

RU

Устаревание французских заимствований в английском языке Канады

Уриханян В. Х., Демина О. В.

Аннотация. Цель исследования – представить уточненную классификацию канадизмов французского происхождения, вышедших из употребления, но не отнесенных к устаревшим во втором издании “Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles”, с учетом причин их устаревания, а также частотности и принадлежности к определенному семантическому полю. В статье рассмотрены 169 извлеченных из словаря галлицизмов с их последующим распределением по категориям частотности (на основе употребления в трех канадских СМИ – “The Globe and Mail”, “Montreal Gazette”, “CBC”) и по 14 семантическим полям. Научная новизна исследования состоит в том, что в нем впервые представлена классификация по степени употребимости для устаревших заимствованных канадизмов с учетом тематической принадлежности, а также подробно рассмотрены причины, лежащие в основе их устаревания. В результате исследования установлено, что устаревание этих заимствований связано прежде всего с экстралингвистическими факторами. Вместе с тем многие из канадизмов французского происхождения обозначают по-прежнему существующие реалии Канады, например представителей флоры и фауны или особенности географии. По этой причине они не могут быть отнесены ни к архаизмам (т. к. вместо них употребляются описательные выражения), ни к историзмам (т. к. они обозначают все еще существующие реалии). Поскольку устаревание данных франкоязычных заимствований связано с перестройкой концептуального восприятия и утратой актуальности определенными понятиями, их можно отнести к категории нотиолизмов.

EN

Lexical obsolescence of French loanwords in Canadian English

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to present a refined classification of Canadianisms of French origin that have fallen out of use but have not been identified as obsolete in the second edition of the “Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles”, taking into account the causes of their obsolescence, as well as their frequency and association with a particular semantic field. The article examines 169 Gallicisms extracted from the dictionary, with their subsequent distribution into frequency categories (based on their use in the three Canadian media outlets – “The Globe and Mail”, “Montreal Gazette”, “CBC”) and 14 semantic fields. The scientific novelty of the research lies in the fact that it presents, for the first time, a subject-related classification based on the frequency of occurrence for obsolete borrowed Canadianisms and a detailed discussion of the underlying causes of their obsolescence. The results of the study show that the lexical obsolescence of these loanwords is mainly due to extralinguistic factors. Many of the French-derived Canadianisms refer to still-existing realities of Canada, such as wildlife or geographical features. They therefore do not qualify for the most common classification as either archaic (they have no single-word equivalent) or historical (they express realities that still exist today). Since these obsolete words highlight a conceptual change in perception due to the loss of relevance of certain ways of life, they can be categorised as notiolisms.

Introduction

It is often said that a language is constantly evolving, with its lexicon being the most susceptible to change (Зайнуллин, Мухаметзянова, 2012; Плисов, Хамидулин, 2019). As the vocabulary of a language reflects changes in the lives of its speakers, its development involves both expansion and contraction (Плисов, Хамидулин, 2019). However, a number of recent studies have called for more attention towards currently under-researched low-frequency vocabulary, as most approaches to language change focus on innovation (Brook, 2024; Smith, 2024). Indeed, it is argued that a full understanding of language change requires taking into account both innovation and obsolescence (Brook, 2024). This makes it particularly relevant to consider the topic of lexical obsolescence in Canadian English, focusing on the role of French-derived terms.

The tasks set in the course of this research included: 1) to identify the most salient semantic fields for the relevant French loanwords extracted from the *Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles*; 2) to assess the frequency of use of the French loanwords under consideration in the Canadian English-language media, including the extent to which they are used independently and are included in proper nouns (toponyms); 3) to analyse the causes of the obsolescence of these French-derived Canadianisms; 4) to evaluate whether the findings are consistent with the conventional classification between archaic and historical words.

The article analyses all 169 French loanwords, not marked as obsolete, from one of the most comprehensive and influential references on the exclusively Canadian lexicon:

- Dollinger S., Fee M. *DCHP-2: The Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles*. 2nd edition. University of British Columbia, 2017. <https://www.dchp.ca/dchp2/>.

The resulting selection of borrowed items was then evaluated according to their frequency in the Canadian media (*The Globe and Mail* (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/>), *Montreal Gazette* (<https://www.montrealgazette.com/>), *CBC* (<https://www.cbc.ca/>)) and their semantic field.

