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J.K. CHAMBERS

The Development of Canadian English[1]

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Colonial varieties of English

The New World colonies of England each speak distinctive varieties of English. Because they were colonized at different times, the founders spoke varieties of English appropriate to their own time and place. The starting-point differed, and subsequent independent developments differed, and so each colony came to speak its own distinctive accent or dialect of English. They are not, however, equally different from one another. Canadian English and American English sound more like one another than they sound like, say, Australian English. Australian English sounds more like New Zealand English than any other variety, and both of them bear many similarities to South African English. Moreover, the Australian-New Zealand-South African accents share more features with the motherland accent than do the Canadian-American accents.

These relationships can be explained historically. North America received its first significant colonists almost two centuries before the southern hemisphere countries, and thus the accent that was exported to the two regions differed greatly. As it happened, these differences were maximized, because the English of England underwent several notable changes between the North American colonization and the southern hemisphere colonization. For one thing, it became largely r-less, so that the *r* sound was no longer pronounced in words like *bark, bar* and *barber* [bɑ:k, bɑ:, bɑ:bɔ].[2] For another thing, the vowel *a* in words like *laugh, bath, chant* and *dance* came to be pronounced longer and farther back in the mouth ([lɑ:f] instead of [læf] etc). Most Canadian and American varieties lack these features, and most Australian, New Zealand and South African varieties have them. These and other, similar features link the southern hemisphere varieties more closely to England English.

With the passage of time, of course, local features develop in the transplanted varieties as well. One obvious area for development comes from

[1] This article is adapted from the Preface to the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, edited by Katherine Barber (Oxford University Press), to be published in Toronto in 1998. The editors gratefully acknowledge OUP's generous permission to publish it in *Moderna Språk*.

2 The phonetic transcription in this article is, wherever applicable, that of J.C. Wells, *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* (1990).

terms for technological innovations. The automobile makes a good example. Because the automobile came into being long after the colonization of North America, England and North America independently developed their vocabularies for talking about it. Most people are aware of the set of items: English *bonnet* for North American *hood, boot* for *trunk, estate car* for *station wagon, windscreen* for *windshield, hooter* for *horn,* and so on. Though the southern hemisphere colonies were also populated before the automobile came into being, those colonies were still tied so closely to England that they adopted the English terms. In this respect as well, their closer link to England English is apparent.

The English language in Canada

Newfoundland, the tenth province, was the first part of present-day Canada discovered by English explorers. It had a very different settlement pattern and colonial history from mainland Canada, and consequently it is the most linguistically distinctive region of English-speaking Canada.

Newfoundland was claimed by the English in 1497, just five years after Columbus. This early arrival of English adventurers is the result of proximity: Newfoundland is almost a whole time zone closer to Britain than any other part of Canada. In the 16th century, its surrounding waters teemed with codfish, and fishermen from Portugal as well as England rushed to harvest them. Permanent settlers arrived soon after, mostly from southwestern England, especially from the seafaring regions of Devon, Dorset, Somerset and Hampshire. Then, in the 18th century, Irish immigrants began arriving in such great numbers as to dominate many of the populous areas, including the capital, St. John's.

Newfoundland joined the Canadian confederation in 1949, after years of autonomy. In the sound of its speech and in its vocabulary, there are many features that distinguish it from mainland Canada. Recent sociolinguistic studies show, however, that the successive post-confederation generations are adopting some mainland features, especially the urban middle-class. As geographical and occupational mobility further increases, the differentness of Newfoundland English will undoubtedly diminish.

Further south, in the Atlantic region of the present Maritime Provinces, the French arrived before the English and established colonies in what they called Acadia. Soon after, the French established *Nouvelle France* inland on the St. Lawrence River and in the vicinity of present-day Québec City and Montréal. Then, in the 18th century, they were forced to cede both colonies to England after suffering defeats in two wars.

- In 1716, the Treaty of Utrecht resolved Queen Anne's War, and one of its terms made Acadia a British possession. The English divided the colony into the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and St. John (since 1798, Prince Edward Island).

