

Translation during the 1980 and 1995 Independence Referenda in Canada

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Abstract. This paper presents a case study of translation in Canada between 1975 and 2000 using a delimited catalogue of nonfiction texts published on the topics of autonomy and independence movements, nationalism, and the Quebec referenda. It begins with a historical overview of the Quebec sovereignty movement and details the results of the 1980 and 1995 independence referenda. It then describes the methodology for compiling, organizing and analyzing the texts upon which the case study is based. It concludes that the translation trends indicate a preference for works favourable to Quebec sovereignty or renewed federalism to be translated into French, even though these works represent the opinion of a small percentage of English Canadians. It also shows a tendency for translations into English to favor works that depict Quebec nationalism or nationalists negatively.

Introduction

In 1980, dissatisfied with Canadian federalism, the Quebec government, led by Premier René Lévesque and the *Parti Québécois*, drafted a proposal for sovereignty-association and proceeded to call a referendum that would allow Quebecers to vote on whether or not they wanted to secede from Canada. Quebecers were asked whether they gave the Quebec government permission to negotiate a new agreement with Canada, one that would grant Quebec the right to make its own laws, levy its own taxes and establish international relations but which would see Quebec maintain economic ties with Canada, including a shared currency. The question provided for a second referendum, to be held once the negotiations were complete (Linteau et al. 1989: 726).

On May 20, 1980 more than 85% of Quebecers went to the polls, and the proposition was defeated by a vote of 59.6% to 40.4%. It should be noted, however, that many Quebecers voted No not because they wanted Canada to remain the same, but because the federal government had promised to initiate a “renewed federalism”, which many understood to be recognition of a special status for Quebec within Canada.

Not long after the failed referendum, the Canadian constitution was patriated from Great Britain and, in 1982, was ratified by every Canadian province except Quebec, who wanted the federal government to grant the province special status within the federation (Linteau et al. 1989: 740–741).

With this new constitution, Quebec also lost the veto power it had previously had over constitutional amendments (Gill 1995: 411). Subsequent efforts to modify the constitution to include the “distinct society” clause—namely the Meech Lake (1987–1990) and Charlottetown (1992) Accords—were unsuccessful.

The failure of the two accords led to growing dissatisfaction with Canadian federalism among many Quebec nationalists. On October 30, 1995 a second referendum was called for in Quebec. This time, however, the question did not specify that a sovereignty-association relationship would exist between Canada and Quebec. Instead, it asked voters whether they wanted Quebec to become sovereign after formally offering Canada a new economic and political partnership.

Although the results were much closer than in 1980, the proposal was rejected by 50.56% of Quebec voters. A significant linguistic divide existed between No and Yes voters: most English-speakers and Allophones (those whose first language is neither English nor French) voted against sovereignty (Gill 1995: 418), while French-speakers were divided. Though most Francophones supported constitutional change, they did not all agree that sovereignty was the best way to achieve this goal, and many were swayed to vote No on the expectation that fundamental constitutional change would come about later (Gill 1995: 410–416).

In the years leading up to both the 1980 and the 1995 referenda, a number of works were published in English and French by Canadians within and outside of Quebec debating the advantages and disadvantages of Quebec independence and arguing for and against separation, sovereignty-association and renewed federalism. Among these publications were a number of ideological and polemic texts by staunch nationalists and federalists whose ideas would likely appeal to only select groups of English or French-speaking Canadians.

What makes this particular period intriguing from the perspective of translation is that the source texts were often written for a very select group of readers, and usually those of a particular linguistic and cultural background. For instance, a 2001 discourse analysis by Trépanier of ten separatist texts written in French around 1995 shows that the sovereigntist discourse makes use of the us/them dichotomy to delimit the members of the Quebec nation through exclusion (41–42). Further, it emphasizes the importance of the French language to the definition of Quebec belonging. Separatist texts, then, are addressed to Quebecers by Quebecers. More specifically, the texts are written for Francophone Quebecers, and not Anglophones in the rest of Canada (ROC).

In her conclusion, Trépanier notes that Quebec is the main receiver, sender and regulator of discourse on the Quebec nation (129), a claim that is supported by an overview of the number of books published on the topic in Canada. Between 1975 and 2000, according to Library and Archives

Canada, more than 600 works were published in French in Quebec on nationalism, independence movements, or the independence referenda, but fewer than a dozen were published in French outside the province. In this same period, English Canada produced about half as many works on these subjects as Quebec: close to 50 works were published in English within Quebec and approximately 175 published in the ROC.