The theoretical background of this article includes the works by G. G. Zajnullin and L. R. Muhametzyanova (Зайнуллин, Мухаметзянова, 2012), E. V. Plisov and A. M. Hamidulin (Плисов, Хамидулин, 2019), and V. M. Kolesnaya (Колесная, 2022), which focus primarily on the issues related to the classification of obsolete words, but also on the nature of the diachronic evolution of the lexicon, interconnected with intralinguistic and extralinguistic changes. The paper by B. Yu. Norman (Норман, 2016) is a key reference in this regard, as it introduces a third category of obsolete words, namely notiolisms, in addition to the traditional distinction between archaisms and historicisms. This approach is both applicable and valuable for the discussion on lexical obsolescence in Canadian English. The article also considers the studies by R. E. McConnell (1979) and J. Walker (2015) on the origins of the vocabulary of Canadian English. Additionally, the research also incorporates insights from the works by M. Brook (2024) on the graduality of lexical obsolescence, including the cases of sporadic use of obsolete terms with or without newly acquired social meaning, C. A. Smith (2024) on the principles of assessing obsolescence on the basis of lexicographic data, and D. Francis, E. Rabinovich, F. Samir et al. (2021) on the cognitive factors, intertwined with socio-cultural changes, affecting the likelihood of lexical obsolescence of certain items. These works collectively form the theoretical background of this article.

Several research methods have been employed during this study. The method of theoretical analysis was used to systematise and identify specific patterns in the process of lexical obsolescence in Canadian English. To classify French loanwords extracted from the *DCHP-2* thematically and functionally, the method of examining dictionary definitions and the semantic field method were applied. Additionally, the method of frequency measurement was used to categorise the loanwords according to their frequency of occurrence, drawing on the materials from the three major Canadian English-language media outlets.

The practical significance of the research lies in the potential application of its findings in advanced English language classes, particularly in linguo-cultural studies, as well as in lexicology and other linguistic courses. In addition, the results of the study may provide a valuable basis for further scientific research into lexical obsolescence and the distinctive features of Canadian English.

Discussion and results

As words gradually become obsolete and lose their functionality, they pass into the passive layer of vocabulary (Плисов, Хамидулин, 2019). Although the exact classification of obsolete vocabulary is subject to various interpretations, it has become customary to distinguish between archaisms and historicisms (Зайнуллин, Мухаметзянова, 2012). The distinction lies in the presence or absence of a more frequent equivalent: archaic words fall out of use in favour of other terms that continue to express the same meaning, while historical words disappear from common use along with the concepts they denote due to their irrelevance in the changing world (Зайнуллин, Мухаметзянова, 2012). Accordingly, the reasons for lexical obsolescence are either intralinguistic or extralinguistic (Плисов, Хамидулин, 2019). Within archaic vocabulary, additional subtypes are sometimes distinguished with regard to the obsolete meanings of a polysemous word (lexico-semantic archaisms), the obsolete pronunciation and stress position (lexico-phonetic archaisms), or the obsolete patterns of word formation (lexico-derivational archaisms) (Колесная, 2022).

However, there are cases when words become obsolete without a clear replacement, or the disappearance of the realities associated with them. In this regard, B. Yu. Norman proposes to distinguish the third type of obsolete words that stand for still-existing realities: notiolisms. According to B. Yu. Norman, notiolisms become obsolete because changes in people's conceptual perceptions render them irrelevant. This, in turn, occurs due to either political, social, and ideological changes or scientific advances and changing lifestyles (Норман, 2016).

This approach, which argues that the process of obsolescence is not purely structural, but also reflects changing perceptions and conceptual relevance, is somewhat echoed in one of the more recent studies of the cognitive factors that influence the likelihood of a word becoming obsolete. In this framework, the evolution of vocabulary is seen as comparable to biological evolution, with different factors influencing the chances of individual words to "survive". While acknowledging the impact of social and technological development on vocabulary, the authors highlight the importance of factors affecting the cognitive processing of words. These factors, intertwined with "extensive sociological and cultural trends that impact word usage", include lack of contextual diversity, competition with semantic near-equivalents, phonological complexity and others (Francis, Rabinovich, Samir et al., 2021, p. 1531-1532).