- In 1763, England's victory on the Plains of Abraham in Québec ended the French and Indian War, and France was forced to surrender its hold on the inland colony. *Nouvelle France* was divided into two large administrative units called Lower Canada (the present-day province of Québec) and Upper Canada (present-day Ontario).

Homogeneity of urban, middle-class Canadian English

In 1867, the five provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Québec and Ontario joined in the Canadian Confederation. Expansion into the vast western territory known as Prince Rupert's Land came later. Manitoba (1870), Saskatchewan (1905), Alberta (1905) and British Columbia (1871) followed the development of the transcontinental rail link.

The first settlers in the western provinces were white Protestants from southern Ontario. Their prominence there was not accidental. In 1870, when the Canadian governors first attempted to carry out a land survey of the Red River Valley – the region around present-day Winnipeg, then (as now) the most populous part of Manitoba – they were opposed by the people who were already there. The strongest opposition came from the Métis, French-speaking Catholics of Québecois and Algonkian ancestry who comprised about half the population of 12,000. They were quelled forcibly by Canadian troops, and their leader Louis Riel fled to the United States. Riel returned in 1885 to lead a second rebellion against Canadian expansionists in Saskatchewan. This time, when the rebels were defeated by Canadian troops at Batoche, the Métis capital, Riel was captured. He was imprisoned in Regina, tried for treason, and hanged.

Following these rebellions, the governors ensured that the first significant wave of settlers in the prairies would be sympathetic to their plans for expansion by making generous land grants to the infantry volunteers and to other Ontarians. In so doing, they transplanted not only the central Canadian ethos but also, inevitably, their accent. As a result, Canadian English is remarkably homogeneous across the vast expanse of the country. Except for Newfoundland, urban, middle-class Canadians speak with much the same accent in Vancouver and Ottawa, Edmonton and Windsor, Winnipeg and Peterborough. The greatest variety, as we will see below, is found away from the cities, in those rural areas founded by settlers from different linguistic backgrounds including the enclaves of native peoples and freed slaves from the southern States. In this century, another source of variety is working-class neighbourhoods populated mainly by immigrants who are speakers of English as a second language. The children and grandchildren of the new immigrants and, to a lesser extent, of the traditional rural folk tend to be socially mobile and urbanized. Today Canada is overwhelmingly middle class, to an extent undreamed of by the old European nations, and the strongest social current draws them into it.

The Canadian word stock

Even before Canada had a significant and widespread population, many distinctive features of the Canadian vocabulary came into being. Explorers and adventurers learned the names of all the places they visited from the natives, and in many cases the native names stuck. Canadian place-names resound with words from the native language stocks: from east to west, *Pugwash, Buctouche, Miscouche, Kejimkujik, Chicoutimi, Saguenay, Temagami, Napanee, Ottawa, Moosonee, Coboconck, Oshawa, Mississauga, Kakabecka, Wawa, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Ponoka, Wetaskiwin, Squamish, Esquimault, Nanaimo, Tuktoyaktuk,* to cite just a few. Other place-names, scarcely less exotic, translate native names: *Medicine Hat, Moose Jaw, Red Deer, Kicking Horse Pass, Yellowknife,* among them. Some places had more than one name because the indigenous name contended with an imperial one. Toronto was called York after the nondescript duke who was George III's second son, but in the end – since 1834 – the Algonkian name prevailed.

Indigenous plants and animals usually kept their native names, such as *tobacco, potato, tamarack, skunk, raccoon, beaver, grizzly* (bear), *moose,* and *caribou.* The European adventurers were novices in the wilds, and those who survived were the ones who availed themselves of native know-how and materials: they learned to use foodstuffs such as *pemmican,* weapons such as *tomahawks,* watercraft such as *kayaks,* and apparel such as *anoraks, mukluks,* and *moccasins.* Because the first explorers were often Québecois, a number of French terms attached themselves permanently to forest and plain: *prairie, portage, bateau, snye.*

As the population of the country grew with the influxes described in the next section, the distinctive vocabulary grew with it. When the land in Upper and Lower Canada was surveyed into lots for the first settlers, the main survey lines, usually a mile apart, were called *concessions,* the French term, and country roads along them are called concession roads. In Ontario, the secondary roads that intersect concessions are called sideroads.

