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### Canadian Dictionary Projects II Canadian English

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## CANADIAN DICTIONARY PROJECTS II : CANADIAN ENGLISH<sup>(1)</sup>

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When the Canadian Linguistic Association was formed in 1954, one of the topics that received some attention was the possibility of producing a dictionary of Canadian English, a terme which was at that time used somewhat vaguely but which has since been defined more precisely. It became clear then that a number of people had been working independently for some years on such matters as pronunciation, vocabulary, regional varieties of Canadian English, the history of Canadian English and, to a lesser degree, on spelling.

Although the members of the Canadian Linguistic Association by no means confine their work to the study of the English language in Canada, a number of us in the Association who find that topic of great interest began to pool our ideas and to try to arrive at an understanding of what might be done to produce a fairly comprehensive study of what we now call Canadian English.

It became obvious that there were three courses which we could pursue, none of these courses entirely independent of the others. And in determining which of these courses to follow, we have been guided by the often apparently irreconcilable factors of idealism and realism based on economics and urgency.

Our idealism of course was based on our understanding of what a dictionary ought to do, and in particular on the idea ably presented by Benjamin Whorf, J. P. Vinay and others, that a language is an important key to an understanding of the nature of the people who use it.

For example, if we had no other information than the great *Oxford English Dictionary* we could learn a great deal about England. We should know that Italy has greatly influenced English music because of the large number of words of Italian origin to do with music in the English vocabulary. We can date this influence and follow its history. We should know, too, that France, from an early date, has had a great deal to do with English fashions. Perhaps more important, we should learn from the dictionary that England was early concerned with democratic government, witness the *witenagemot*, the Anglo-Saxon assembly of counsellors or wise men. We should know that Ireland and Rome both influenced the coming of Christianity to England. From the divergent development of *crafty* and *craft*,

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<sup>1</sup> Texte d'une conférence prononcée par M. Scargill à l'école d'été en linguistique de l'Université de l'Alberta, août 1958.

one a term of disrespect and the other still an honorable one, we can see that the English suspected the man with a *craft*, the *crafty man*, even though they admired his skill in his *craft*.

Ideally, a dictionary of the English language in Canada should be as complete a record of the history and culture of English-speaking Canada as is the *Oxford English Dictionary* of the people of England. Such a dictionary should be historical and should deal with every word and usage in the English language in Canada, showing what England, Scotland, Ireland, the French, the Indians, the Eskimo, the people of the United States have contributed to the development of English-speaking Canada. It should record *table* and *chair*, indeed all words from England; and it should also give *seigneurie*, *broncho*, *cariole*, *mukluk*, *wiener* and so on.

Obviously the task of compiling such a dictionary would be too great. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, with 2,000 volunteer workers took more than forty years to publish. Moreover, such a dictionary would in a sense be wasteful. The idea, then, of such a dictionary was early abandoned even by the most idealistic of us.

However, the second course open to us, one which is more practical than the first although still quite extensive, did not deny the possibility of giving a true picture of the many cultural influences to be demonstrated in the language of English-speaking Canada.

This second course is the production of what we now call the *Dictionary of Canadian English on Historical Principles*. Here, of course, is a change in title : Canadian English as opposed to the English language in Canada. This change means an emphasis on the investigation of the English language in Canada *as it differs from as well as resembles* British English. That is, our aim is to show what is distinctive about the English language in Canada.

As a member of our Association, Mr. C. J. Lovell, has expressed it : "Our only practicable procedure is to investigate Canadian writings solely for their own sake, considering New World English as it pertains to Canada, without regard to earlier work in the United States." (*Journal of the Canadian Linguistic Association*, Vol. 1, No. 1)

It is obvious what such an investigation of Canadian writings might reveal : that English-speaking Canada owes much to Britain, to the U. S. A., to French-speaking Canadians, to native peoples. Indeed, a dictionary produced in this way will be a more useful one than a dictionary of the English language in Canada because in recording Canadian history and culture it would ignore words common to all English-speaking peoples and would concentrate on those which are distinctive and which, for this very reason, indicate the Canadian Way of life.

