CHAPTER 11

FROM OTHER TONGUE
TO MOTHER TONGUE IN THE DRAMA
OF QUEBEC AND CANADA

Louise Ladouceur
University of Alberta, Faculté St-Jean (Canada)

This article aligns itself along the postcolonial trajectory because the phenomena discussed here originate in the power struggle that exists in translation in an officially bilingual country between two languages of unequal status, the legacy of European colonial wars. It is from this angle that sense can be made of many asymmetries noted in the comparison of dramatic texts that English Canada and French Quebec have borrowed from each other by means of translation. These asymmetries can be found not only in the quantity of plays exchanged, but also in the strategies employed to translate a work which is written originally in the other official language and expected to represent this other culture in a context where the notion of bilingualism is fraught with an increasing number of problems.

A French colony ceded to Great Britain in 1763, New France would remain part of British North America until the Constitution Act of 1867 united Upper and Lower Canada with Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to form Canada, a federation to which other provinces would gradually be added. The Canadian federation adopted a policy of institutional bilingualism that would know a lively history—too long to be recounted here—centred upon the encounter of two languages of unequal power: on one hand, a triumphant English which would become the language of the majority, a language sure of itself, destined to become a worldwide lingua
franca; on the other, French, a minority language that had to be protected by the institution of laws and decrees, a language into which would be translated vast quantities of governmental documents first produced in English.

According to Ben-Zion Shek (1977), from the first days of British rule this diglossia would symbolize the problem between Canada and Quebec:

Les documents clés de l'histoire du Canada, tels la Proclamation royale de 1763, l'Acte de Québec, l'Acte constitutionnel, le rapport Durham, l'Acte de l'Union, l'Acte de l'Amérique du Nord britannique, le Statut de Westminster, ainsi que les textes des deux référendums sur la conscription, ont été rédigés d'abord en anglais puis traduits en français... La traduction à sens unique a reproduit les rapports réels dominants-dominés de la conjoncture militaire, en premier lieu, puis et par conséquent, politique et économique. (111)

[The key documents in Canadian history, such as the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the Quebec Act, the Constitution Act, the Durham Report, the Act of Union, the British North America Act, the Statute of Westminster, as well as the laws regulating the two referenda on conscription were originally produced in English then translated into French... This unidirectional process of translation reproduced the actual “dominant-dominated” relationship initially reflecting the situation militarily, and consequently, economically and politically as well.]

The monumental task of translation inherent to bilingualism thus embodies the clear hierarchical superiority of English vis-à-vis French—a state of affairs which would profoundly condition the translational behaviour of each group. In such a context, it is understandable that literary translation would be more actively practised among Anglophones, a group whose language remained unthreatened, and who could borrow without risking acculturation. It was quite a different story for Francophones, who were already required to translate a multitude of non-literary documents, and for whom the borrowing of a literary work was perceived “à la fois comme une menace et comme une perte d’efforts dans une entreprise marginale, du point de vue de la lutte pour la survie d’une langue et d’une culture minoritaires [both as a danger and a waste of energy in a marginal undertaking, from the point of view of the struggle for survival of a minority language and culture]” (Shek 1977, 112). In this analysis of theatre translation circulating between Canada and Quebec from the end of the 1960s up until 1994, the study of themes or aesthetics of drama will be set aside in order to concentrate on representations of linguistic alterity proposed by each repertoire.
Unequal Exchange

Though there were already a few plays from Quebec translated into English, it was the English production of Gratien Gélinas’s *Tit-Coq* at Toronto’s Royal Alexandra Theatre in 1951 that actually inaugurated the era of active theatrical exchange, by means of translation, between English Canada and French Quebec. Statistics compiled for my doctoral research (Ladouceur 1997b) show that, from 1951 to 1994, 101 plays from Quebec were produced or published in English translation in Canada. Ten of these plays were translated before 1970, thirty-six during the 1970s, thirty-five more during the 1980s and another twenty between 1990 and 1994. As for English-Canadian plays produced or published in translation in Quebec, there was one in 1969, six during the 1970s, twenty during the 1980s and twelve more between 1990 and 1994. This statistical profile indicates a 101 to 39 ratio in the respective borrowing by each repertoire, and an interval of eighteen years before Quebec reciprocated with publications or productions of translated plays. One does however note a breakthrough for English-Canadian drama in Quebec theatres beginning in 1990.