For the most part, texts written in French are not aimed at Canadians living outside Quebec, nor are they targeted at non-French-speakers. Not surprising, then, is Gill's assertion that outside Quebec few intellectuals supported separatism, due in part to lack of sympathy for—and often understanding of—Quebec nationalism (1995: 417).

To study how many translations exist, and how they were presented to target-language readers, the methodological framework must focus on placing the source and target texts within their historical and bibliographic contexts. Further, it must provide a means of doing so in as objective a manner as possible.

Methodology

Historical context

For the purpose of this study, the term *historical context* will be used to refer to the historical events surrounding the period in which the source and target texts were written. This initial historical overview is essential to the final analysis. It would be impossible to explore the ways in which translations during this period were written and introduced to target audiences without basing the analysis on the socio-political climate, which would have had a significant impact on the way that SL and TL texts were treated.

Various texts were therefore consulted. History texts from English- and French-Canada, the United States and Europe were selected for study so that a wide range of interpretations would be covered. These works cover a period of Canadian history from approximately 1960 to the late 1990s so that events prior to the referenda could provide more historical context for the referenda themselves. In addition, a number of primary sources, including polls and publications by the federal and provincial governments were consulted.

Bibliographical context

In addition to being placed within their historical context, the translations needed to be placed within their bibliographic context. In this study, the term *bibliographic context* will be used to refer to the bibliographic catalogue that has been compiled according to the criteria listed below. This catalogue

includes translated and non-translated works so that the number of translations can be contextualized—that is to say, they can be analyzed with respect to the total number of works published. Providing a bibliographic context for a list of translations allows a researcher to draw comparisons between such aspects as the number of works published and the number translated, or between the types of works published—reports, academic or polemic texts, government documents, etc—and the types of works translated.

For the purposes of this case study, the bibliographic context requires delimitation (to catalogue *all* works published in Canada since confederation would simply be too time-consuming). Moreover, an act requiring books published in Canada to be deposited with the National Librarian was not passed until 1952, and the National Library itself was not established until one year later.¹ So compiling a list of works published in Canada prior to the early 1950s based on the records of the National Library would not necessarily guarantee completeness. Nor would it necessarily provide pertinent context for this project, as the period chosen falls within the mid- to late-twentieth century.

The bibliographic context has therefore been limited by year and place of publication. Texts must have been published within Canada between 1975 and 2000 to encompass the period five years prior to the first referendum until five years following the second.

The context has also been limited by genre and subject. The study centers on non-fiction texts written within Canada, so fiction has been excluded, while historical, political, biographical, academic and polemic texts have been retained. Of these texts, only works that the National Library and Archives catalogue listed as having a subject of *nationalism, autonomy and independence movements* or *referendum (Quebec)* were retained. By conducting three closely related subject searches within the catalogue, fewer published works are likely to have been omitted and the list is able to approach maximum completeness within the established criteria.

I would prefer to call this list of published works a *delimited catalogue* rather than a *corpus* as Pym suggests when he explains that such a bibliography should be referred to as a *catalogue* only when its main function is to “approach maximum completeness” and as a *corpus* when it has been drawn up according to strictly controlled criteria (1998: 42). However, even a

¹ See the National Library and Archives website: <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/50th/012009-217-e.html> and the full text of the original act on the Department of Justice Canada site: <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/N-12/82923.html>. The Bibliothèque nationale du Québec was not founded until 1967, and the *règlement sur le dépôt légal* did not come into effect until 1968. (See the historique of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec at: http://www.banq.qc.ca/portal/dt/a_propos_banq/qui_sommes-nous/historique/qsn_historique.jsp).

catalogue, which is supposed to approach maximum completeness, must be drawn up according to controlled criteria; otherwise, researchers would be striving toward the next-to-impossible task of listing every work ever published worldwide. I therefore feel that the term *delimited catalogue* is appropriate for all bibliographies and will use it to apply to mine.

Organizing the delimited catalogue

Once the bibliographic context of the translations was established, the texts could be studied and the delimited catalogue organized. This step is essential to the final analysis, which is supposed to determine not only how many translations exist, but more importantly, what themes were presented to TL readers.

The delimited catalogue was therefore organized in the following manner. The prefaces and introductions—where these existed—and the introductory and concluding chapters of every ST were read so that the author's stance on Quebec independence could be gauged. Each work was then placed into one of several categories: primarily for independence, primarily against independence, or neither for nor against independence. Those works that did not argue for or against Quebec independence were further categorized according to whether they focused on nationalism, independence movements, or history or on the *Front de libération du Québec*, a 1960s and 1970s pro-sovereignty organization.