However, this second plan, a dictionary of Canadian English, has found some opponents, particularly among those who asked "Why should we have a Dictionary of Canadian English which might be in a large measure a duplication of information already available in the *DAE* (*Dictionary of American English*) and the *DA* (*Dictionary of Americanisms*)?" I shall return to this problem later. But let me say now, that even before the voices of protest were raised, some thought had been given to the kind of dictionary implied by their question : a dictionary of words and usages indigenous to Canada, originating there and used only there.

Such a dictionary could be produced. But it would by no means be anything like a comprehensive record of the origins and nature of the culture of English-speaking Canada. It would obviously have to ignore a large part of our vocabulary which we owe to the United States. As a cultural record, it would suggest that we are quite unlike our American neighbours, that we are quite unlike the British, that we have nothing in common with the New World at all. Imagine a dictionary of Canadian English that was prevented from recording *muffler, corral, frankfurt, lumberjack, chipmunk, box social* . . .

As a result of many deliberations, a Committee was formed last year to make plans for the preparation and eventual publication of a *Dictionary of Canadian English on Historical Principles*.

However, largely within the last two or three months certain avenues have been opened which will lead to a more speedy publication of certain materials than the Committee had ever thought possible.

Thanks to a Canadian publishing firm, there is now every hope that *two types of dictionary* will be available within a few years, with the Committee's large-scale venture to appear later, probably much later.

¶ The first of the two projects is to be a series of three dictionaries for use in Canadian Schools : a *Beginning Dictionary*, a *Junior Dictionary*, and a *High School Dictionary*. Perhaps some of you are already familiar with these three under the name of the *Thorndike-Barnhart School Dictionaries*. These are dictionaries produced for use in American schools and are outstanding in their field. A Canadian publisher has obtained the rights to have these three dictionaries revised for Canadian Schools and has asked four members of our Association to do the work : Dr. Avis, of R.M.C., Kingston, Professor Gregg of U.B.C., Mr. Lovell from Illinois, and myself.

Now this particular revision is not strictly a part of the work of our Association's Dictionary Committee at all. But the project does have the official support of the Committee and of the whole Association.

How does one go about making a dictionary designed for American schools suitable for use in Canada ?

In the first place, one must consider the obvious matter of pronunciation. The Thorndike-Barnhart dictionaries list either as /iðər/ with /aɪðər/ as "especially British". It lists *schedule* only as /skɛdʒul/. Obviously some alteration is needed here. Both /iðər/ and /aɪðər/; /skɛdʒul/ and /fɛdʒul/ must be listed in a dictionary for Canadian schools. But in what order of preference ? We believe that either one is acceptable among educated Canadians and therefore neither one can be described as preferable to the other. Both types are perfectly reputable.<sup>2</sup>

Next, of course, comes the matter of spelling. For example, in *centre* only the *-er* spelling is given in the Thorndike-Barnhart dictionaries. Obviously this is not an accurate statement for Canada. We must offer *-re* as well in any Canadian revision. This is true, too, of the type of word like *colour*.

But the question arises here as with pronunciation : Do we list such

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<sup>2</sup> Un article du Dr Avis précisera ces questions de prononciation du canadien anglais dans le prochain numéro du *Journal*. JPV.

variations in spelling in an order of preference ? Some people have urged us to do so in the interests of consistency.

If we take newspapers, periodicals, and most books as our standard, we find that what are called American spellings are the more frequent. But there is a difference between "more frequent" and "preferred."

I think that we shall need to say here as with pronunciation that we do not "prefer" either *center* or *centre* but that both are current and therefore acceptable among educated Canadians. We shall thus record both.

An American dictionary is also not going to be entirely suitable in its content for Canadian schools. For example, the Thorndike materials have no reference to *separate schools* — nor, for that matter does any dictionary, — British or American — but obviously this term should be given in a dictionary for Canadian schools.

The term *levée* is given as "a reception" with an explanation that French kings used to hold such a reception while dressing. Perhaps a fuller description could be given for Canadian schools with some reference to current official receptions.

However, it is probably not necessary to include in these school dictionaries those words which properly belong to the *Dictionary of Canadian English*, e. g. the term *kamik* for a "skin boot" as used by Foxe Basin and Baffin Eskimos or *shaganappi* for "cords of rawhide" derived from Cree Indian.

