When Hollywood Speaks “International French:” The Sociopolitics of Dubbing for Francophone Québec

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Introduction
Translation of a particular sort provokes regular political uproars and scandals in Quebec. It is the stuff of parliamentary debates, laws and regulations (and their amendments), countless letters to the editors, and numerous websites and blogs. Given the fact that almost 99% of the audiovisual product screened in Quebec is originally in English, and from Hollywood (SODEC 2008), translation issues are very public. A recent scandal illustrates the powerful emotional and sociopolitical debates set off in Quebec by … film dubbing. In June 2007, controversies erupted around the dubbed-in-France version of Shrek the Third, the third in a series of animated Hollywood children’s movies constructed around a green ogre who sets out with a noisy donkey at his side to free his swamp of various fairytale creatures and meets love in the process. Due to the policies of Dreamworks/Paramount studios, this series is dubbed only in France and then distributed in Quebec. The dubbing raised the ire of local Quebec politician Mario Dumont (Action démocratique du Québec) to such an extent that he sought to address the problem with legislative solutions. He claimed that his and many other Quebec children could not understand the Franco-French put in the mouths of the Hollywood creatures, and argued that this was a political matter that needed to be addressed by the provincial government.

While Dumont objected in particular to the French slang used by the Shrek characters, many other aspects of Franco-French dubbing tend to irritate Quebec audiences: regional French expressions, French syntax, French pronunciation, and the pitch of the actors’ voices which is much higher and more “pointu,” more hectic. Dumont’s bill did not go far in the Assemblée nationale in Quebec City, since it did not have the support of the Minister of Culture, who instead sent a representative to Hollywood to try to broker a deal with the major studios that would see more movies dubbed especially for and in Quebec. Yet, the controversy served, once again, to stir up opinions on this translation issue, revealing its importance to Quebec Francophones.

The controversies are not restricted to Hollywood films dubbed-in-France, however. They can be even more virulent when American audiovisual products are made to speak Québécois. A case in point is the 1999 American television series, Ally McBeal. Bought by Quebec’s TVA, dubbed into Québécois, and scheduled to run in prime time, it failed because of the outcry around the language it used. It was quickly taken off the air, to be replaced a few years later by the version dubbed-in-France. Indeed, the tolerance level for Quebec French from the mouths of international actors
is low since audiences seem to want it reserved for local productions, it provides a credible reflection of local identity in that very specific space, television series or feature films set in Québec. It is also used exceptionally to dub certain types of cartoons for children and for certain character in Les Simpson.

In what follows, I briefly describe the translation processes used to synchronize film in Québec as well as some of the challenges facing the industry. In a second section, I provide an overview of the discourse around film dubbing as they have appeared in various public documents since the late 1960s when the industry developed in Québec; and I trace the three main discursive threads: cultural, economic, and pedagogical. Lastly, I discuss a number of excerpts from recent Hollywood feature films dubbed in Québec in order to examine the question of language quality that so vexed M. Dumont.

Questions about the quality and type of language used for dubbing in Québec are pressing and recurrent. They pertain in many other societies and in Hollywood and raise sensitive issues related to aesthetics and culture, the control of language, and identity. I address these issues in regard to Québec first of all.

