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Quebec English

1. Introduction

Among the many fears linguistic duality provokes is the spectre of language attrition. Is it possible to maintain a native language in the face of diminishing opportunities to use it and intense pressure from a ubiquitous majority language? If so, can the "quality" of the minority language be preserved? In the Canadian context, these questions have traditionally been raised with respect to French. But over the past 30 years, the striking success of Quebec's language laws and the resulting "anglophone exodus" (Castonguay 1998, 41) have fundamentally altered the position of English in the province. The official status of French has had the unprecedented effect of converting English, elsewhere in the majority, into a minority language. In this new and unfamiliar guise, Quebec English (QcE) has become the subject of a discourse which characterizes it as threatened and distinctive. Indeed, the received wisdom is that due to convergence with French, QcE has undergone attrition and/or loss of native features (e.g. Chambers 1986, 1991; Chambers and Heisler 1999; Palmer 1995), an outcome which receives prominent coverage in the English press. To date, however, little scientific evidence has been brought to bear on such assertions. Instead there has been a disproportionate emphasis on "gallicisms" (e.g. Chambers and Heisler 1999; Fee 1991; Grant-Russell 1999; Hamilton 1958; McArthur 1992; Manning and Eatock 1983, Munroe 1930; Palmer and Harris 1990; Russell 1997), French lexical incorporations assumed to be unique to QcE (e.g., *dépanneur*, *autoroute*, *vernissage*). And though the infiltration of such gallicisms is widely considered to be on the rise, with rare exceptions, no explicit comparison with an earlier or pre-contact stage of English has been made. Nor, for that matter, has the implication that lexical manifestations of contact function as agents of structural change (Backus 2005; Thomason 2001; Toribio 2004) received empirical support. On the contrary, systematic study of nearly a dozen pairs of languages in contact reveals that rather than introduce change into recipient language structure, borrowed words *adapt* to it upon or shortly after their first use (see e.g. the papers in Poplack and Meechan 1998; Poplack et al. 1988; Sankoff et al. 1990). Thus, the inference that QcE had *changed*, and that borrowed lexicon was the agent, albeit widespread, remained speculative.

It was in this context that we initiated, in 2002, a project designed to document the synchronic mechanisms by which change comes about in situations of intense contact (Poplack et al. 2006a). The goal was to establish whether QcE was in fact "different", and if so, the nature and provenance of the differences. The research, which is ongoing, contributes several novel aspects to the study of this variety. It focuses on spontaneous conversation, as opposed to written materials, which have hitherto formed the basis for most claims of contact-induced change. It is one of very few to examine the grammar of QcE, as opposed to the general preoccupation with the lexicon noted above. Perhaps most innovative is its *comparative* variationist approach (Poplack 2000; Poplack and Meechan 1998; Poplack and Tagliamonte 2001, Tagliamonte 2001), as described in what follows.

The inference of change was investigated from three perspectives. The diachronic perspective is captured by comparing the speech of Quebec anglophones who acquired their vernacular prior to the "Quiet Revolution" of the 1960s and remained *in situ*, with that of the generation that acquired English after the passage of Bill 101 (1977), the law which made French the sole and official language of the province. Change, if it has occurred, should manifest itself in differences between the speech of older and younger anglophones. To determine whether such (eventual) differences are best explained as the result of contact (as opposed to internal evolution), we assess the contribution of language status (minority vs. majority), by comparing the English spoken in two Quebec urban centres in which the proportion of English mother-tongue claimants is small to virtually nonexistent (Montreal [12%] and Quebec City [1.5%]) with that of a non-contact control, Oshawa/Whitby, a heavily anglophone (86%) conglomerate in the Greater Toronto Area (Ontario), where English is the majority and dominant language (Statistics Canada Census 2001). If hospitality to contact-induced change is a function of language status, its effects should be most apparent in Quebec City, where native anglophones have constituted a tiny minority at both the local and provincial levels since at least 1791 (Dickinson and Young 2003, 70). Finally, making use of the variationist framework (Labov 1969; Labov 1972; Sankoff 1988) and the comparative methods pioneered in studies of other contact situations, we adduce the existence and directionality of change by comparing linguistic structure, first among the pre- and post-Bill 101 speakers of QcE, then with a mainstream benchmark, and finally, with that of the presumed source variety: French.