The first volume of this series should be in the publishers hands by October of next year at the latest and the other two will follow in due course.

¶ The second dictionary, which should be published within three or four years, will be in a sense a pilot volume of the extensive *Dictionary of Canadian English on Historical Principles* and will later be incorporated into that work. This pilot dictionary is to be the work mainly of Mr. C. J. Lovell, an experienced lexicographer who was on the staff of the *Dictionary of Americanisms* and is a member of the Linguistic Association's Dictionary Committee.

Mr. Lovell's work will probably consist of a single volume of what are to be described as "especially examples of word usage in which words or meanings differ from words and meanings used in other English-speaking countries."

This book will probably be called a *Dictionary of Canadianisms* for convenience, although it will by definition not confine itself to words and usages indigenous to Canada.



Since Mr. Lovell's work is to be the first of the publications to offer historical evidence and since it is to follow the principles now being established for the larger *Dictionary of Canadian English on Historical Principles* perhaps it is in order for me to now consider these proposed volumes together and say something about what they are likely to contain, remembering that the first volume is to be designated as a *Dictionary of Canadianisms*, for convenience in distinguishing it from the larger work.

As I explained earlier a dictionary of Canadianisms, using the term strictly to mean "words originating in and used in Canada" could be produced. But it is doubtful if such a dictionary would be a valid contribution by itself to a history of Canadian culture. A dictionary bearing a similar title "Dictionary of Americanisms" did not limit itself strictly to words indigenous to the United States.

A Dictionary of Canadianisms in the strict sense of the word would emphasize only one side of Canadian English. Such a dictionary would not include *scrip* for that is not indigenous to Canada. The *Dictionary of Americanisms* records it from 1790 as "a certificate issued in lieu of money." (And it is an abbreviation of British *subscription*.)

Moreover it would probably not include *wigwam* and it would not include *Hoodoos* or *lumber* (first recorded in its present sense in 1855 in American sources). It is doubtful if such a term as *old timer* could be entered. Even *remittance man* is probably not indigenous to Canada.

The work required to produce such a dictionary would be far greater than the results would warrant. It would mean that in order to be absolutely accurate the editors would have to examine a vast amount of material not consulted by the editors of the *Dictionary of Americanisms* or by anybody else.

For example, let me take a simple illustration : *fire-hall*. In the *Dictionary of Americanisms* this word is cited from 1906. Mr. Lovell turns it up in the *Brandon Mail* for 1882. Does this mean that *fire hall* is a usage indigenous to Canada from whence it passed to the U. S. A. ? By no means. Editors of dictionaries are not omnipotent. It merely means that a further intensive search of American materials might well produce an earlier date for this usage. For that matter a search of other New World writings might prove that its place of origin was neither Canada nor the United States.

I doubt if an intensive search for such indigenous "Canadianisms" would prove sensible. For, as Mr. Lovell himself has written, such an activity would limit our investigation to but a few hundred words (*Journal of the Canadian Linguistic Association*, Vol. I, No. 2).

The important fact about the use of *fire hall* in the 1882 *Brandon Mail* is that by that year at least fire-fighting was a public duty in Brandon.

To compile such a dictionary would not only require tremendous detective work, but it would also fail to give anything like a fair and comprehensive picture of the distinctive features of Canadian English as a whole. Mr. Lovell and his publishers are therefore to be commended on their refusal to be strictly confined by a very narrow and exclusive use of the term "Canadianism."



What kind of words are to be entered in a *Dictionary of Canadian English* ? That is, what are the sources of Canadian English ?

First, perhaps, we might note the obvious fact that new meanings have been given to English words and to combinations of English words. *York boat* is an obvious example. Neither word is in itself a Canadian development ; but in combination they do take on a new meaning to describe something Canadian, a heavy freight canoe developed by the Hudson's Bay

Company post at York Factory. In Mr. Lovell's volume this term will doubtless be given and illustrated with its earliest date as 1864.

*Separate school* is another example of British English words being brought into a combination with a distinctive Canadian meaning.

Neither *end* nor *steel* are indigenous to Canada; but in the phrase *end of steel* they have a meaning which is not found in British English.