**International French, “le synchronien” of French Dubbing**

The French dubbing industry — in France and in Québec — makes a secret of the fact that “international French” is the language used for translating film. Regional pronunciations, dialects, strong slang or expression that might date quickly are generally avoided and a “neutral” form of French is employed in order to make the product as palatable as possible to the greatest number of viewers. Researchers such as Luykens have confirmed that the convention in French dubbing is to keep the language as free as possible of associations to a particular speech community, and that the UDA (Union des artistes) in Québec seems to concur with these industry norms. However, it is true that certain regionalisms inevitably creep into the language of dubbing, especially those that are part of the everyday language of the people working in the dubbing industry itself; Paris slang such as “mec” for guy, “flic” for policeman, “clope” for cigarette, “tronche” for face come up regularly in work from France — and regularly irritate the Québec viewers. Similarly, when dubbers seek ways to differentiate language registers between, say, the less educated and more educated characters involved in a production such as The Simpsons, the French-language dubbing industry can occasionally resort to very popular language. On the whole, however, it uses a form of French that it refers to as “international French,” and which certain critical commentators — academics, everyday viewers, and those in the industry who have to produce it — refer to as “le synchronien.” This is a constructed, relatively artificial language, notable for its lack of color, lack of expressiveness, its “woodenness,” its us of repetitive solutions for recurring problems in translating American English, and its often rather high register. A study of the 1970s Québec dubbing of Star Trek as Patrouille du Cosmos has summarized the qualities of this language as sapping the actors’ verbal power and having the crew c
the Enterprise speak “in a manner that implies an extensive education, some degree of refinement, great psychological strength in the face of danger and an underlying uniformity of social provenance” (Caron 343). In other words, the dubbing into “synchronian” substantially changes the idiom of the audiovisual product. Nevertheless, the industry maintains “international French” as the norm for dubbing on both sides of the Atlantic, thus using an idiom that aspires precisely to being a “langue de nulle part.”

The term “International French” dates from the 1960s when a standardized, normalized but rather abstract version of French was designated as an alternative to the so-called “Parisian French” that had hitherto represented and been considered the norm. In Québec, the assumption was that “le français international” would not only “redonner du prestige au français au Québec” (Bouchard 250) and garner respect and status for French within Canada, but also foster international francophone contacts and exchanges. The Office de la langue française, established in Québec in 1965, laid out the situation in its very first publication as follows:

Ainsi, la norme qui, au Québec, doit régir le français dans l’administration, l’enseignement, les tribunaux, le culte et la presse, doit, pour l’essentiel, coïncider à peu près entièrement avec celle qui prévaut à Paris, Genève, Bruxelles, Dakar, et dans toutes les grandes villes d’expression française.

The language used in various public spheres was thus to coincide with the French used in the capitals and other large cities of the entire francophone world. It has, perhaps not surprisingly, lost a sense of place. In the Quebec dubbing industry, it is nonetheless considered the local idiom, “la langue de proximité” that is necessary to bring a dubbed film into the purview and perspective of the audience. And so, as a dubbing actor in Québec,

vous devez maîtriser le français dit “international.” La diction doit être irréprochable. À l’exception de TRES rares cas (la série “Les Simpson,” par exemple), les productions doublées au Québec se font dans un français qui doit être exempt d’accent local.

Somewhat paradoxically perhaps, Québec’s “langue de proximité” has become “le français international” while “l’accent local” is reserved for very rare cases such as Les Simpson and a small number of children’s cartoons that are dubbed into Québec French.

The Challenges of Dubbing as a Team Effort
At this point it is useful to briefly describe the complex process of film dubbing, and the team effort involved. All the films studied for the purposes of the research project on “Double-Dubbing” underwent the same dubbing process.
1. The original English sounds of the film were transferred by hand onto a “bande rhythm,” a wide piece of transparent tape, by a specialist “détecteur” in Montreal. This transcription, which includes all the spoken dialogue and other sounds requiring translation onto a new soundtrack, including sighs, bursts of laughter, sneezes, drawn-out vowels, emphases, hesitations, and stutters as well as information about the location and visibility of the speaking voice/mouth was finalized in about two days of work.

2. The transcription was sent to a freelance adaptor/translator along with the original version of the film for translation into French. The translator matched a French text to the English, paying close attention to lip movements (when visible) and seeking to match consonants such as “b,” “p,” “t,” “w” and “th” with sounds requiring similar lip movements in French. The adaptor was thus as aware of form as of meaning. The adaptor completed the work in about five days, following clear instructions provided by the distributor and studio to avoid so-called “prohibited” expressions. This translation was inscribed on the “bande rhythm” just below the original version of the English, and returned to the studio.