Some of the earliest political terms used in Canada were either obscure terms in England or became obsolete there, so their perpetuation in Canada and the meanings they took on make them unique. Among these are *reeve* as the political head of a county, a *riding* as an electoral district, *acclamation* as the election of a candidate without opposition, and *shiretown* as the government seat in Nova Scotia counties.

The peopling of Canada

The English-speaking population of Canada is largely the result of four significant waves of immigration that took place over slightly less than two centuries. Each wave had linguistic implications – that is, the immigrants influenced the way in which English is spoken in Canada to some extent. But, predictably, the first two were much more important linguistically than the subsequent ones because they took place when the character of Canadian English was not yet formed, and thus they had a formative influence.

The four major waves of immigration were these:

- Beginning in 1776 and reaching its peak in 1793, hundreds of refugees from the Thirteen Colonies entered Canada; these were the people known in Canadian history as Loyalists, the citizens of the newly-formed United States who chose to maintain their allegiance to the imperial mother-country, England, and fled rather than participating in the American Revolution.

- Beginning around 1815 and reaching its peak around 1850, thousands of immigrants from England, Scotland, and latterly Ireland (because of the Potato Famine of 1845-7) arrived in Canada as a result of systematic, large-scale recruitment by the British governors of the colony in order to counteract pro-American sentiments among the settlers, especially in the face of American border invasions in the War of 1812.

- Beginning in the 1890s and reaching a peak around 1910, thousands of immigrants again from Scotland and Ireland but also many from more diverse European homelands such as Germany, Italy, Scandinavia, and Ukraine, recruited as farmers for the vast wheatlands of the newly-opened Prairie Provinces and as workers for the industrializing central cities in Ontario and Québec. Even when the immigrants came from non-English-speaking countries, about 95 per cent of them became speakers of English (rather than French) as a second language.

- Beginning in 1946 and reaching a peak around 1960, a highly diverse immigrant population arrived first as a result of the post-War diaspora in Europe, with thousands of Italians, Portuguese, Dutch, Belgians, Greeks, Ukrainians, Poles, Finns, and Yugoslavians, among others, and later, even more diversely, from Hungary, Czechoslavakia, Korea, China, Vietnam, and the United States, as a result of political unrest in those countries.

It should be mentioned here that in the last 25 years Canada has received another significant wave of immigrants, often as political refugees from such countries as Pakistan, Chile, Brazil, Cambodia, Somali, and El Salvador, but also from English-speaking countries in the Caribbean and from Hong Kong. The linguistic effects, if any, of this most recent immigration are not yet discernible.

By the time of the latter two immigrations – the ones that peaked in 1910 and 1960 – the linguistic character of Canada was firmly established. The immigrants could thus have only a mild, and minor, influence. As is ty-

pical under such circumstances, the newcomers do their best to conform to the linguistic norms they find in their new surroundings. Their children, of course, grow up speaking just like native Canadians of their age and social stratum, though they are usually bilingual, speaking their parents' language as well as Canadian English. Their childrens' children – the second-generation Canadians – are often indistinguishable linguistically (and in every other way) from people whose Canadian ancestry is much more venerable than their own.

The Loyalist base

When the refugees from the American Revolution, the Loyalists, arrived in Canada in the last decades of the 18th century, they usually formed the first group of settlers in their regions. This was especially true in the inland settlements, as we shall see. As true pioneers, they themselves had to set standards and develop routines for all their activities, such as landclearing, crop selection, house construction, religious observance, educational practices, and much more. Although the first settlers were hardly conscious of it, they were also the pioneers in establishing linguistic norms in the community, because no ready-made set existed in the settlement.