This asymmetry is due in part to the specific development of each system. In 1968, Quebec drama underwent a prodigious expansion when the theatrical institution questioned the dominant French model and promoted the use of a local vernacular on the stage, as demonstrated by Annie Brisset in her study of parodies, adaptations and translations of foreign plays in Quebec between 1968 and 1988: “Dans le secteur de la dramaturgie, c’est la langue qui va remplir la fonction distinctive nécessaire à l’émergence institutionnelle de la production québécoise [In the dramatic sector, it is language that will serve the distinctive function necessary for the institutional emergence of the Québécois production]” (1990, 273). In the relatively compact and socially cohesive context of French Quebec, theatre enjoyed great public favour as it displayed the specificity of the language spoken locally, a language that primarily distinguishes itself from the French model by its oral characteristics. Theatre consequently acquired a privileged status within the arts, where it permitted the affirmation of a Quebec identity freed from its ties to France and distinct in its language. This era also marked the beginning of an intense period of translation inasmuch as foreign plays would henceforth need to be presented in a local idiom, initially represented by joual, an accentuated vernacular which would later be integrated into a more varied regional language currently referred to as “Québécois.”

In contrast, English Canada is spread out over a large territory and divided into regions more or less removed from one another, and often with little in common. Occupied with managing the multiple regional identities
of what is commonly referred to as a multicultural “mosaic,” English Canada was also questioning its attachment to a colonial past. In 1970, it began to seek a voice among the poor and sparsely attended alternative theatres that sprang up on the periphery of government-funded regional theatres which were more attuned to the established British and American repertoires:

Canadian plays were relegated to small, low-budget theatres that lacked the financial and technical resources available to the heavily subsidized festivals and regionals. While non-Canadian works had access to lush productions, large casts and relatively highly paid actors, Canadian plays were doomed to what George Ryga called “beggars theatre.” (Wasserman 1986, 18)

With limited resources, the alternative movement dedicated itself to the promotion of an indigenous Canadian drama through the examination of Canadian history, culture and institutions, and the exploration of themes related to various Canadian realities (see Usmani 1983 and Johnston 1991). In this instance, translation offered several advantages to the growing alternative companies, one of which was to produce a play that had already proven successful. With the dynamic state of its theatrical production, Quebec had a great deal to offer a Canadian theatre repertoire still unsure of itself.

Divergent Attitudes Toward Translation

The asymmetry in the number of plays translated on each side also underlines a divergence in the attitude taken toward translation, a divergence attributable to the unequal status of Canada’s official languages. Quebec resisted borrowing literary texts from a partner from whom it was already obliged to translate volumes of documents more pragmatic in nature. Moreover, when it came to drama, the temptation if anything, was to borrow from the prestigious stages of London and New York. English Canada, on the other hand, armed with a hierarchically superior language spoken by the majority, did not hesitate to enlarge its own repertoire by borrowing a successful theatrical model from Quebec, which it would readily qualify as Canadian. In her study of the reception of translated Quebec theatre in Toronto up until 1988, Jane Koustas comments on the Canadian popularity of famous Quebec playwright Michel Tremblay:

Although the success of this distinctly Quebec nationalist playwright might initially suggest an openness to the “Other,” reviews thus indicate that he triumphed as a Canadian, not Quebec, playwright due primarily to the universality, not québécitude, of his plays. (1995, 93)

This divergence in attitude toward translation is highlighted by the dominant metaphors each side calls upon in the discourse pertaining to trans-
Elke translation. English Canada extols the meeting of the two cultures by means of an activity repeatedly referred to as a "bridge." As Kathy Mezei observed, "Since the 1950s, particularly in the context of the Quiet Revolution, the 1970 October Crisis, and the rise of the Parti québécois, English-Canadian translators have proclaimed a political mission to 'bridge' the two solitudes" (1994, 88).

In use until the middle of the 1980s, the metaphor of the bridge joining the "two solitudes"—another emblematic representation of the relationship between Canada and Quebec—was a unifying symbol designating an activity that saw itself as neutrally friendly, motivated simply by a curiosity for the other culture.

However, in the other solitude, Quebec, the harmful effects of the abundant and obligatory translation that turned the people of Quebec into "un peuple de traducteurs" are deplored. According to Sherry Simon, this aversion revolves "non pas autour des sujets d'ordre culturel, mais sur des questions proprement linguistiques [not around subjects of a cultural nature, but rather on strictly linguistic questions]" (1989, 50). In fact, the cultural difference between "the two founding peoples" of Canada rests above all in the language (see Simon 1992, 159). A principal indicator of cultural difference, language becomes a primary symbol of identity. In such a context, translation can only be viewed with great suspicion by Francophones. This suspicion is such that when, in 1975, Jacques Brault proposed that his "langue propre," his mother tongue, could benefit from a regenerative "détour" through the language of the other, he hastened to name this positive vision of the translative process, rare in Quebec, "nontraduction" (non-translation) (1975, 15-34). Therefore, only in denying its own action can the act of translation take on a positive value and present itself as a constructive activity. Commenting on his translation of English-Canadian poems, Brault wrote: "Une langue qui se refuse à pareille épreuve est d'ores et déjà condamnée. Morte [A language that refuses to face such a challenge is already condemned. Dead]" (15). It is, thus, an inversion of the usual argument contending that translation could be detrimental to the target language by exposing it to the influence of the source language. However, he added: "Nous n'aimons ni traduire ni être traduits. Et nous n'avons pas toujours et pas tout à fait tort. Les clefs de la traduction appartiennent aux puissants. S'il n'y a pas de langue mondiale, il y a des langues colonisatrices [We don't like to translate nor be translated. And we are not always nor completely wrong. The final word on a translation belongs to those in power. If there is no universal language, there are colonizing languages]" (16).