2. The Data

The sample is made up of 183 native speakers of English born, raised and still residing in Quebec City, Montreal, or Oshawa/Whitby. Along with language status (minority – majority), members are stratified according to the factors of intensity of contact (intense [Quebec City], heavy [Montreal], none [Oshawa/Whitby]) and time of acquisition of English (prior or posterior to the passage of Bill 101 [1977]). In addition to standard socio-demographic descriptors, each speaker is also characterized with respect to independent variables particularly relevant to contact-induced change: reported proficiency in French, language choice profile and affect toward French language and culture. All the parameters necessary for a scientific assessment of contact-induced change are thus built directly into the sampling schema.

Three hundred and forty hours of casual speech were recorded and computerized, making use of standard sociolinguistic techniques (Labov 1984) and detailed protocols developed in constructing other corpora (Poplack 1989; Poplack and Tagliamonte 1991; Poplack et al. 2002; Van Herk and Poplack 2003). This resulted in the 2.8 million word *Quebec English Corpus* (QEC) (Poplack et al. 2006a). The QEC contains a wealth of narratives, opinions and observations, as well as the spontaneous linguistic manifestations of bilingualism crucial to contact research, including borrowings from French (1), code-switches to French (2), and the odd calque on French (3).

- (1) Big tradition, after the bar, you gotta have a *poutine* ['a food consisting of french fries topped with cheese curds and gravy']. (QC.059.370)¹
- (2) Uhm so I do all the uh- *service à la clientèle* ['customer service'] and the bids- quotations for the- the government agencies in the States and the ones here. (QC.053.285)
- (3) It was like seven o'clock in the morning and then she started *passing* [<Fr *passer*] the vacuum cleaner, opening the blinds. (MTL.200.521)

It also features many vernacular and colloquial features of spoken English, including *be like* quotatives, as in (4), singular concord in existentials, as in (5), and variable expression of deontic modality as in (6), as well as more formal discourse (7). The richness of the QEC in terms of the number and variety of linguistic forms represented, coupled with its rigorous sampling protocol, make this a unique resource for the study of contact-induced change in general, and for the characterization of QcE in particular.

- (4) When we actually saw the knee, we *were like* "Okay, call the ambulance right now". (QC.075.701)
- (5) There's good *horses*, there's bad *horses*, and- some people don't believe in bad horses. Trust me, I- I know there *are* bad *horses*. (QC.009.1167)
- (6) You *gotta* do what you *have to* do. You *need to* get the dough. (MTL.174.506)
- (7) And Joe saw Harold, *whom he knew*, because they lived on Hutchison-Street uh- when they were in high s- in- when they were kids. (MTL.160.985)

Before illustrating the contribution of the QEC to the characterization of contemporary QcE, we first briefly describe the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of this work.

3. Method

Inherent variability is the hallmark of spontaneous speech, as well as a necessary precursor to language change. But variability need not entail change. Study of the factors constraining the choices speakers make among competing variants of a linguistic variable (such as those in 5-7) offers a way to determine whether variability is stable or changing. Hypotheses can be operationalized as factors in a multivariate analysis (Rand and Sankoff 1990), and their statistical significance, relative contribution and hierarchy of effect can be assessed.

Because each variable has an internal structure of its own, as emerges from the conditioning of its variant realizations, we can use its quantitative correlates to reliably test not only *what* has changed but in which direction (see Poplack and Levey forthcoming; Poplack and Tagliamonte 2001).