There were two main paths of immigration for the Loyalists. One was from the coastal New England States – especially Connecticut and Massachusetts, where the first skirmishes of the Revolution took place in 1776, but also Maine and Rhode Island – into the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. Many of these refugees, perhaps most, bided their time in Halifax or Lunenburg, the main seaports of the province, until they could arrange their passage to England. Some others stayed in Nova Scotia or in nearby New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, finding work on the land or in towns. Still others took advantage of government offers of generous land grants further inland, along the banks of the St. Lawrence River and the north shore of Lake Ontario, and made the trek into the regions of Lower and Upper Canada.

These refugees from New England brought with them a distinctive home dialect. New England speech was then, as it is now, r-less and also has several readily identifiable vowel sounds. Wherever the New England refugees became the founding population of a community, the local speech came to sound like New England English. But this happened only in a very small, highly localized region. The town of Lunenburg itself and some rural areas in Lunenburg County and the Annapolis Valley were marked linguistically as descendants of the New England dialect region. In this century, with accelerated mobility and urbanization, the distinctive sound of that New England ancestry has receded in these regions.

Perhaps surprisingly, no trace of the New England accent persevered or survived in the inland regions, although the number of New Englanders who moved inland from Nova Scotia was significant. By the time these

Loyalists reached their destinations in the Eastern Townships of Québec and the Kingston-Belleville-Port Hope region of Ontario, they were greeted by other Loyalists – refugees who had taken the second route into Canada. And though they too were native Americans, they brought with them a very different accent.

These other Loyalists set out principally from the states of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Vermont, and they moved by inland routes to entry points at the narrows of the lower Great Lakes, mainly crossing the border at the Detroit River, the Niagara River, or the upper St. Lawrence. There, they were met by Canadian government officials and sent, with a modest allotment of provisions and tools, to homesteads in the richly forested parklands of the Great Lakes basin. In every district where they landed, they formed the first settled population. Native peoples – the Iroquois (Hurons, Tobacco, Oneidas, and others) and Algonkians (mainly Delawares, Odawas, Ojibwas) – circulated through the regions harvesting roots or grains and hunting game, and white or mixed-blood trappers (*coureurs de bois*) cut across the regions chasing pelts and hides. But the Loyalists were the first people to fence in parcels of land, clear them of roots and rocks, and raise houses and outbuildings on them. Where their numbers were concentrated, some of them quit farming to provide goods and services for the others: mills for lumber and mills for flour, blacksmithing, slaughterhouses, tanning, spinning and weaving, rooms and meals for travellers, spelling and arithmetic lessons, Sunday sermons. Towns grew up as central places for distributing goods and services, with churches, schools, markets, and stores.

These people became the founding population of inland Canada. Socially, they brought with them the manners and mores of the middle American states where they originated, distinct from the Yankees north of them in New England and the planters south of them in Virginia and Georgia. Linguistically, they brought with them the sounds and syntax of those same middle states on the Atlantic coast.

The founding population of any place exerts many subtle and largely unintentional dictates on those who succeed them. They set the pattern for roads in the country and streets in the town, establish norms of communal cooperation (midwifery, health care, sewing bees, barn raising) and set the moral tone of the community. One of the subtlest dictates – and one seldom considered because it is beneath consciousness – is linguistic. The people who come after the founding population, the second or third generation of settlers, may come from far and wide, but their children will speak, under ordinary circumstances, just like the children whose parents arrived before them. So it came to pass in inland Canada – Lower Canada and especially Upper Canada, destined to become the economic and political wheelhorse of the nation in the next century – that the sound of the speech was directly descended from these Loyalists.

The successive waves of immigration have had very little effect on this basic character of Canadian English. As a result, it is a common experience

of young Canadians today, whether their ancestry be Scottish, German, or Bangladeshi, to be mistaken for Americans when they go travelling across the globe. To foreigners, unless they have a good ear for subtle differences, they sound American. That is the heritage of the Loyalist founders.

