoked (and it still does) much controversy.

All in all this volume provides an interesting contribution to the understanding of some facts about Québec's particular sociolinguistic context. In this regard, I think it will certainly interest scholars that work on language planning, but also a wider public curious to learn more about Québec. However, in order to increase the accessibility of this collection, I would personally encourage the editors to review the articles (rather than simply translate them) in order to adapt them to the needs of the target audience. For instance, the first article contains some French words that are not translated (thus making the examples difficult to understand) and the different articles sometimes mention facts that might be unknown to readers who are not familiar with Québec at all.

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