This can be seen most clearly in the behavior of (apparently) shared variable structures, such as those we focus on below. These are prime candidates for transfer (Chambers and Heisler 1999; Clyne 1967; Klein 1980). The benchmark varieties alternate amongst counterpart variants, but choice among them will usually not be constrained in the same way. Because the conditioning of linguistic variability tends to be language-specific, once determined it can be helpful as a diagnostic of change. If the

¹ Examples are reproduced verbatim. Codes in parentheses represent location, speaker number, and line number of the utterance in the corpus (*Quebec English Corpus* [QEC] or *Ottawa-Hull French Corpus* [OH]).

structure of variant choice in QcE mirrors that of French, while simultaneously differing from mainstream English, we can infer that contact-induced change has occurred. If, on the other hand, QcE structure is parallel to that of mainstream English, but differs from that of French, either no change has occurred, or it is not contact-induced. The design of the QEC permits us to situate the contact variety with respect both to mainstream and source varieties, enabling us to transcend often misleading surface similarities in the determination of contact-induced change.

4. The Place of French in Quebec English

A number of factors may conspire in rendering one language permeable to influence from another. Attitudes toward the majority language (here, French) are of primordial importance (Joseph 2007, Thomason 2001). Proficiency in that language, as well as a sociolinguistic situation encouraging its regular use, may also invite interlingual influence. Almost all the Quebec anglophones in the QEC score positively on these measures (Poplack et al. 2006a): they report high levels of proficiency in French, claim to speak it daily, and harbour overwhelmingly positive affect toward French and francophones. As a result, French is advancing, especially among the most "vulnerable" post-Bill 101 generation of Quebec City. And English is receding, even in the traditionally conservative domains of home and family (ibid.). On all counts, then this qualifies as "intense" contact, a situation predicted to lead to major linguistic changes in the borrowing language (e.g. Thomason 2001). The QEC was specifically designed to furnish an empirical test of these claims.

The language "mixing" characteristic of so many bilingual communities is also thought to provoke change [cf. papers in Backus 2005]. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of QcE speakers agree with the received wisdom that French is influencing English, and pinpoint the lexicon as the area most affected (Poplack et al. 2006a). But these beliefs, widespread though they may be, bear little resemblance to the use these same speakers make of French in their spontaneous English speech, as emerges from systematic examination of the massive QEC.

The universal bilingual strategies of *borrowing* of lone French-origin items into otherwise English discourse, as in (1), and *code-switching* between multiword fragments of French and English, as in (2), are exceedingly rare. Words borrowed from French represent an average of only 0.05% of the words making up the QEC (Poplack et al. ms.). Moreover, a large number of them are either international or attested since well before the current contact situation (e.g. *milieu*, *unique*, *cliché*, *fiancée suite*). When these are discounted, the rate of French-origin words falls further. A disproportionate number of the remaining borrowings is made up of just three lexical types: *metro*, *Cegep* and *quebécois*. Code-switching of longer fragments is still more infrequent (ibid.).

Moreover, nearly all uses of French, borrowed *or* switched, in English discourse qualify as "meta-linguistic" or "special-purpose", as in (8) and (9). This type of combination, which *highlights* the use of the other language, is a well-documented rhetorical strategy among bilinguals (e.g. Poplack 1981, 1985). In striking contrast to the anecdotal reports on which previous characterizations of QcE have drawn, quantitative analysis of spontaneous speech provides the first empirical evidence that once French-origin words are placed in the context of the wider English discourse, they at

not only negligible in number, but used with full speaker awareness. This is hardly the kind of bilingual language use that can be expected to lead to contact-induced change.

- (8) Like, what's a translation of *dépanneur*? (MTL.111.51)
- (9) She kept me there for about ten minutes, 'til the man behind me says, "*C'est donc ridicule* ['It's so ridiculous']". (QC.006.1600)

5. Convergence and Divergence

But contact-induced change need not involve the incorporation of overt other-language material. Many more spectacular changes, including addition and loss of entire grammatical categories have been reported. Our synchronic studies of contact situations have failed to turn up such categorical changes. The changes we observe are ongoing, typically altering the relationship amongst variant expressions of the same function or meaning, and/or the conditioning of variant selection. Such alterations may result from convergence with the source language or divergence from a mainstream counterpart. In the following sections we examine both.

5.1 Convergent Change

Most widely documented are changes of some aspect of the minority language to resemble the majority or source language. This may manifest itself in the selection and favoring of one of the competing variants with an apparent counterpart in the source language (Klein 1980; Silva-Corvalan 1994). The surface identity of the variants and contexts discussed below, coupled with the overall typological similarity of French and English, not only fulfill linguistic conditions for convergent change, but in fact make these prime loci for it.