The British and Irish arrivals after 1812

Virtually from the time of their revolution, the Americans began looking covetously northward. In June 1812, the United States declared war on Britain and launched a series of raids on the Canadian borders. The event is known as the War of 1812 but it actually lasted until 1814, when the Treaty of Ghent ended the conflict with neither side gaining any advantage over the other. Militarily, the war was a draw, but from the Canadian viewpoint it seemed a victory. The aggressor had been repelled, after all, and the Canadian border remained intact.

The American invasions took place at the very sites where the Loyalists had entered the country: on the north shore of the St. Lawrence from Montreal to Cornwall, along the Detroit River, and especially at the Niagara frontier in Upper Canada. The British were embroiled at the same time in the Napoleonic Wars in Europe and could spare very few troops for defending their North American colony, but the outnumbered defenders eventually beat back the American insurgents. The Canadian victories aroused the first significant show of national pride, and today virtually all the battle sites are marked by monuments.

British intelligence later discovered that the Americans relied on finding widespread sympathy for their cause in Canada. They had expected their invading armies to be swelled by anti-English sympathisers as they marched through the colony. Instead, they met with stout resistance at every step. Though the Canadians proved their loyalty, the governors felt uneasy about the broad base of American ancestry in Canada, and they set about diluting that base by recruiting British settlers with promises of transport and generous gifts of land.

Between 1830 and 1860, thousands of British emigrants settled in Canada, especially along the north shores of the two Great Lakes, Ontario and Erie, but also inland in regions where the Loyalist presence was sparse, in the valleys of the Ottawa River (Pembroke, Ottawa, Hull), the Otonabee (Peterborough), the Grand (Brantford), and the Thames (Chatham, London). In the later years, they were joined by hundreds of Irish immigrants.

Their numbers more than doubled the population of Upper Canada, the second- and third-generation Loyalists. Economically, the immigrants broadened the consumer base and brought new initiatives. Politically, they brought debating skills and imperialist powerlust; it is an astounding fact that three of our first five Prime Ministers were British-born – Macdonald (in office 1867-73 and 1878-91) and Mackenzie (1873-78) were native Scots, and Bowell (1894-96) was born in England. But linguistically, the

long-term influence of the British immigrants was highly restricted. Most of the immigrants settled, naturally, in the towns and villages founded by the Loyalists, and, predictably, their Canadian-born children grew up speaking not like their parents but like the children who became their schoolmates and playmates. The essential Loyalist character of Canadian English persisted.

Naturally, Canadian English came to develop its own distinctive features, and the most distinctive one may ultimately be traceable to the broad representation of Scots people in the Canada from the earliest times. Many astute listeners distinguish Canadians from other North Americans by the pronunciations of words like *wife, mice, right* and, especially, *house, couch,* and *about.* Canadians pronounce the diphthong in these words with a higher vowel at the onset of the diphthong – [ɔɪ] instead of [aɪ], [ʌʊ] instead of [aʊ]. The distinctive diphthong is known among linguists everywhere as Canadian Raising, and it occurs before voiceless consonants but not elsewhere: thus *wife* [wɔɪf] has a different diphthong from *wives* and *why* [waɪvz, waɪ], and *house* [hʌʊs] has a different diphthong from *houses* and *how* [haʊzɪz, haʊ]. Exactly how this feature originated in Canadian English is uncertain. One certainty is that a similar diphthong occurs very generally in Scots English, not only in words like *wife* and *house* but also in words like *mine* and *foul* (where it never occurs in Canadian speech). One plausible explanation, of course, is that Canadian Raising came about by adapting the Scots vowel into the Canadian sound system.

Enclaves of Scots and Irish origin

In two accidental senses, the British accents and dialects of the 19th century immigrants made a direct and indisputable impression on Canadian speech. First, in relatively isolated regions where the immigrants became the founding population, their speech formed the basis of the local accent. To this day, one can discern the Scots roots of rural speech in Cape Breton, Pictou and Antigonish counties in Nova Scotia, the Ottawa Valley, Peterborough county, the West Lorne district on the north shore of Lake Erie, and other places – though nowadays it takes some searching. It takes no searching to hear the Irish roots of Newfoundland English, of course. Since Newfoundland joined the Confederation, Canada has come to encompass a large and influential enclave where the speech descends from Irish ancestors.