In Canada, inasmuch as power struggles are intimately connected to linguistic duality, translation and its accompanying discourse cannot avoid political ramifications. As Larry Shouldice notes: "Literary translation is political because language is political, and it is particularly political
because the relationship of English to French in this part of the world is particularly political" (1983, 77). Still, according to Shouldice, "It is not uncommon, I think, for English Canadians to view translation as a means of fostering national unity" (75). However, the Francophone minority would see in it a dangerous political tool, "a means of penetration and possession, a necessary step in the process of becoming informed, of preparing responses, and of exerting control" (79). Thus, from Quebec's point of view, translation would represent instead "an impulse to intelligence gathering for strategic defence purposes" (75). These highly contrasted attitudes toward the function of translation would necessarily have an influence on the choice of works to be translated and the strategies employed in representing the language of the other, that "other tongue."

**French to English: The "Joual" Era**

At the end of the 1960s, French Quebec and English Canada were actively preoccupied with the question of identity. In Canada, the celebrations held in 1967 to mark the Centennial of the Confederation furthered the emergence of a sentiment decidedly nationalist in nature which would be fed, moreover, by the upheaval occurring in Quebec as it came to the end of the Quiet Revolution, and headed toward the affirmation and recognition of a Quebec nation. At a time of such nationalist fervour, translation responded to the desire to create a national repertoire, specifically Canadian on the one hand, and specifically Québécois on the other. The specificity of each repertoire could only rest on a notion deemed essential to the construction of a distinct national identity: difference. Though common to each linguistic group, the emphasis placed on difference gave rise to divergent approaches. As the majority defines the norm against which differences are constructed, within a Canadian context where the majority is Anglophone, it is the Francophones, not to mention various ethnic minorities, that are most likely to invest in and be invested with a sense of alterity in relation to a dominant structure of identity. However, the alterity bestowed upon them is not necessarily the one to which they lay claim.

In 1968, when Quebec theatre found a voice of its own, it was with a language deformed by the overwhelming promiscuity of English and entrusted with the responsibility of distinguishing itself from the French model, which had hitherto been viewed as the only one capable of expressing a true Francophone culture. A poor and broken sociolect filled with Anglicisms, joual embodied the alienation of a French language cut off from its origins, and which a constant friction with English had rendered foreign to itself. With the canonization of joual, therefore, it was two colonial traditions that were simultaneously being challenged, a fact that would hardly reassure an Anglophone public worried about the effects of Quebec nationalism.
Whatever the case, Canada's nascent theatrical institution, hesitant yet wanting to establish a repertoire of its own, hurried to take advantage of the success of the *nouveau théâtre québécois* from which it would translate many plays written in joual. Among these plays, special attention was devoted to the work of Quebec playwright Michel Tremblay, who would soon become a prominent Canadian author with seventeen plays translated, produced and published in English before 1994, eleven of which appeared between 1972 and 1979. Three of these translations, moreover, would reappear in revised editions. John Van Burek was responsible for six of these translated versions, the tandem of John Van Burek and Bill Glassco for seven more, while the rest were translated by Renate Usmiani, John Stowe, Allan Van Meer and Arlette Francière.

For the most part, however, these translations were published without annotations or introductions. Except when appearing in an anthology—as was the revised translation of *Les Belles-Sœurs* in the 1993 edition of *Modern Canadian Plays*—the English version of a play was presented without any preliminary metatext explaining the difficulty involved in translating joual. Having never been exposed to the socio-historic conditions that shaped the French spoken in Quebec, Canadian English not only has difficulty in providing a linguistic equivalent to joual but it is, moreover, incapable of expressing the ideological statement made by the recourse to a colonized idiom alienated by its close contact with a dominant language.

Considering the rupture caused in Quebec theatre by Tremblay's style of writing and the challenge it poses to translation, the silence surrounding these translations, particularly in the case of the earlier publications, carries a definite, albeit discreet, message. Because it obscures the work of the translation and conveys the idea that the transcultural passage met with few obstacles—since none are mentioned—this silence places the emphasis on the final product to the detriment of the process from which it results. It creates the illusion of closeness and implies a faithfulness of the English reproduction that can only result from a total compatibility of the two cultures, a notion also at work in the assumption that translation provides a bridge on which it is easy to travel from one to the other.