5.1.1 Variable Expression of Future Temporal Reference

Consider the expression of future temporal reference. French and English share its two major exponents: a periphrastic form derived from the verb 'to go', as in (10-11), and a variant originating in modal expressions involving obligation or volition, expressed in French by the synthetic future, as in (12), and in English by *will*, as in (13).

- (10) Bien demain, tu *vas aller* au bingo, tu *vas gagner*. (OH.065.2301)
'Well tomorrow, you're *going to go* to bingo, you're *going to win*.'
- (11) You wanted honesty, *I'm gonna give* you honesty. (QC.021.318)
- (12) J'ai dit, "laisse faire, on *ira* à messe demain matin." (OH.070.686)
'I said, "never mind, we'll go to mass tomorrow morning."'
- (13) I said, "*I'll get* in touch with Madame and see if *I'll get* them." (QC.006.173)

The parallel historical origins of these variants, as well as the similarities in surface form and (supposedly) in contexts of use, coupled with the fact that choice of future marker is not subject to prescriptive correction, or indeed, commentary of any sort, should all enhance the possibility of convergence in this sector of the grammar. Walker et al. (2004) compared the way speakers actually make reference to the future in French and English. *Will* and *go* are equally implicated in the expression of future time; in French, the *go*-periphrasis has basically ousted the synthetic variant from all

contexts of productive use but one. Even more revealing is that the factors constraining variant choice - temporal proximity, grammatical person, polarity, sentence type, adverbial specification and clause type - work differently in each language. In French the major predictor is negative polarity: negative sentences are overwhelmingly associated with the synthetic form, as in (14). No such effect obtains in English.

- (14) Mais tu *paieras plus* de taxes (OH.078.1435)
'But you won't pay taxes anymore.'

English-specific conditioning of variant choice, on the other hand, not only owe nothing to French grammar, but remains constant regardless of how speakers are partitioned (minority vs. mainstream, older vs. younger, more vs. less bilingual). This is a first piece of evidence in favor of the grammatical independence of the languages in contact.

5.1.2 Variable Expression of Relative Pronouns

Another area propitious to convergence is the variable expression of overt and null relative pronouns in accusative relative clauses. In both French and English, the standard overt pronoun (15-16) is sometimes unexpressed (17-18).

- (15) "...and then I worked for a brother in a shoe factory *that* my uncle owned..."
(QC.013.110)
- (16) "Le seul problème *qu'*il a lui c'est le- son Coeur." (OH.63.706)
'The only problem that he has, him, it's the- his heart'
- (17) "My boyfriend loves the relationship \emptyset I have with my dad." (QC.009.769)
- (18) "Ça c'est une petite lampe \emptyset j'ai faite à ma niece." (OH.63.1233)
'That, it's a little lamp I made for my niece.'

Poplack et al. (2006b) studied the variable expression of pronoun expression in French and English and found major distinctions, as previously, both in terms of rate of null relatives (occurring nearly half the time in English, vs. only 14% in French) and more important, conditioning of variant choice.

Of all the factors involved in accusative relative pronoun expression - type of subject of the relative, type of clause, type of antecedent, presence of intervening material, phonological environment - the latter is the major determinant in French: null object relatives result from a phonological process of consonant cluster simplification. In English, on the other hand, most of the variance is accounted for by syntactic considerations involving the type of subject in both antecedent and relative clause with pronominal subjects favoring null pronouns. Both tendencies are consistent with reports on the respective non-contact varieties. But in this case, the QcE pattern of variant selection is *not* shared by all its speakers. While, predictably enough, the oldest and least bilingual cohorts behave very similarly to their non-contact counterparts in terms of the fine conditioning of variant choice, the younger and more bilingual speakers show some differences, not only from the mainstream but also from the elders. This suggests change, at least in apparent time. That the young and highly bilingual should be leading it is of course consistent with their predicted role as initiators of contact-induced change. But when their "departures" are situated with respect to their possible sources, it is clear that they owe nothing to French. Instead, Quebec youth are simply participating in a change which is also in progress in mainstream

English. Similar results were found by Leroux and Jarmasz 2006) for variable subject realization, adding to a growing body of evidence that even intense language contact need not result in convergence toward majority language grammar.