3. Back in the studio, the French translation was transcribed by a calligrapher onto a new “bande rhythm” in order to make it legible for the actors and the dubbing director who would record the new sound track.

4. For the recording sessions, which often started well before the translator had completed the entire translation, this new text was run across the top of the screen on which the English version played, with a clear black line indicating the point at which a French actor’s utterances should start. Actors and director would listen to the English original, then switch off the English sound track and record the French in its place as the French translation unscrolled above the scene. Recording was done sentence by sentence, often with numerous retakes and repetitions, sometimes with text changes imposed by the director or suggested by the actors. Often actors came separately to record their particular parts, and did not work together, i.e. off each other.

5. The studio mixed the new French sound track, improving sound quality, adding special effects, etc. The work was sometimes completed in less than a week, at a cost of $70,000+ per film.

The team effort that is film dubbing brings with it numerous challenges, including the question of who controls the text. The “détecteur,” the adaptor/translator, the calligrapher, the actors, and the director of the recording
can all intervene and make adjustments. Further, the question of "prohibited" language presents a bone of contention, and can inhibit performances of certain scenes, where for example, strong, expressive language in the source text is replaced by the required neutral version of "international French," which can be more or less "playable." The issue of actors’ schedules is also problematic: only a small number of dubbing actors have regular work in Montreal, and timetables conflict. This can result in disjunctions in the finished work, as recordings are done when people are available and not necessarily as a team. The small number of available actors also results in different Hollywood characters being dubbed by the same recognizable voices, a factor that again raises the ire of film connoisseurs and bloggers.

This situation is hardly made easier by an environment under pressure from international competition with France and hard deadlines. Challenges that are specific to the Quebec situation include the Quebec’s government current ruling that French versions of the English-American film must be available in cinemas for the general public within forty-five days of the release of the English. In practice, this has come to mean that the French release occurs at the same time as the English, since otherwise it cannot compete for audiences, who will choose to see the English version. This, in turn, leads to very short dubbing schedules with some feature films translated into French in only three days.

A more complex competitive issue stems from the fact that France prohibits the importation of Quebec-dubbed film into France, but readily exports film dubbed-in-France to Quebec. The protectionist French decree dates from 1949, was reinforced in 1964, and again in the late 1970s through strikes by French dubbing workers, and requires all foreign film circulating in France to have been dubbed there, and now, in the EU. This decree forces Hollywood producers and distributors to finance one dubbing for France, but simultaneously allows them to distribute this version in Quebec, which does not impose protectionist measures. This situation presents a constant threat to the Quebec industry, a threat that is mitigated by generous provincial tax credits supporting the industry. But the threat remains, and it is tracked by the UDA, which regularly organizes events, demonstrations, and meetings with the media in order to, for example, "protester contre la décision de Columbia de faire doubler ses films en France [...] et dénoncer les politiques de l’entreprise qui n’a fait doubler que deux de ses onze plus récentes productions au Québec" (Guenette).

Finally, the language issue requires constant engagement with public challenges, specifically the question of which French should be used (Paquin). Interestingly, the current UDA blog on the topic (posted at www.doublage.qc.ca October 2008) sides with the Quebec industry with the following comment: "[...] en tenant compte des divers facteurs influant le tout, il ne faut pas perdre de vue que l’apport du langage utilisé en doublage est un élément important de la qualité générale du français au Québec" (my emphasis). Aesthetic and cultural questions seem to pale in relation to the pedagogical impulse here, a factor that will resurface in the next section on the public discourses around dubbing in Quebec.
Three Strands in the Discourse Around Dubbing in Québec

