

The world 'remarks' our French-influenced English

Others may be shocked by what she 'exposed at the reunion' – but not Quebecers

INGRID PERITZ
THE GAZETTE

IF YOU take the autoroute to reach your dépanneur, then visit the caisse populaire en route to the CLSC, you are part of a distinct group in North America.

You speak Quebec English.

For years, Quebec anglophones have been borrowing words from their francophone confrères and confounding outsiders.

"The syndicate has your dossier," for example, has nothing to do with organized crime, though it may mean your union job is on the rocks.

"The animator is in local 231" does not mean a cartoonist is at phone extension 231, but that a group leader is in Room 231.

Now Quebec English is getting international recognition. The prestigious Oxford Companion to the English Language publishes its first edition next month, and it devotes a small entry to Quebec English.

So the English of *chez nous* will take its place in the pantheon of world Englishes, alongside Maori English,

Babu English, Queensland Canefields English, Hawaii Pidgin English and Rasta Talk.

The 1,000-page Oxford Companion, described as a cornucopia covering every aspect of the English language, is edited by Tom McArthur. He's a Scottish-born professor whose interest in Quebec English is more than academic — he taught English at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières from 1979 to 1983.

His interest in the topic was twiggled when a colleague of British origin casually mentioned that he had recently "given a conference."

"I was puzzled about what he meant," McArthur said in an interview from his home in Cambridge, England.

"I became aware that anglophones in Quebec speak a slightly different English, without knowing it," he said. "If somebody draws their attention to it, they become mildly embarrassed."

The companion concludes what most of us have known all along: "The most marked feature of (Quebec) English is the influence of French."

For example: English-speakers in Quebec say "give a conference" instead of give a lecture; "scolarity" instead of

schooling; and "collectivity" instead of "community."

They say Premier Robert Bourassa "passed on television" instead of appeared. They visit the caisse populaire, eat frites, and seek government subventions rather than grants.

These quirky English-speakers are often "anglos" — and they get a listing in the book too.

Anglos grasp sentences that have entirely different meanings to non-anglos. Like this: "I was shocked by what she exposed at the reunion."

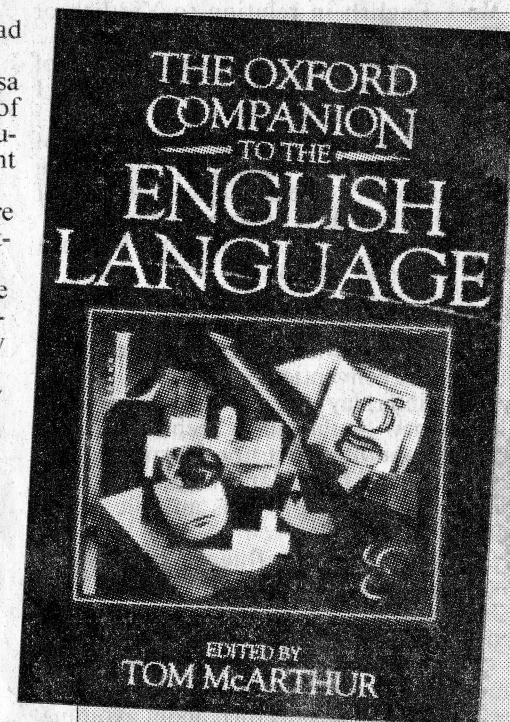
If you think it refers to trickery and the bold behavior of a former classmate, then you are probably not a fluent speaker of Quebec English. Locals know it means you were disappointed with someone's presentation at a meeting.

McArthur has analyzed such terms as "to remark," "to demand" and "confessional schools." They are used instead of "to notice," "to ask" and "denominational schools."

"Because of its special circumstances

PLEASE SEE **ANGLOS**, PAGE B2

■ **The way we spell is ridiculous.** PAGE B6



Quebec English takes its place alongside Rasta Talk in McArthur's book.

Anglos appear unconcerned about the gallicisms in t

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in relation to French," he wrote in another 1989 study. "Quebec English seems to me to be at least as interesting as, say, New York English in relation to Yiddish or Hebridean English in relation to Gaelic." Quebec anglophones think nothing of saying "I hope to work at a CLSC when I graduate from CEGEP."

That's because they make free use of these and other French titles, including Hydro-Québec, Société des Alcools and, of course, Office de la Langue Française.

Political events can become a bonanza for "Frenghish" speakers.

When they say "The commission president will attend the congress," they really mean "the committee chairman will attend the convention."

The interplay of English and French is hardly new — they have been rubbing off on one another since the Normans sang the Chanson de Roland at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. It was an epic poem about Charlemagne.

In Quebec, the influence has always been perceived in one way: English words slipping into the French language, leading to dreaded anglicisms.

Quebec's minority anglophone community does not, however, appear at present to be much concerned about avoiding or correcting gallicisms," McArthur wrote.