Lexical decline is therefore not an arbitrary process. It occurs for a variety of reasons, including social and technological changes, as well as speakers' evolving cognitive frameworks. As it will be shown further, in line with B. Yu. Norman's approach, the obsolescence of a large number of French-derived Canadianisms is due to changes in conceptual perception and relevance.

Although dictionaries remain an invaluable source of information, "lexicographic indications of historical frequency of use, register, and obsolescence are well known to be fallible" (Smith, 2024, p. 356). This is the case not only because the process of lexical obsolescence is continuous and thus may not be fully attested in a dictionary, but also because of the so-called "long tail": even when forms approach zero in general use, "sporadic examples continue to be found" (Brook, 2024, p. 3). In fact, their frequency corresponds to a reversed S-curve (Brook, 2024). As a result, it can be difficult to define the exact moment when an item should be classified as obsolete.

For the purposes of this research, we have selected all French loanwords from the *DCHP-2*, according to the etymology provided by the dictionary, without the labels "obsolete" or "historical", as this article focuses rather on those entries that have fallen out of use without being recognised as such at the time of the dictionary's last revision in 2017. The authors of the dictionary do not specify their definitions of "obsolete" and "historical" entries, which however seem to correspond to the previously mentioned distinction between archaisms and historicisms. From the resulting selection, loanwords with a relatively high occurrence in the three Canadian media (*CBC*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Montreal Gazette*) were excluded, while the rest (120 out of a total of 169 words selected from the dictionary) were classified according to semantic field, which can be defined as a set of linguistic items with a common meaning reflecting a conceptual, thematic, or functional similarity of the denoted entities (Кобозева, 2024), and frequency.

These 14 semantic fields included: 1) Animal Species and Flora; 2) Clothing and Animal Products; 3) Culture and Heritage; 4) Exploration, Trade and Forestry; 5) Fishing, Hunting and Industry; 6) Food and Cuisine; 7) Geographical Features and Weather; 8) Parts of the Country; 9) Housing and Architecture; 10) Indigenous Life; 11) Politics and Administration; 12) Recreation and Sports; 13) Social Identity and Language; 14) Transportation. The entries that did not fit into any of these categories were listed as 15) Miscellaneous.

In terms of frequency, the French loanwords in question were divided into "not used", with zero occurrences in the three media sources, and "rare", with fewer than 10 occurrences.

As indicated by M. Brook, obsolescence is a very gradual process that can, among other things, "yield new local social meaning" (2024, p. 11). It can in fact contribute to the preservation of certain items. Infrequent in everyday interactions, they acquire markedness that makes them useful in expressing identity (Brook, 2024, p. 4). We believe this to be the case for a number of French-derived Canadianisms that are rarely or never used independently but are found as parts of proper nouns: names of the streets, towns, rivers and mountains. As it will be shown below, most of these Canadianisms fall within the semantic fields expressing the most important realities for the first settlers in Canada. These loanwords include:

The term *malpeque*, referring to "a famous oyster of Prince Edward Island" (Dollinger, Fee, 2017), still found in the media on its own, but also used in place names:

*After nearly two decades of boats scraping sand bars at the bottom of **Malpeque Bay**, some people who fish out of that area may finally be getting a safer option* (CBC Prince Edward Island. 21.12.2024).

The word *loup-garou* – "a werewolf" (Dollinger, Fee, 2017), rarely used independently but also included in the name of popular hiking area near the town of Sainte-Adèle in Quebec:

*The town of Sainte-Adèle, located about 70 kilometres northwest of Montreal, is hoping to raise \$3 million to buy **Mont Loup-Garou**. The municipality is planning to convert the space into a public park and take steps to protect the summit from residential development* (CBC Montreal. 18.12.2024).

The loanword *rapid(s)* – "shallow water, strong currents and a rocky bottom, which causes the whole surface of the water to appear foaming and white", derived from Canadian French *rapide(s)* (Dollinger, Fee, 2017), sometimes used independently but also included in place names such as *Little Grand Rapids*, a town in the province of Manitoba:

*RCMP announced yesterday they found a body belonging to a 49-year-old man from Family Lake, but said police and the community of **Little Grand Rapids** are still searching by boat for Friesen's body and that of the 42-year-old passenger* (CBC Manitoba 21.12.2024).