5.2 Divergent Change

But the perception of distinctiveness also arises when the minority language *fails* to change in tandem with the mainstream benchmark, possibly due to geographic, psychological or linguistic separation. To determine the extent to which QcE speakers are participating in ongoing changes (and concomitantly, the extent to which linguistic isolation constitutes a barrier to the spread of change), we examine its behavior with respect to linguistic variables known to be engaged in change in progress in Canadian (and other) mainstream varieties of English.

5.2.1 Variable Expression of Deontic Modality

One such variable is the expression of deontic modality, as in (6) above. The variant of choice is *have to*, which not only accounts for more than 2/3 of the data but is on the rise amongst the young, at the expense of *must* and *(have) got to* (Petrik (2005)). The distribution of the major variants is appreciably the same in Oshawa/Whitby and QcE, as are the conditions governing variant selection. This means that all speakers – minority and mainstream – share the same basic grammar of deontic modality. At the same time, the quasi-modal *need*, as in (6), is beginning to infiltrate the system, a change which is clearly spearheaded by mainstream youth. *Need* has traditionally conveyed a strong sense of personal obligation, and this is in fact how QC speakers tend to use it (19), preferring *have to* for externally-imposed obligation (20), a distinction which is robust and statistically significant.

- (19) You're kinda going, "Oh, I *need to* see my parents now. *I need to* see my family now".
You know, you want your family. (QC.044.724)
- (20) Oh yeah, you *have to* just do what they say, you know. (QC.025.282)
- (21) I'm not joking, a five minute speech about how, you know, you *need to* be listening and paying attention and not chit-chatting. (OW.313.461)

For the young mainstream speakers on the other hand, *need* now expresses external obligation as well (21), a use that is only incipient in QcE. Thus while minority status has not led to convergence towards French, it does seem to have affected the degree to which QcE is participating in change in the mainstream deontic modality system: it appears to be lagging in both rate of use of the innovative variant and its gradual spread across the system.

5.2.2 Variable Concord in Plural Existentials

Another well-documented change in progress across the English-speaking world involves variable concord in plural existential sentences, as in (5 and 22-23).

- (22) I'm here and *there's* things that I have to do. (MTL.172.366)
- (23) Yes, *there were* a couple of guys from Saint Paul's in scouts. (QC.071.173)

Here, (non-standard) singular concord is by far the preferred variant. Attested in this context since 1400, this is by no means a recent change, but in Canada as else-

where, it continues to gain ground (e.g. Tagliamonte 1998, Britain and Sudbury 2002, Woods 1979). Singular concord with existentials (*il y a*) is also an obligatory feature of French. This led Adams (2005) to reason that convergence with that language might manifest itself in minority English, if not in rates of singular concord exceeding those of the mainstream, then in the levelling of the robust constraints on variant selection. This is not the case. The contextual factors found (Meechan and Foley 1994, Britain and Sudbury 2002, Hay and Schreier 2004, Eisikovits 1991) to promote singular concord in existentials elsewhere (a contracted copula, present tense, intervening material between copula and complement, the presence of certain modifiers) are all operative in QcE as well, regardless of speaker age, proficiency in French, or community of residence. Here too, the structure of variant choice in QcE is no different from that of mainstream English. If anything, contra the predictions of the convergence hypothesis, QcE shows even less singular concord than Oshawa/Whitby (although this discrepancy, which is most pronounced among the under-24 cohort, is modest at best (76% in Quebec City vs. 82% in Oshawa/Whitby). Nonetheless, as with the incursion of *need* into the deontic modality system, the behavior of singular concord in existentials is also consistent with the suggestion that QcE is lagging behind mainstream English.

5.2.3 Quotative *be like*

Such an analysis finds scant support in the use of quotative *be like* (4, 24) in QcE, however.