British linguistic proprieties

The second impression was made at the opposite pole, so to speak. Though the English immigrants could not impose their speech sounds on their offspring, they often did succeed in imposing norms of propriety and correctness on them, and on the community in general. Many English immigrants frankly promulgated their linguistic superiority to the benighted natives.

Thus Susanna Moodie, whose snide and snobbish account of her immigrant experience, *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), greatly amused the Victorian gentlefolk she left behind in England, described the first Canadian dialect she ever heard, that of the immigration recruiter, by saying he "had a shocking delivery, a drawling vulgar voice; and he spoke with such a twang that I could not bear to look at him or listen to him. He made such grammatical blunders that my sides ached laughing at him."

English immigrants took it upon themselves to try and change linguistic practices that differed from their own. In almost all cases, these practices differed because they were based on American rather than British models. The first schoolteachers in inland Canada were Loyalists or descendants of them, and they used the pedagogical tools they were familiar with. Noah Webster's spelling-book, for instance, was almost universally used in Upper Canada schools. It included spellings like *color, neighbor, center, meter,* and *connection* instead of *colour, neighbour, centre, metre,* and *connexion,* and it included pronunciations like ['sekrɒteri] ('secretary'), [lu:'tenənt] ('lieutenant'), ['i:ðər] ('either'), and [zi:] (the letter Z), instead of ['sekrətrɪ], [lef'tenənt], ['aɪðə(r)], and [zed].

One result of the belated intervention on language standards by the English immigrants is the Canadian double standard in many matters of spelling and pronunciation. Wherever British and American practices differ from one another, Canadians usually tolerate both. For instance, many Canadians freely vary their pronunciation of *either* without noticing any discrepancy or raising any controversy, and different regions sometimes maintain different norms, as when, for instance, Ontarians prefer the spellings *colour* and *neighbour* but Albertans prefer *color* and *neighbor.* These double standards are the linguistic legacy of the first two immigrations in Canadian history.

The day of the Anglo-Canadian

Another result, much less obvious but no less real, was attitudinal. In the second half of the 19th century, Canadians came to regard British standards as superior, whether or not they were the ones we ourselves practised. This attitude insinuated itself into the Canadian ethos politically as well as linguistically. At many points in our history, being patriotically Canadian has defined itself as being anti-American, either mildly or vitriolically, and in decades past – though probably not after the 1950s – it often also entailed being pro-British. Many genteel Canadians affected British speech and manners. In the first half of this century, many Canadian-born military officers, diplomats, professors, CBC newscasters, actors, and other members of the self-styled cultural élite made themselves "Anglo-Canadian." The poet Irving Layton took that as the title of his satirical poem describing an English professor at Queen's University:

A native of Kingston, Ont.
– two grandparents Canadian
and still living
His complexion florid
as a maple leaf in late autumn,
for three years he attended
Oxford

Now his accent
makes even Englishmen
wince, and feel
unspeakably colonial.

Nowadays, the Anglo-Canadian élite have become relics, along with the Union Jack, the British Commonwealth, and "God Save the Queen." The ethnically diverse immigrations of this century diluted the Anglo-Saxon hegemony. The image of Britain as Canada's mother country is a historical fact, but it is as far removed from our daily affairs as is Victorianism. Britain's failure to impose itself on recent generations of Canadians is abetted, of course, by the decline of Britain as a world power.