Yet the state of English in Quebec is comparable in status to English on the

Texas border or in Puerto Rico, where it is influenced by Spanish.

"The Quebec and Puerto Rican situations have much in common," McArthur wrote. Two world languages meet in one place, giving birth to "special varieties" of both.

"One of the languages, English, belongs to a powerful neighbor and also to a significant local minority."

The Oxford Companion says the first

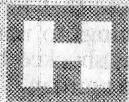
significant English-speaking settlers in Quebec were the British Empire Loyalists from the U.S., who arrived in the late-18th century. Anglophones used to be a majority in Montreal, but their decline to a minority has affected the way English is spoken, he said.

"Such facts explain why English as used in Montreal is not as homogeneous as other Canadian regional English," the companion says.

"Rather it exists as a continuum, long-established unilingual anglophones broadly similar to anglophones in Ontario to bilinguals of various kinds to francophones using English as a second language."

The Companion sheds light on Quebec creations. English-lovers the world over will soon know that Alliance Québécoise is "a pressure group in the Canadian province of Quebec," and the Equinoctial Party was "founded to support minor-

Dépanneur means corner store only in Quebec French —



ERE is a glossary of some Quebec English words.

Anglophone/francophone: English/French

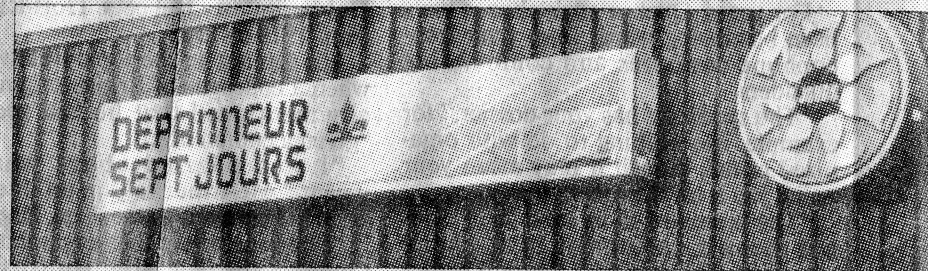
speaker.

The terms "are now more or less pan-Canadian, but they are not negotiable currency in the United States generally, and hardly occur in British English although they have currency in West Africa," McArthur writes.

In the U.S., anglo is a term used by Mexican-Americans to refer to English-speakers. It is short for Anglo-Americano.

Animator: a group leader.

Autoroute: highway



In France, you'd call a dépanneur to get your car fixed.

Demand (to): to ask.

Dépanneur: corner store.

"In international French the term refers only to someone who fixes vehicle breakdowns, not shortages in food," McArthur

writes. He said he did find the word dépannage, with the Quebec meaning, in Haiti.

Dossier: file. "I was seized with dossier" means "I was given the file."

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Don't seem unconcerned about the gallicisms in their language

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The Companion sheds light on other Quebec creations. English-lovers the world over will soon know that Alliance Quebec is "a pressure group in the Canadian province of Quebec," and the Equality Party was "founded to support minority

language rights in Quebec."

They will discover that Quebec's Bill 178 "allows non-French signs inside stores but not outside — an ordinance mocked by some anglophones as 'the inside-outside law.'"

The Oxford Companion to the English Language, published by Oxford University Press, sells for \$61.95. It will be available in Canadian libraries — oops, bookstores — late next month.

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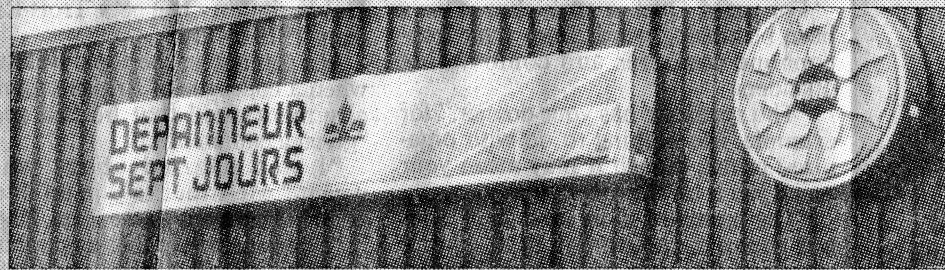
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Dossier: file. "I was seized with the dossier" means "I was given the file."

Inscription: registration.

Notes: grades, as in, "I got a good note on my history paper."

Remark (to): to notice, as in, "Did you remark the way he was carrying on?"

Scolarity: schooling, from *scolarité*.

Subvention: grant, subsidy.

Syndicate: union, from the French *syndicat*.

"The sentence, 'We talked to the syndicate people about scolarity' is well understood in Quebec," McArthur writes. "In Britain it would make no sense at all, and in the United States, puzzled minds would turn, not unreasonably, to thoughts of the Mafia."

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