What is essential to this stage of the analysis is maintaining, as far as possible, a certain degree of objectivity. To claim that a study such as this one is—or even could be—entirely impartial would be untrue. As Chang points out, absolute objectivity in observation is impossible, as one always observes from a cultural or historical context (2001: 328). However, by recognizing that observations are bound to be influenced by one's background and sociocultural context, one can strive to reduce subjectivity as much as possible.

To reduce subjective categorization of the works in the delimited catalogue, two types of secondary sources were consulted: 1) book reviews from academic journals and Canadian periodicals, and 2) additional bibliographies. These additional bibliographies were of two types: the first had already categorized some of the source texts according to the author's opinion on Quebec sovereignty, while the second was simply an annotated list of works published on the subject of nationalism or independence movements (see Appendix 1).

To ensure that I was not unduly influenced by the secondary sources, the book reviews and bibliographies were consulted only after I had organized my delimited catalogue; the additional sources were intended to act only as a second opinion and to reduce subjectivity.

Findings

An analysis of the delimited catalogue shows that between 1975 and 2000, at least one work was published annually in French and English Canada on these three subjects. However, within this time, three periods saw a significant increase in the number of publications.

As Figures 1 and 2 illustrate, many more works were published in 1977–1980, 1991–1992 and 1995 than at any other time during the period. These dates correspond closely to the 1980 and 1995 referenda and to the failed Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords.

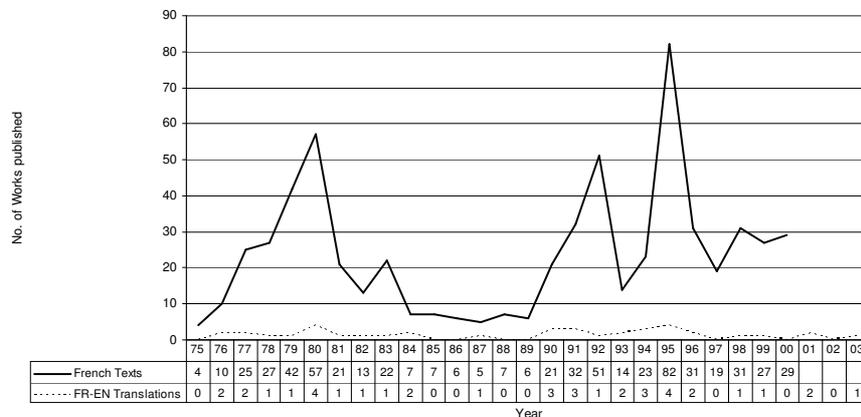


Figure 1. French texts and French-English translations

An interesting contrast, however, between the French and English publications is the fourth, smaller peak in Figure 1 between 1998 and 2000, when 27–31 texts were published each year. It would seem that while French Canada continued to reflect on nationalism, on the referenda and on independence after the second referendum, English Canada did not. As Figure 2 demonstrates, the number of English works dropped quickly after 1995, and by 2000 only four titles were published on any of these three subjects.

Translations into French tended to follow almost the same trend as publications of French-language works: the number of translations increased in 1978 and again in 1995, with very few published in between. Translations into English, on the other hand, remain almost constant through the twenty-five year period, though slightly more were published in 1980 and 1995.

Once the delimited catalogue has been organized thematically, some additional trends become evident. For instance, Figure 3 shows that an almost equal number of texts arguing for and against independence were

translated into English between 1975 and 2000.² But while it would appear that equal weight was given to both sides of the argument, closer examination shows that this is not quite the case.

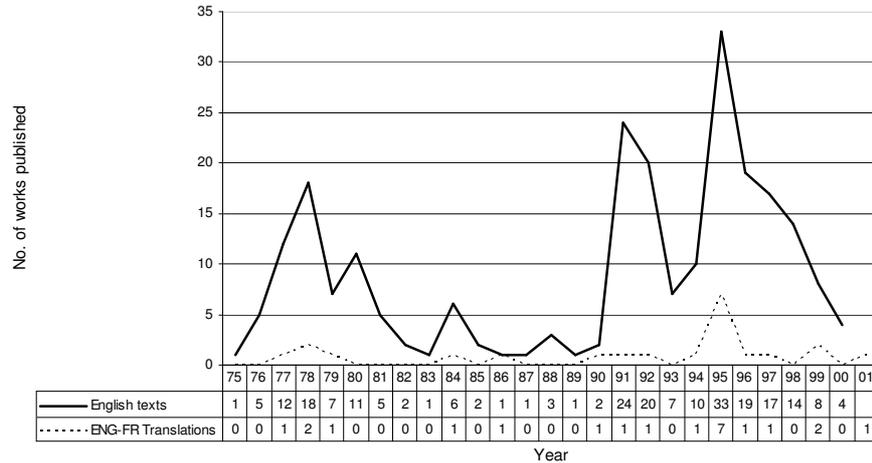


Figure 2. English texts and English-French translations

Two of the pro-independence works are publications by the *Parti québécois* to outline and define the concepts of sovereignty-association (1979) and political sovereignty (1993) to all Quebecers—French and English texts would therefore be necessary to reach as many voters as possible. In addition, three of the texts that do not directly argue for or against sovereignty present negative arguments against Quebec nationalism or nationalists. One, a published version of a PhD thesis, even accuses certain national-