Canadian English today

The English spoken by Canadians is obviously an amalgam, as are Canadians themselves. As we have seen, our oldest vocabulary imported words from Inuits, Indians, and *coureurs de bois.* Most of those words were necessary because the word-stock of European languages provided no equivalents for the actions and objects they named. But this importation of words is not an isolated or strictly historical event. Exactly the same thing is happening in our language today, for exactly the same reasons, and it is happening at an unprecedented rate. The broader base of Canadian ancestry as a result of recent immigrations affects us in many ways, but perhaps most obviously in gustatory matters. New foodstuffs require names, so we can talk about and order them: *caffe latto, capuccino, vermicelli, linguini,* and countless other items of Italian cuisine, *salsa* from Mexico, *sushi* and *teriyaki* from Japanese, *dim sum* from Chinese, *souvlaki, saganaki, gyros, teramasalata,* and other Greek items, *shish kebab* from Turkey, *falafels* and *pita* from the Middle East, and *samosa* and *nan* from India. In a few cases, we take words from two different languages for the same thing, and end up with synonyms: thus *shish kebab* (from Turkish) or *souvlaki* (from Greek), and *smorgasbord* (from Swedish) or *buffet* (from French). When the foreign word is considered too difficult to pronounce, we usually substitute translated terms: so sautéed *zhou dzi* (fried dumplings) are usually called

pot-stickers in Chinese restaurants. Most often, we take the foreign word and adjust it to our own phonology (gyros, for instance, sounds like "heroes" when we say it) and fit it into our own grammar (teriyaki is an adjective preceding nouns like steak or chicken, capuccino is pluralized as capuccinos). From a historical viewpoint, by accommodating foreign words of all kinds in this way, our branch of the language is simply perpetuating the venerable English tendency.

That ancient tendency has never served us better than now, when our vocabulary – and, indeed, the vocabulary of every modern nation – is swelling more rapidly than ever with words from technology, medicine, international politics, and many other sources. *Gigabyte, best-before dates, PMS, quark, glasnost, sexism, ageism, auto-immunity* – these words and numerous others were coined only a few years ago, but they are already known and used in most parts of the world. The adoption of words like these on an international scale is a recent linguistic phenomenon. Less than a century ago, technological and cultural innovations were much more likely to give rise to different (or partly different) vocabularies in widely separated places, as we saw in the separate British and American automobile vocabulary. No more, and the reason is obvious: no longer are there many places that can be described as widely separated.

Canadian English tomorrow

Perhaps the main historical thrust of the last fifty years has been the compression of space and time. Rail and sea travel are supplanted by air, postal and telegraph communication by fax and e-mail, gas and electrical cooking by microwave, radio and phonography by television and laser disk, abacuses and adding machines by calculators and computerized spreadsheets, short wave antennae by satellites, scalpels by laser beams, carbon copies by photocopies, linotype by photo-plates, stroboscopic motion pictures by virtual reality. In 1964, when Marshall McLuhan said that the world was becoming "a global village," his words had the ring of science fiction. Now, just a few decades later, they seem very close to the literal truth.

It is too soon to know how – if at all – global proximity might affect the way we speak. Will Canadian English lose some of its Canadian-ness? Will the various and different speech standards in, say, Canada, Australia, Scotland, England, and the United States be superseded by an oceanic English accent, that is, by an accent that is somehow neutral with respect to all of them? Although it is impossible to say for certain, we do know about some of the necessary conditions that would result in an oceanic English. On the one hand, we know for certain that accents are not transmitted by mass media. Listeners or viewers can be exposed to endless hours of speech on radio or television without significantly changing their own accents or grammars. They may adopt some vocabulary items, all right, and they may come to view the media accent more tolerantly than before, but they still sound like

themselves. For that reason, Newfoundlanders in the outports, for instance, have retained their indigenous accents after more than fifty years of hearing mainland accents daily on the CBC. On the other hand, we know for certain that accents are altered by face-to-face interactions between peers. People who move from one end of the country to the other come to sound – more or less – like their new work-mates or playmates. Their proficiency will be determined partly by age. For people over 14, the adopted accent will always be less than perfect, so that they will never sound exactly like natives even though they come to sound quite unlike the people they moved away from; for people under seven, their adopted accent will sound just like the natives; and for people in between seven and 14 it is impossible to predict how fluent they will become. Knowing this, it seems that the inception of an oceanic English is a long way off. It depends upon close interaction among young people, and for that to happen the globe will have to become much smaller.