What is more, as Vivian Bosley notes, Tremblay's joual is "standardized into [a] generic North American" (1988, 141) that retains a certain level of propriety, counterbalanced by an abundance of Gallicisms and, as in *Les Belles-Sœurs*, an excessive use of swearwords. Unlike the Anglicisms found in the original, the Gallicisms employed in the English version fail to reflect any actual usage inasmuch as the majority of Anglophones outside Quebec remain unexposed to the friction between the two languages and the ensuing linguistic hybridity. Indicative as they are of what Simon
calls a “surconscience de la différence [an overawareness of the difference]” (1994, 55), these Gallicisms serve only to underline the origin of the source text and to highlight an alterity already expressed by the translator’s choice to keep the original title in the translation, a strategy that would become the trademark of the English versions of Tremblay’s plays.

With titles bereft of meaning for an English audience, such as Les Belles-Sœurs (1974), Bonjour, là, bonjour (1975), En pièces détachées (1975), La Duchesse de Langeais (1976), Trois petits tours (1977), Damnée Manon, sacrée Sandra (1981) and La Maison suspendue (1991), it is suggested right from the outset that the play portrays an untranslatable reality to which an Anglophone public can hardly identify. As expressed by Bosley, commenting on the perception of Tremblay’s world by an Anglophone audience and “the kind of experience we have when watching such a play in translation”: “It is my contention that, instead of identifying with what is happening on stage, we become observers of an ethnological situation which strikes us as interesting and amusing and quaint” (1988, 139). This quaintness is made even more reassuring by the fact that, once translated and stripped of the ideological implications of the use of joual, Tremblay’s plays evoke a traditional image of Quebec, picturesque and nonthreatening, a perception more akin to what could be viewed as “universal” from a Canadian point of view. If we accept, as pointed out by Linda Hutcheon, that “eternal universal Truth ... has turned out to be constructed not found—and anything but eternal and universal” (1988, viii), and that such a notion, far from being neutral and absolute, is ideologically motivated, it is possible to see how plays evoking a Quebec of the past could be perceived as more “universally” acceptable.

New Markers of Identity

By the end of the 1980s, however, joual had become a level of language, among others, within an enlarged Québécois idiom. Theatrical writing in Quebec was then thriving in the formal exploration of dramatic language through the highly stylized verbal aesthetics of such writers as René-Daniel Dubois, Normand Chaurette and Normand Canac-Marquis, who, according to Chantal Hébert (1995), developed:

a new theatrical writing involving numerous mises en abîme, the mixing of genres and styles, the special use of monologues and narrative, the upsetting and telescoping of time, the fragmentation of space, discontinuity of the story-line, modification of the notion of suspense, and the questioning of the notions of character. (40-41)

Although it moved away from the preoccupation with a local vernacular, the emphasis placed upon the role of language in dramatic works remained,
as noted by Linda Gaboriau (1995), who has translated numerous plays by Jovette Marchessault, Normand Chaurette, Michel Garneau and René-Daniel Dubois into English:

In all Quebec theatre, there is an omnipresent, invisible character and that is the Québécois language. The presence of that spoken language, whatever level the playwright has chosen, is a statement in itself, a statement of cultural survival, aspiration and communion... The underlying difficulty I find in translating Quebec theatre is dealing with this preoccupation with language, the constant awareness of the importance of speaking French. (87)

If translating joual into English presented an almost impossible task, the intensive redefining of the role and structure of dialogue in recent dramatic works from Quebec would present another kind of problem to the reception of the text within a Canadian context. When the linguistic exuberance exhibited in these plays was not toned down in the translation, the English version would be perceived as suffering from a “French verbosity” incompatible with the more naturalistic codes of Canadian drama. It is as if such insistence on the function of language would prove exasperating for an English audience. Primarily unilingual and confident in their use of a language free from threat, English Canadians are ill-equipped to understand the preoccupation with the linguistic fabric, the importance given to the enunciative function and the insistence put on the very act of speaking in Quebec drama. This divergence in attitude toward the function of language could very well illustrate a critical difference between the dramatic repertoires of French Quebec and English Canada.