There are obvious examples of words derived from native languages. Such a one is *pemmican*, a word to be derived from the Cree *pemmi* meaning "fat" and *kan* meaning "meat". The earliest reference to this word is 1743 in Isham's *Observations on Hudson's Bay* where he says that "pimmeggan is reckoned . . . very good food by the English as well as Natives."

An author writing in the mid nineteenth century is not impressed by pemmican, for he says: "Take scrapings from the driest outside cover of a very old stale piece of cold roast beef, add to it lumps of tallowy rancid fat, then garnish all with long human hairs . . . and short hairs of oxen, or dogs, or both, — and you have a fair imitation of common pemmican."

Another such word is *muskeg* — to be derived from the Cree *muskak* meaning "swamp". It is first recorded as "swamp" in the *Cumberland House Journal* of 1775 in this way: "We passed over one Carrying Place of  $\frac{1}{4}$  Mile called Muskake or swampy carrying Place . . ."

A localism, that is a word confined to a particular region, that is derived from the Ojibpwe is *nitchie*, a term used to describe an Indian in the Prairie Provinces. *Nitchie* is early recorded in the 1865 *Manitoban* as "Well, I give nee chee some; and he filled his peese pipe and smoked it . . .", Nowadays, this word has taken on disrespectful connotations.

From the year 1820 is to be dated *shaganappi*, a Westernism from the Cree language meaning "a line made of leather or hide."

From the Eskimo (the word itself may be French in origin) come two words for a seal-skin boot, *kamik* and *mukluk*, the first one being used by Foxe Basin and Baffin Eskimos.

A third source of words in Canadian English is Canadian French. From this source is *seigneurie*, with its original meaning of a landed estate. A sobering thought, although not the earliest dating of this word, comes from the 1836 *Canadian Temperance Advocate* which says: "Resolved, that in the opinion of this Society the individuals selling intoxicating drinks in this Seigniory are the direct promoters of immorality."

Another such is *caribou*, the North American reindeer.

There are, too, words borrowed from other languages, sometimes via the United States: *hamburger*, *weiner*, *frankfurt*, *broncho*, *stampede*, *placer*, *corral*. A very obvious borrowing of this type, and not via the medium of the United States, is *Doukhobor* derived from the Russian for "spirit wrestler." It is first recorded in Canadian sources in 1899 (the year of their arrival) in the *Yarmouth Telegram*: "The Doukhobors came to our shores singing hymns, and their first act on arriving was to thank God . . . for the merciful protection he had afforded them . . ."

A smaller source of the vocabulary of Canadian English is words originating in Canada and coined from existing words. Such a one is *splake*, a fish developed from speckled and lake trout. Another is *Mountie*, a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or earlier Royal Northwest Mounted Police. *Socred* is probably a word coined in this country.

No *Dictionary of Canadian English* can ignore geographical names or names descriptive of people of various places and regions: *Acadia*; *French Shore*, first recorded of the west coast of Newfoundland in 1822. Others are *Bluenose*, *Herring Choker*, *Spud Islander*, *Maritimer*; and doubtless *Calgarian* might find a place.

Expressions such as *Loyalist City* and *Land of the Little Sticks* must be included. The Land of the Little Sticks, referring to a region of stunted trees at the southern edge of the Barren Lands, is dated from 1896 in a work *On Snow-Shoes to Barren Grounds* thus: "No man may consider himself an expert until he has driven dogs and handled a sledge over such country as that approaching the Land of the Little Sticks."

*Barren Grounds* itself, referring to the treeless tundras of the region west of Hudson Bay is recorded from 1691 as: "Now ye manner of their hunting these Beast on ye Barren Ground is when they see a great parcel of them together they surround them with men..."

Among interesting words of various origins in Canadian English *Chinese Laundry* offers one of the most amusing citations: from the *Brandon Blade* of 1884 comes this gem: "A sample of the water... was taken at hazard from a passing water cart and analyzed by a competent chemist with the following result: "Solution of dead cat, .13; of assisted immigrant, .02; Attar of Chinese Laundry, .04; ... Hallelujah alderman, .03."<sup>3</sup>

Among political terms an interesting one is *Clear Grit*, originally a member of the radical wing of the Reformers, recorded from 1849 with its allied use *Clear Gritism* from 1850. The term *clear grit* itself in the sense "courageous" is not of Canadian origin: it is for example cited in the *Dictionary of Americanisms* from 1825. But the specific political application is distinctively Canadian.