The Canadianism *embarras*, also borrowed from Canadian French, which originally meant "a tangle of logs and brush obstructing a stream" (Dollinger, Fee, 2017), but is now found only in toponymy:

*Parts of the delta are drying out and climate change may play a part, he said. But the biggest factor, Hall said, is the **Embarras River**, which redirected large volumes of water when it broke its banks in 1982* (CBC Edmonton. 21.12.2024).

Overall, of the 120 obsolete loanwords, 55 were classified as "not used" because of their zero frequency in the Canadian media and 36 were marked as "rare". 20 are now used exclusively in place names, and 9 are used in place names but also show rare independent occurrences. The chart illustrates the distribution of frequency categories for the identified semantic fields, as well as the number of entries related to each of the fields (Figure 1).

By far the most important semantic fields in our selection are "Animal Species and Flora" and "Geographical Features and Weather". Words related to these fields were particularly important to Canada's first settlers who encountered the realities on the new continent that were unknown in Europe (primarily flora and fauna, but also those associated with wilderness exploration or Indigenous life) or warmer climates (for example, *la poudre* (also *poudre-rie*) – "a northern blizzard" (Dollinger, Fee, 2017)). Due to the lack of names for related concepts in English at the time, English-speaking settlers borrowed many of these words from Canadian French or Indigenous languages (often via French), as French Canadians were the first to arrive in Canada (McConnell, 1979; Walker, 2015). The importance of these aspects is underlined by the fact that these two semantic fields also account for the largest proportion of loanword use in place names.

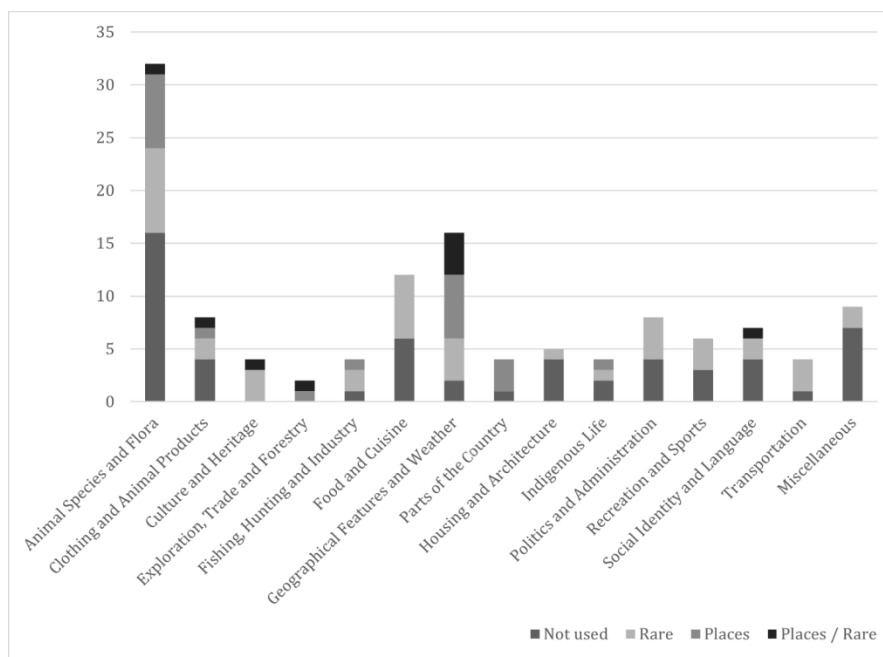


Figure 1. Distribution of Frequency Categories for Semantic Fields

However, such terms are more closely associated with traditional trades and rural lifestyles. The disappearance of these French loanwords from active use is therefore not surprising, given their lack of relevance to modern urban life. This is indeed the case for the specific names of the various fish species in North America (e.g. *ouananiche* or *winanishie* for “a species of small fresh-water salmon, native especially to Lake St. John and certain other lakes in Ontario and Quebec” or *barbot* for “a large catfish, especially *Ictalurus punctatus*” (Dollinger, Fee, 2017)), or for the single word used to describe the Canadian lynx (*loup-cervier* (also *lucifée*, *lucivee* or *pichou*), defined as “a North American wildcat, *Lynx canadensis*, having prominently tufted ears, large cushioned paws, and a black tail-tip” (Dollinger, Fee, 2017)).