While this reflection of new-found verbal exuberance met with criticism, translations showed less of a tendency to insist on the origin of the borrowed text. It must be noted that in turning away from joual, Quebec theatre abandoned as well the examination of a sense of alienation and opened up to wider horizons. Gay, feminist or experimental theatre presented an enticing selection of thematic approaches from which English Canada borrowed at will without insisting, however, on the signs of a linguistic alterity specific to Quebec. In fact, there is an absence of exotic Gallicisms in recent translations of plays by Normand Chaurette, Jovette Marchessault and Michel Garneau, where specific references to the original setting or sociocultural context have been removed or Anglicized. It may be that the sense of alterity carried by references to a modern era is not ethnographically relevant, in the sense proposed by Simon (1994). Commenting on the approach taken by English Canada in translating Quebec literature, Simon compares the translator to an ethnographer who, unveiling a distant culture, “s’engage à en rendre toute la vérité mystérieuse et fascinante ... et à donner au texte traduit toute la densité de sa spécificité culturelle [vows to reveal all its
mysterious and fascinating truth ... and to invest the translated text with all the density of its cultural specificity]” (1994, 52). The more remote this distant culture appears to be, the more it contributes to creating identity by contrast. In this search for contrast, the other culture must exhibit signs of difference that are not only irreducible but authentic. In the English translation of Quebec plays, it looks as though this authentic alterity can only belong to a bygone era, the idyllic Quebec of the past. It is, to borrow a term used by Jacques Saint-Pierre, a “fantasy” nourished by the work of Michel Tremblay—and, more recently, by that of Michel-Marc Bouchard—who brings to life and “perpétue pour les anglophones un fantasma, celui d’une certaine vision de la société québécoise des années précédant la Révolution tranquille [perpetuates for Anglophones a fantasy, that of a certain vision of Quebec society during the years prior to the Quiet Revolution]” (Saint-Pierre 1991, 65).

Among Quebec playwrights, Tremblay and Bouchard presently enjoy the greatest popularity in English Canada. As mentioned previously, Tremblay dominates the Quebec repertoire in English translation with seventeen plays and three revised translations published between 1972 and 1994. As for Michel-Marc Bouchard, six of his plays were translated into English between 1990 and 1996, one of which, *Lilies or the Revival of Romantic Drama*, was made into a feature film directed by Torontonian John Greyson in 1996. The settling of accounts at work in *Lilies* takes place in 1952; the story relates events unfolding in Roberval in 1912 and portrays the narrowness of spirit and religious dogmatism of that era.

The following excerpt from Michel Tremblay’s *La Maison Suspens-due*, published in English by Talonbooks in 1991, takes place in the same era. In this account of a multigenerational family reunion involving a return to rural Quebec of 1910, Josaphat explains to his son how the legendary Chasse-Galerie would carry their house from Duhamel in the Laurentians right into Montreal so he could get the people of the city dancing to the tune of his violin. One can count in this excerpt no fewer than twelve Gallicisms, most of which are terms easily translatable into English—they may have been chosen for their morphological similarity to their English equivalents, which makes them more easily accessible to an Anglophone audience. These Gallicisms have been placed in italics for the purposes of this study. Within this same excerpt, it is also possible to observe a levelling out of the English in relation to the French in terms of the marks pertaining to a vernacular level of speech. Underlined in the two texts, they number twenty-nine in the original and six in the translation.

VICTOIRE. Josaphat, franchement!

JOSAPHAT. And off we all go to ma tante Blanche, or to ma tante Ozéa! The forest slides away beneath us, Duhamel is tout petit, les
Laurentides disappear completely into the darkness... The house sways gently... Me and your mother, we just sit here on the verandah and watch the sky go by. Usually all we see from here is a big black hole where Lac Simon is, but now it's the Big Dipper, the Little Dipper, la planète Mars... The house turns on the end of the rope and we see the whole sky pass before us, like la parade on St-Jean-Baptiste Day. During the whole journey, the house sways gently back and forth, back and forth... Us, we're sitting pretty. It sure is beautiful. (Silence. The three characters look around them.) When we get to our relatives', the canoe sets us down next to their place, bonsoir la compagnie, get out your accordéons, push the chairs against the wall, here we are! And then, let me tell you, the party starts in earnest! (He dances en turlutant, then stops as if at the end of a story.) And that, mon p'tit gars, is how you've been to Morial [Montreal] without even realizing! (Tremblay 1991, 34-35)

Here now is the excerpt from the original play, published in 1990 by Éditions Leméac:

**VICTOIRE.** Josaphat, franchement!

**Josaphat.** On s'en va sus ma tante Blanche ou ben donc sus ma tante Ozéa! La forêt glisse en dessous de nous autres, Duhamel est tout petit, les Laurentides au grand complet disparaissent dans le noir... La maison se balance tranquillement... Moé pis ta mère on s'installe su'a galerie pis on regarde le ciel passer devant nous autres! D'habetude, c'est un grand trou noir qu'on voit là oû qu'y'a le lac Simon, mais là c'est la Grande Ourse, pis la Petite Ourse, pis la planète Mars... La maison tourne au bout de sa corde pis on voit le ciel au grand complet passer devant nous autres comme une parade de la Saint-Jean Baptiste! Pendant tout le voyage la maison se balance un p'tit peu... Juste un p'tit peu. On est ben. C'est pas beau ordinaire! (Silence. Les trois personnages regardent autour d'eux.) Quand on arrive sus nos parents, le canot nous dépose à côté de chez eux, bonsoir la compagnie, sortez vos accordéons, poussez les chaises de contre le mur, nous v'lons! Pis là j'te dis que le party pogne! (Il danse en turlutant, s'arrête comme à la fin d'une histoire.) C'est comme ça, mon p'tit gars, que c'as souvent été à Morial sans même t'en rendre compte! (Tremblay 1990, 43-44)

Although relatively recent, this translation reveals translative strategies that translators have been employing since 1972 to represent Tremblay's work to English Canada.
English-Canadian Plays in French

In Quebec, however, English-Canadian playwrights of the 1970s and 1980s received little attention. The few Canadian plays then translated were those that had previously been very successful or whose themes were of particular interest to Quebec. For example, *Fortune and Men’s Eyes* by Torontoan John Herbert was produced in New York, London and Los Angeles, and subsequently turned into a movie that was filmed in English in Quebec City, before being translated by René Dionne and produced in Quebec in 1970, 1978 and 1985. John McDonough’s *Charbonneau & Le Chef* recounts the events surrounding the power struggle between the Archbishop of Montreal and the Premier of Quebec during the Asbestos Strike of 1949. The translated version by Paul Hébert and Pierre Morency enjoyed phenomenal success in Quebec with extended productions in 1971, 1972, 1974 and 1986.

Of the twenty-seven English-Canadian plays translated in Quebec before 1990, I consulted twenty-four. In these translated versions, whenever the action takes place somewhere else in Canada, it is transposed into a Quebec setting. Most onomastic, toponymic and sociocultural references are thus naturalized and, if necessary, the text is restructured. For example, in René Dionne’s adaptation of John Herbert’s play *Aux yeux des hommes* (Éditions Leméac, 1971), the characters Rocky, Smitty and Mona keep their original names, while Queenie is renamed Alice. Place names indicating where the action occurs are modified to suggest a Quebec setting. For example, a native of the Matachewan Reservation in Ontario is relocated to “une réserve de la Côte Nord” in Quebec. Allusion to famous people not well-known in French Quebec, such as British nurse Florence Nightingale, is replaced with a French equivalent, New France’s heroic nursing figure Jeanne Mance. References that have a well-known French equivalent, such as “Cinderella” or “Alice in Wonderland,” are translated into French, while mention of people like famous French actress Sarah Bernhardt and silent-movie star Valentino are retained in the translation. American movie stars Bob Hope and Bette Davis, although known to Quebec’s Francophone audience, are given local French equivalents, in this instance, Quebec actors Claude Blanchard and Yvette Brind’Amour. These strategies, the last of which is perhaps the most eloquent, are indicative of a desire to remove from the discourse references to an English language whose powerful presence already pervades the French spoken in Quebec. It is as if resistance to its dominance requires it be denied representation whenever possible.

In this fashion, translation followed the model of a Quebec dramatic repertoire whose specificity rested primarily on its recourse to a distinct
idiom. While the level of Tremblay’s language was raised in English translations reluctant to give voice to a vernacular that may have been perceived as too crude, Quebec translation found it necessary to dialectalize the language in borrowed plays. This resulted in an overall lowering of the level of language in many Quebec translations of English-Canadian plays produced before 1990. For instance, in John McDonough’s Charbonneau et le Chef, the structure of the play was modified by moving, cutting or creating entire scenes in which dialogue had been radically reworked. The following excerpt chosen from among the rare sections where the translation remains faithful to the original allows one to compare the level of language at work in each version. The dialogue involves a striker, La Roche, who argues with Premier Duplessis, known as le Chef, and with the American director of the mine, who threatens to enlist the services of strikebreakers. The regionalisms and distinctive marks of the spoken language have been underlined in the original and in the translation:

LA ROCHE. Solemn. Take care, gentlemen, take care... that could have grave consequences for the town of Asbestos.

LE CHEF. Rising on his toes, his fists in the air. Is that a threat?

LA ROCHE. We are French Canadians... we will defend our homes and our jobs. They stare at each other.

LE CHEF. Suddenly, with anger in his voice. I am the Prime Minister of Quebec, I will defend the rights of the people and the laws of the people from the illegalities of your crazy strike.

LA ROCHE. Calm. Our union is holding a meeting tonight, in front of the Parish Church, Saint Aimée. He points to the Church. If you free me, I will tell the others what you have in mind.