It is interesting to note that the term "by acclamation", meaning "without the formality of a ballot or an election without opposition," is not well-known outside Canada. It was used as early as 1844 when the Honorable L. H. Lafontaine was "returned by acclamation."

In the area of localisms or regionalisms again, the word *bluff* for a clump of trees seems to be confined to the Prairie Provinces. It is, however, recorded in 1752 in the *Geography of Hudson's Bay*. Thus: "Near the same latitude, on the west side, is a bluff of wood..."

From this very brief sampling of possible materials for inclusion in the *Dictionary of Canadian English* you can see how varied the vocabulary of Canadian English is, how numerous its sources, and how it does illuminate many aspects of Canadian life: politics, education, topography, contacts with other peoples, settlement and development.



At this point it might be of value to say something about the way in which materials for the *Dictionary of Canadian English* are to be collected and where they are likely to be found.

As I said earlier, the *Oxford English Dictionary* had access to the work of some 2,000 volunteers in addition to the work of a competent staff.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Journal of the Canadian Linguistic Association*, 4. 1 (1958) : 7-33.



The Dictionary Committee of the Canadian Linguistic Association will also need to call on volunteers : and this year we hope to get enough volunteers to provide us with over 100,000 citations to illustrate words and usages which might be suitable for inclusion in the *Dictionary*. We shall make available to volunteers a set of paper slips in standardized form on which the citations can be entered and which will show where and when the citation was found. The representatives of the Committee will decide what use to make of these citations for obviously only the people who have all the materials before them can interpret them properly.

In reading, it is not difficult to find words which look as if they should be examined for inclusion in the Dictionary. Obviously geographical terms, words pertaining to the weather, to sports, to politics, to fishing and farming, to flora and fauna are likely to bear close scrutiny. The danger is to look only for seemingly extraordinary words and to ignore what appear to be quite common ones. For example, the word *graduand*,<sup>4</sup> quite common to graduates of the University of Alberta, is now under close examination. Yet at first sight the Alberta student does not react to it. It is so familiar to him that he disregards it. But that word is not in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* nor is it in the *American College Dictionary*, just to name two quick reference works. A very cursory reading of such a book as Godwell's *Arctic Trader* turns up such interesting examples as these : *jackpine* where he says, "Jackpine alludes to one of several varieties of pine trees found in the Rocky Mountain;" *mukluk* : "... Eskimo boot made of seal-skin and trimmed with fur ..." but also "a mukluk or bug"; *ponasked* : to mean meat roasted over a fire; *Blubber house* : "An ice-house for storing blubber or seal fat." Now these jump out at the reader, as does *mouffle* in another writer who says "... (he) helped (prepare) a dish of mouffle, dried moose nose."

But there are other words, not so romantic perhaps, but urgently in need of evidence. I should like printed evidence of *Hudson Bay start* and earlier evidence than I have of *Turkey Trail*, the narrow gauge railway that ran from Lethbridge to Dunmore, and of *free-traders*, men who left the Hudson's Bay Company to trade alone.

Keep an eye open, too, for *caller-off* in square-dancing, for *bull-dogging* of steers, for *endorsation* rather than *endorsement*, for *snow-snake* and *mudcat*.

Let us not ignore words which might appear so obvious that they need no further investigation. Such a one is *lumber*. It is difficult to say with certainty when the word took on its present North American meaning; but an author writing about Canada in 1830 says "By lumber are (sic) meant all kinds of timber and wooden materials in a rough state." This is an early reference to this usage; but there are much earlier ones.

If you would like to become a collector for the *Dictionary of Canadian English*, write to me at this University; and later this year we shall be happy to send you the standard form of citation slips. With the support of people like yourselves, it will not be long before Canada has its own dictionaries : a sign of a nation that knows itself.

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<sup>4</sup> Fr. *finissant*, qui s'oppose à *commençant* (Freshman). JPV.