Other entries in the *DCHP-2* have become obsolete due to changes in the social and political context. Today, many words related to the life of Indigenous peoples would be considered at least bizarre, such as *brave*, marked as borrowed from Canadian French for “a male Indian, especially a warrior; or a young male Eskimo” (Dollinger, Fee, 2017), or outright scandalous, such as the word *Siwash* (from the French *sauvage*, meaning “savage”) for “a native Indian” (Dollinger, Fee, 2017). Even the words “Indian” and “Eskimo”, which are used in the dictionary definitions, are nowadays rather controversial.

A Vancouver Park Board commissioner wants to see *Siwash* Rock renamed, saying the Stanley Park landmark has had its “derogatory” title long enough (CBC British Columbia. 28.12.2024).

Many of the French loanwords related to politics are no longer used either. Such is the case of the term *telegraph*, which does not appear in the modern media and means “to vote more than once in an election by impersonating other voters, usually ones who are dead, sick, late, or away from home” (Dollinger, Fee, 2017). Others are rare and limited to articles on history: for example, the word *créditiste*, which refers to a member or supporter of the Quebec wing of the defunct Social Credit party.

These examples suggest that the reasons for the complete or ongoing obsolescence and legacy status of certain French loanwords in Canadian English, now found mainly or only in toponymy, are primarily extralinguistic. Accordingly, most of them might be expected to fall into the category of historical words, referring to historical realities that have now disappeared (Норман, 2016). For some of them, this is indeed true: for example, the political terms considered above have disappeared along with the entities and practices they used to describe. For others, however, the object of reality still exists, as in the case of the terms used to describe Canada’s animals, fish and plants, or the geographical features and weather conditions of the North. This fact prevents them from being classified as historical (Норман, 2016). At the same time, they lack a one-word modern equivalent (e.g. Canada lynx for *loup-cervier* or *pichou*), which is one of the conditions for their inclusion in the archaic layer of vocabulary (Норман, 2016). We believe this to be the case for almost half of the obsolete Canadianisms selected for this study (56 out of 120). These obsolete items should rather be regarded as notiolisms, the category of obsolete words proposed by B. Yu. Norman to account for such cases.

Conclusion

Thus, we come to the following conclusions. The study has shown that 169 French loanwords, not marked as obsolete in the *Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles*, can be grouped into 14 distinct semantic fields, with the remainder classified under a 15th category (“Miscellaneous”). The semantic fields with the highest number of entries are “Animal Species and Flora” and “Geographical Features and Weather”.

The analysis of the material from the three major Canadian media outlets suggests that many of the loanwords without obsolescence labels in the dictionary are, in fact, no longer in use (55 words), occur only rarely – fewer than 10 times (36 words), appear exclusively in toponyms (20 words), or are found in toponyms with only occasional independent use (9 words). Notably, the two dominant semantic fields also exhibit the highest frequency of use in place names – both in absolute numbers and proportionally relative to the overall number of entries. In particular, for the semantic field “Geographical Features and Weather”, more than half of all entries appear in toponyms. This pattern emphasises the historical significance of these terms.

The findings of the study highlight the prominent role of extralinguistic factors in the obsolescence of many of these Gallicisms. Since the Anglophone majority in Canada emerged considerably later than the arrival of French-speaking settlers, English speakers borrowed numerous terms from French, particularly those describing the realities of North America and the northern climate. However, as political, social, economic, scientific and technological developments have changed daily life, many of these borrowed Canadianisms have gradually fallen out of use.

At the same time, a significant number of these Gallicisms cannot be classified as either archaisms or historicisms. Extralinguistic causes of obsolescence are typically thought to confer historical status on obsolete words, as such terms are expected to disappear from active use along with the objects they once denoted.

Nevertheless, our selection includes a number of now-obsolete loanwords that used to refer to objects and phenomena that still exist in the contemporary world. These words, therefore, should be considered notiolisms according to B. Yu. Norman’s classification. The distinction of notiolisms alongside archaisms and historicisms significantly contributes to a more precise and comprehensive classification of obsolete French loanwords in Canadian English.

The prospects for further research on the subject may include refining and elaborating the classification of obsolete French loanwords according to frequency and semantic field, as well as expanding the scope of the analysis by incorporating a wider selection of borrowed terms. This could involve the use of lexicographic data from other dictionaries providing information on the Canadian lexicon.

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