LE CHEF. Rapidly. You are free to go. But remember He shakes his long fingers in La Roche’s face remember, La Roche, I will not tolerate any violence or scorn of the laws. You be sure to tell that to your comrades, you hear! Otherwise I will throw the lot of you in jail. I mean it, I mean it, I mean it. (McDonough 1968, 22-23)

Here is the translated version of the same excerpt:

LAROCHE. Moe. a vot’place, j’frais attention à mes paroles, Monsieur.

DIRECTEUR. Pourquoi?

LAROCHE. Vous parlez des scabs, hein? Ca pourrait avoir des conséquences pas mal graves pour la ville d’Asbestos.
LE CHEF. C'est-y une menace ça, Laroche?

LAROCHE. On est des Canadiens français, on va défendre nos foyers et nos jobs... au coton...

LE CHEF, en colère. Moi, j'suis le Premier Ministre d'la province, mon gars, pis j'vas défendre les droits du peuple, j'vas défendre les lois du citoyen contre l'illegalité pis contre vos maudites grèves de fous! Vous avez une assemblée à soir?

LAROCHE. Quais, on d'vait se réunir...

LE CHEF. Avertis ta gang, sans oublier ton aumônier, que le mépris des lois, j'tolère pas ça!

LAROCHE. Mais monsieur, comment que j'vas leu dire ça? Chus arrêté.

LE CHEF. T'es libéré! Envoye! (Laroche ne bouge pas.) Envoye! Scram! Pis c'est mieux de dire tout ça à tes amis, compris! Autrement, je sacre tout l'monde en prison! (McDonough 1974, 20-21)

It is impossible to ignore the emphasis placed on regionalisms and on the marks pertaining to spoken language in a decidedly vernacular Québécois translation. While present only three times in the original passage, they occur thirty times in the translation.

At the end of the 1980s, the systematic recourse to adaptation was brought into question, as was the appropriateness of routinely transposing the action of a borrowed play into a Quebec context, here expressed by translator Jean-Luc Denis: "L'adaptation n'est pas en soi quelque chose d'illegitime; c'est lorsqu'elle est érigée en système qu'elle fait problème... Elle doit être reléguée le plus vite possible au territoire qu'elle n'aurait jamais dû quitter: celui du phénomène épisodique [Adaptation is not in itself illegitimate; it is when systematically applied that it becomes a problem... It must be relegated as quickly as possible to the territory it should have never left: that of the occasional phenomenon]" (1990, 16-17). From this point on, translations more frequently retained the original setting as well as the original names and occupations of the characters but continued to rely on an accentuated local vernacular. What is surprising in this insistence to translate into joual is that it contrasted sharply with the experimentation with language undertaken by Quebec playwrights in the 1980s. It is as if this audacity was reserved solely for writing while translation remained subject to the rule of Quebec's vernacular. Inasmuch as translation could no longer call upon the transposition authorized by adaptation, it appears as though the use of a highly accentuated idiom was a last resort in the attempt to naturalize the text to suit the receptive context.
Since 1990, however, a new tendency can be observed in the Québécois translation of English-Canadian theatre. Of the ten English-Canadian plays produced or published in translation in Quebec between 1990 and 1993, I have consulted nine, none of which involved an adaptation. The most popular English-Canadian playwright in Quebec at the beginning of the 1990s was Albertan Brad Fraser, who had three of his plays produced in Québécois translation between 1991 and 1995.\textsuperscript{15} In these translated versions, the origin of the play is readily displayed and one translation, \textit{Poor Super Man}, actually features an exact reproduction of the English title. The original settings are also retained, be it Edmonton, Calgary or, more vaguely, the West. Two of these plays, exhibiting a more or less frequent use of colloquialisms, resulted in Québécois versions bearing numerous attributes of the vernacular. However, the informal level of language, with occasional marks of orality, employed by Fraser in \textit{The Ugly Man} is maintained by Maryse Warda in her 1993 translated version, \textit{L'Homme laid}. Although adorned with discreet signs of orality, the language used in this translation has little in common with the accentuated vernacular that, in previous years, characterized the dramatic repertoire translated in Quebec. In this instance, translation reveals a voice without insisting on affirming a code.

**Conclusion**

As suggested in this study, the exchange of theatre translation between English Canada and French Quebec before 1990 shows evidence of polarization, from an emphasis placed on the untranslatable alterity of a French minority, nostalgically identified with a traditional and non-menacing past, to the attempt to resist the hegemonic and oppressive English majority in translations crafted to conceal the origin of the text while highlighting Quebec's own sense of difference. On the linguistic level, this is manifest in the English translations with their recurring recourse to calques and Gallicisms and by a raising of the level of language found in the source text, while Quebec translations tend to erase any trace of the original text and lower the level of language to promote the use of joual as the idiom of drama specific to Quebec.