Film dubbing does not have a long history in Québec. It dates from the late 1960s when the call for “le français sur nos écrans” began to bring results. This was a response to an unacceptable situation, namely the broad distribution of increasing numbers of popular American film products, with only a rare French (dubbed-in-France) version appearing as late as a year after the release of the English version (SODEC 1998, 9). In other words, prior to this decade and the Loi sur le cinéma (1975), copies of French-dubbed versions of popular film materials were scarce, foreign-sounding, and poorly distributed. Furthermore, even the French films that came to Québec were often dubbed into English and distributed only in English. French-language films made in Canada were extremely scarce and the translated, or versioned, NFB productions, were largely prohibited by Duplessis as “Communist” materials (York 2010). Small wonder that dubbing made-in-Québec became an issue and that Québec’s Loi sur le cinéma included a clause on film synchronization/dubbing, which called for all dubbing to be done in the province — a condition Dumont’s failed bill also demanded and a component of the law that has never been enforced. What the Loi sur le cinéma never addressed, however, was the question of which French should be used in film translation, an issue that joins questions of language quality with others concerned about cultural history, identity, political power, and the “obsession with language” that has marked Québec society for the past 200 years (Bouchard), and which continues to be contested.

While the protectionist stance assumed by France has softened somewhat — allowing English-Canadian film products to be dubbed in Québec for dissemination in France —, Québec industry representatives, film commentators, and politicians continue to perceive the French position as extreme and unjustified, and criticize it as inappropriate within la francophonie. As Pierre Lampron, head of SODEC, writes:

Il s’agit […] de la seule mesure qui assure à un pays jouissant d’avantages de position dominante une protection supplémentaire contre un pays dont les désavantages de marché pourraient justifier le recours à une loi de protection de cette nature. (30)

The effect of the decree has indeed been powerful, affecting the commercial viability of the industry and perhaps also the quality of the work it produces. While this French decree is a constant in the discourse on dubbing in Québec, there are three other important strands: the cultural issues, the economic/commercial questions, and more quietly, the pedagogical aspects. These are addressed both explicitly and implicitly in the many studies, position papers, and other documents on dubbing in Québec that have been presented to institutes, commissioned by political bodies, produced by lobby groups, the UDA, or by cultural associations.

The Cultural Strand

An early report from 1969, the “Mémoire du comité de culture cinématographique,” which was prepared for the Gendron Commission, connects the
government responsibilities for language and culture with the audiovisual: “il appartient au gouvernement québécois de sauvegarder la culture et les intérêts de ses citoyens” (my emphasis.) The report expresses the hope that French-dubbed film will “donner un visage français dans les cinémas du Québec,” and that French will not only be the “langue de travail” of the province, but become the “langue des loisirs.” Another series of studies on film dubbing in Québec published during the late 1980s by the Institut québécois du cinéma (IQC) takes this cultural argument as their very foundation, reiterating the opening remarks in the *Loi sur le cinéma*: “Attendu que le cinéma constitue l’un des moyens les plus puissants d’expression et de diffusion de la culture; Attendu que le Québec se doit d’affirmer sa souveraineté dans ce domaine” (IQC 1990, 10), and concluding that the government’s recognition of the power of cinema as a “véhicule d’un imaginaire collectif et de valeurs culturelles […]” must also accord importance to the language of cinema (IQC 1990, 10).

Opinions on dubbing “made in France,” also make this link between culture, language, and cinema. The IQC writes “le décret français crée chez nous une situation de ‘colonialisme culturel,’ forcing ‘argot français’ onto Québec viewers, and imbuing ‘our’ North American culture with a language and culture ‘qui ne nous ressemblent pas’” (1990, 13, 15). In the late 1980s, in an exasperated appeal for more French on the screens in Québec, the author of another IQC study of dubbed cinema writes “l’identité culturelle a besoin d’oxygène” — the French language and culture are suffocating under the weight of English-language film which has changed the tastes and viewing habits of the young in particular (IQC 1989, 27).

An interesting (pedagogical) addition to this cultural strand comes from Québec’s Union des artistes (UDA) which claims that French language cinema in Québec is a must in order for immigrants to better acclimatize to the French-speaking culture of Québec (Mémoire de l’UDA 1991).