² Note: In two cases, a work was considered both for and against independence. In Marcel Rioux's *La Question du Québec : Essai*, the author is a separatist sociologist who emphasizes in his introduction that "on retrouvera, dans certains passages, le point de vue du sociologie. Dans d'autres, c'est celui du Québécois qui opte pour l'indépendance de son pays." In Rioux & Crean (*Deux pays pour vivre: un plaidoyer*), the problem arose from the fact that while the French ST was primarily for independence, the English TT (*Two nations: An Essay on the Culture and Politics of Canada and Quebec in a World of American Pre-Eminence*) was an adaptation rewritten by Crean that was neither for nor against; thus, this work could not be simply labelled For, as it was not a pro-independence work in English, unlike the other pro-independence works translated from French into English. Both Rioux (1976) and Rioux & Crean (1990) have therefore been classified as 0.5 For and 0.5 Neither.

ists of anti-Semitism in the 1930s.³ Thus, the results of the case study show a tendency for translations into English to favor texts that negatively depict Quebec independence or Quebec nationalism.

This translation tendency reflects the mood of English Canada in the late twentieth century: polls in the early 1990s showed that most Canadians outside Quebec (75%) were against the idea of granting Quebec additional powers⁴ or of decentralizing the Canadian government (71%) (Johnson 1994: 277), while a sizeable majority (75%) of Quebecers believed the Quebec government should have more constitutional power to protect and promote the Quebec identity, especially in language, demographics, education, and immigration (Fortin 1991: 1).

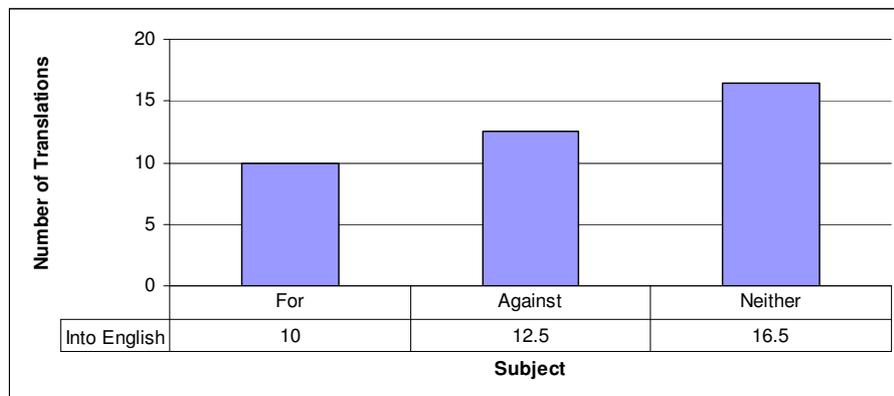


Figure 3. Translations into English by subject

It might at first seem surprising that translations into French, as illustrated in Figure 4, include more than twice as many translations of anti-independence works as those arguing for Quebec independence. However, it is important to note that support for Quebec independence outside Quebec is low. According to a 1998 Environics poll, only 10% of Canadians outside Quebec support independence, while another 2% favor sovereignty-association (quoted in Scowen 1999: 136). And within Quebec, Anglophones have usually voted against separation.⁵ So it is reasonable to assume that few works supporting independence would have been written in English.

³ Delisle, Esther. 1992. *Le traître et le Juif : Lionel Groulx, le Devoir et le délire du nationalisme d'extrême droite dans la province de Québec, 1929-1939*. Outremont, Québec : L'Étincelle.

⁴ Fortin (1991: 2) puts this percentage at 70%

⁵ In the 1995 referendum, for instance, the No vote won in all but one of the ridings where Francophones made up less than 75% of the population (Drouilly 1995-6: 126)

graphic contexts would therefore seem to be an effective way to compare historical, political and translational trends.

However, the methodology used in this case study provides only a starting point for research into the treatment, reception and translation of Canadian non-fiction nationalism-, independence- or referendum-related texts during the late twentieth century. Further research is needed to explore the actual reception of translations and source texts and could help determine how TL readers reacted to translations that criticized the TL audience.

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Appendix 1: Bibliographies and Book Reviews

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