At the end of the 1980s, however, this model was redefined as English-Canadian theatre enjoyed growing popularity in Quebec, while retaining marks of the original setting in translations. Although recently less accentuated, the use of a local vernacular remained prominent in Québécois versions of Canadian plays while Quebec's verbal exuberance in experimenting with language had to be toned down to fit the more naturalistic inclination of English-Canadian drama. This polarization in the methods applied to the translation of plays from one official language into the other
reflects the power struggle at work in Canada, where English is spoken by the majority and French remains the language of a minority.

Notes

1. This study has benefited from a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada doctoral fellowship. A shorter version was delivered in French at the Postcolonial Translations: Changing the Terms of Cultural Transmission conference held at Université de Montréal and Concordia University, May 22-25, 1997. This text was translated into English by Richard Lebeau.

2. Although periodization according to decades for statistical purposes is arbitrary, it permits readily accessible reference on the time axis. It must be noted, however, that 1970 and 1980 are pivotal years in the context of relations between Canada and Quebec. During the 1970 October Crisis, the federal government responded to violent acts perpetrated by the Front de libération du Québec by proclaiming the War Measures Act, thus temporarily suspending civil liberties in Quebec. In the 1980 Quebec Referendum, sixty percent of the voters refused to give the Parti Québécois government the mandate to negotiate sovereignty-association with the Canadian Confederation (The Canadian Encyclopedia [Edmonton: Hurtig, 1985], 1311, 1555).

3. Brisset's (1990) statistical study shows that sixty-nine percent of the foreign plays translated by seven Quebec theatre companies between 1968 and 1988 were originally written in English.


5. “Que nous le voulions ou non, nous sommes un peuple de traducteurs” [Whether or not we want it, we are a people of translators]” (León Lorrain, qtd. in Daviault [1971], 716).

6. A dialect associated with a specific social group or class. For example, joual was more closely identified with Montreal's illiterate working class.


8. For example, criticizing the English translation of The Edge of Earth Is Too Near, Violette Leduc, by Jovette Marchessault, Ray Conologue wrote in The Globe and Mail:
"Part of the problem is a French lyrical verbosity that does not work in English—at least, not in Suzanne de Lothièrè-Harwood’s overwrought translation" (qtd. in Wallace [1990], 225). Conlogue’s comments on the English translation of Michel Garneau’s *Warriors* reads: “The difficulty is that Gilles' exuberant language and his passion for ideas are distinctly Gallic. An anglophone adman might well have Gilles’ talent and encounter his moral dilemma, but there is no way he would talk about it in this fashion” (1990), C9. See also the title of the review of Normand Chaurette’s *Le Passage de l’Indiana: “Fuelled by Long Monologues. Play’s Verbosity Is Its Engine."

Conlogue (1996), C15.

9. For example, in *Warriors* (Linda Gaboriau’s translation of Michel Garneau’s *Les Guerriers*), reference to a book published by the French publishing house “les éditions de minuit” is replaced in the translated version by a “penguin paperback,” and the advertising campaign directed toward a “jeune québécois raisonnable” is aimed in the translation at “reasonable young people.” In Jovette Marchessault’s *The Edge of Earth Is Too Near*, Violette Leduc (translated by Susanne de Lothièrè-Harwood), titles of books written by Violette Leduc (e.g., *L’Asphyxie* and *L’Affamée*) or passages referring to other contemporary writers close to Leduc have been removed.


11. “French Canadian variant of the Wild Hunt, a legend [in which] one or several persons together are able, with the help of the Devil, to travel in a canoe through the air at tremendous speed” (Smith [1985], 320).

12. For a detailed analysis of the transpositions in Quebec translations of English-Canadian plays, see Ladouceur (1997b).

13. This diverges from Brisset’s (1990), 112, interpretation of similar strategies observed in Quebec translations of foreign plays, where she contends that such an approach is destined to “réduire au silence la voix de l’Étranger” (1990, 112). As demonstrated here, it is not so much reference to any foreign culture that is the object of suspicion but, more precisely, cultural items pertaining to the dominant linguistic code, English.

14. This phenomenon had been previously observed by Brisset (1988), 16: "la représentation théâtrale de la québécité qui se projette sur le texte étranger exige un abaissement social des protagonistes pour justifier qu’on les fasse parler suivant un mode d’expression distinct du franco-français [the theatrical representation of québécité projected on the foreign text demands that the social status of the characters be lowered to justify their use of a language distinct from the French of France]."

15. They are: *Des restes humains non identifiés et de la véritable nature de l’amour [Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love]*, trans. André Brassard.

Works Cited

Theory and Criticism


FROM OTHER TONGUE TO MOTHER TONGUE


Plays