The Economic Strand

Analyses of the logistics and economics of film dubbing and distribution enter into many of the reports and studies produced over the past thirty years in Québec. The issues are numerous: in the early years they center on the delay between the arrival of the English version of a film and that of the French dubbed film from France, as well as on serious distribution problems (Cégar 1981). In the 1970s the Commission d’étude sur le cinéma et l’audiovisuel notes that, in fact, the French versions of films are not shown until the English version has “run its course,” which has the effect of privileging the English version, since audiences are in a hurry to see the new films. (This factor has now been addressed by rushing out the dubbed version to coincide with the launching of the English version.) In the early 1980s, VHS technology brought with it a sharp reduction in the number of cinemas, with many small-town movie houses closing down, causing the number of films shown in French to drop dramatically — from 71.7% to 53.5% (IQC 1990, 12). This had the effect of further reducing the variety of the films available in French, with only those expected to make more than $300,000 — “les films porteurs” — being considered for dubbing in Québec. In fact, much is
made of the finances for dubbing and film distribution. Given the small francophone population, Hollywood distributors (with few exceptions) are loath to invest the tens of thousands required for dubbing, and some, such as Steven Spielberg’s Dreamworks, maintain “le zéro absolu” as one report puts it. Québec lobbyists and institutes have continued to insist that only government subsidies will improve the situation and meet the objective of “le français sur nos écrans” within a realistic time frame, and with an appropriate number of copies of each film to reach out into the countryside and small towns in the language of the local population.

The UDA, which represents dubbing actors and regularly gets involved in artistic and cultural issues in the province, raises the question of artists’ employment, claiming that in 1991 at least 500 artists were employed in the industry, which also creates further spin-off activities. Presenting the usual cultural arguments as well as arguments about language learning for immigrants (“le cinéma est une source d’identification à la culture d’accueil et un instrument d’acquisition de compétences linguistiques de base” [UDA 1991, 5]), the UDA wants to take control of both the language and the timing of foreign films. There is nothing more ridiculous, they say, than to have North American realities interpreted for Québécois by expressions and accents from Paris. Or as another document sums it up: “Sur les plans de la culture et du marketing, le film VF (version doublée française) répond mieux à la réalité québécoise lorsqu’il est doublé ici. En outre, cette industrie crée des emplois chez nous.” (IQC 1990, 22). Cultural and business arguments come together in almost every one of these studies — underlining the complexities and perceived threats of globalized (American) audiovisual cultural materials that travel easily, are attractive, popular, and therefore highly influential, and which, in the minds of those worried about the survival of minority cultures need to be controlled to ensure that the language and culture of their own particular group resists. The debates around dubbing are thus in line with recent initiatives to protect cultural diversity in the francophone world, and which target the power and influence of globalized English-language audiovisual products.

The Linguistico-pedagogical Strand

In the discourse around dubbing in Québec, questions of language, economics, and government funding converge to bolster arguments that all foreign language films be dubbed in Québec in order to provide work, high-tech training, and expertise for local artists and technicians; to support the local industry; to ensure that a good standard version of French is circulated throughout the province, thereby ensuring that all Québécois have access in good French to the foreign audiovisual products that have become international “events.”

The question of which language to use in dubbing, the question that most concerns me, was addressed for the first time in 1998, in a report produced at a moment of crisis in the Québec dubbing industry: “L’industrie du doublage: consolidation et nouveaux marchés,” the Lampron report. Examining the industry at a time of sharply diminishing business, the study finds that in all countries that share a language with another country
(e.g. Argentina with Spain, Belgium with France) the population prefers the local language for film-dubbing: "la population accepte mal une version dans laquelle elle ne se reconnaît pas" (23). And Lampron concludes "on constatera [...] jusqu'à quel point le doublage réfuse à l'idée de 'langue de proximité'" (23).