- (24) They're all yelling at him, he's *like*, "Well, why don't you listen to me?"
(QC.076.1412)

Since it was first attested in 1982 (Butters), *be like* has swept the English-speaking world, practically supplanting the traditional *say* among youth. The quotative system constitutes the ideal test of participation in mainstream change: since the innovative *be like* is virtually absent from the speech of older generations, it could only have been acquired from the mainstream. Yet Dion and Poplack (2005) report that QcE youth have adopted not only *be like*, but also, remarkably enough, the entire complex set of conditions on its occurrence – it is preferred in the present tense, with overt subjects, first person referents, and when quoting internal monologue.² Still, while *be like* accounts for more than half of all quotatives for mainstream youth, it represents somewhat less (42%) for Anglo-Montrealers, and least (34%) for residents of Quebec City. Those in most intense contact with French appear to use the innovative variant least, further bolstering the suggestion that minority speakers lag behind the mainstream in linguistic change. When the vertiginous rate of this change – (a 450% increase in *be like* over seven years [Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004]) is taken into account, rate differences across communities were found to correspond to the year of data collection (Dion and Poplack 2005). As concerns quotative use, then, evidence that minority speakers lag behind the mainstream rate of change is less compelling.

2 Such conditioning is widely believed to be impossible to acquire in the absence of direct face-to-face contact with (mainstream) adopters; in comparison with their degree of contact with francophones and/or other minority anglophones, this would be relatively limited.

6. Discussion

Summarizing, systematic quantitative analysis of a large representative corpus of spontaneous QcE speech offers no support for claims that QcE differs from other varieties of Canadian English as a result of its minority status and sustained contact with French. Targeting two morphosyntactic variables which should be hospitable to change, because their variants, variable contexts and uses are at least superficially similar in the two languages, and because they have escaped sociolinguistic stigma and conscious correction, we first examined the possibility of convergence. Despite the fact that the comparative variationist methodology adopted here is capable of uncovering even small discrepancies between cohorts and attributing them to the appropriate source, remarkably, no evidence that the grammar of QcE is converging with that of French emerged. Admittedly, a change – involving the fine conditioning of relative pronoun expression – *was* detected, but once it is contextualized with respect to source and mainstream varieties, it is clear that it owes nothing to French. Instead, comparison with the noncontact benchmark, where the same change is also in progress, confirms that minority anglophones are simply participating in ongoing developments in mainstream English.

Observing that change can also manifest itself as a *failure* or *lag* in participation, we also examined the behavior of QcE with respect to three additional variables known to be involved in change in progress in Canada and elsewhere in the English-speaking world: the incursion of *need* into the deontic modality system, the rise of singular concord with existentials and the colonization of the quotative system by *be like*. There is some evidence to suggest that QcE may in fact be lagging behind the mainstream with respect to the first two; results are more equivocal for the third.

It is important to stress, however, that the differences between QcE and Oshawa/Whitby English reported here are simply minor discrepancies in rate and/or conditioning of variant use – quantitative differences, not qualitative. As such, they would not even be visible to casual inspection. The widespread perception of QcE's distinctiveness could not possibly stem from them. Rather, the presence of French-origin words and phrases in QcE is likely responsible. This is ironic, because these too are very infrequent, testimony to their extreme salience. Moreover, the existence of local lexicon cannot be the sole criterion for dialect differentiation since vocabulary is regularly refreshed in contact as well as contact-free situations, leading to the intergenerational, intergroup and intercommunity lexical differences found in every speech community. More important, the way that they are flagged in discourse effectively blocks them from introducing change in anything but the vocabulary (the most superficial and labile level of language).

The results of these studies, taken together, reveal that, in the case of QcE, the inference of contact-induced change is vastly overemphasized. QcE speakers show appreciably the same patterning of variant selection as their mainstream counterparts, regardless of bilingual proficiency, time or status of English when they acquired it. This means that they share the same grammar, at least as far as these variables are concerned. This suggests that there is in fact *no* "Quebec English", as distinct from, say, Ontario English, beyond a small stock of proprietary lexical items and acronyms. Granted, the majority are of French origin, but they behave no differently from the neologisms created in all languages.

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