This linguistic argument for dubbing made-in-Québec is presented on the one hand as an important factor in the audience’s emotional response to a film (and therefore the film's box-office success) and on the other as a useful pedagogical instrument. The populace should hear good French ("acquisition de compétences linguistiques de base"), it should hear its own French ("la langue de proximité"), and when these two requirements are fulfilled it will not only be content with its access to international audiovisual products, but will also have acquired added educational value. The interesting questions that arise are: to what extent does standardized "international French" or "le synchronien" in fact represent this "langue de proximité," and what form does it take in dubbing made in Québec.

**International French, a Teaching Tool?**

In order to study and describe the language of Québec dubbing, five films were chosen for analysis. All five had been dubbed into French twice in the last decade — once in Québec and once in France. They were selected at random, with choices based on recently viewed work and a certain mix of genres: Chicago, a drama set to music and dance; Chocolat, a modern fairy tale set in a peculiarly anachronistic version of France; 21 Grams, a complex, dark tragedy in an urban setting in the American southwest; Bridget Jones’ Diary, a romantic comedy set in London; and The Hours, a more intellectual literary adaptation.

The purpose was to extract, describe, and compare the two versions of French that were generated to dub these movies. A second purpose was to explore the cultural and political contexts of the Québec translations, and to understand the finished product as a product of those environments. Finally, in regard to Québec it seemed important to understand the paradoxical situation of a population that prefers and demands local dubbing over French made in France for its viewing experience, but accepts the neutralized "international French" as its local idiom.

The research process required the transcription of three versions of the film dialogues — the English, Québec French, and Franco-French scripts. The transcriptions were done by anglophone and francophone graduate students who listened to the CD versions and typed out what they heard. (Ready-made scripts, which can sometimes be downloaded from the Internet are not reliable.) The transcribed scripts were then examined and compared for interesting moments — where the French versions either departed from the English or from each other, moments that were considered hot spots, and which were examined more closely, with careful recourse to the audiovisual sources. In the second step of examining these hot spots, two francophone graduate students assisted; still mature and able graduate students were the informants who assisted in identifying, researching, and commenting on the differences between the French and
Québec versions, and in seeking out studies on contemporary grammar and usage to support the evaluations that were made.

In what follows, I present brief excerpts from the analyses of 21 Grams (USA/Mexico, 2003, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu) and Bridget Jones’ Diary (UK, 2001, directed by Sharon Maguire) in order to give a taste of the language of the translations and comment on their qualities. I refer briefly to ideas on “native-speaker competence” developed for the oral translation/interpretation of oral language or spoken text, and used to train interpreters. I also refer to contemporary developments in the grammar and syntax of spoken French — in Québec and France. The recourse to such theoretical work became necessary as I sought to understand and interpret the differences between the dubbed versions and their different effects. For instance, the following criterion for creativity in language, established for interpreters, struck me as equally important for dubbed cinema:

Creative translation/interpretation has to do with unpredictable non-institutionalised use of language [...] A creative product must be novel and must contain an element of surprise, it must be singular or at least unusual. (Lederer, cited in Kussmaul 39)

When there is creative translation, the listener who only hears what is said once pays close attention. But I also refer to the maxim used in oral interpreting that it is important to express oneself in the language the public is used to hearing. Otherwise,

l’auditeur ne ressent pas seulement la traduction comme lourde et peu agréable, il la trouve inintelligible car la continuité et la vitesse du débit oral n’autorisent ni pause de réflexion, ni retour en arrière. (Lederer 51-52)

Lederer also expects the following of the translator producing oral language: “le traducteur doit se montrer suffisamment créatif pour que son expression fasse comprendre et ressentir intégralement les idées et les sentiments de l’auteur” (44). For Lederer and other trainers of interpreters, oral language is the language that slips by rapidly, is only heard once by the listener, and must therefore be clear, effective, and creative. It needs to catch the listeners’ attention, be original or unexpected. At the same time, in order to work, it must be “what the public is used to” — in intonation, rhythm, prosody, and form. While the visual elements in film doubtless aid (and sometimes overpower) the film dialogue, these interpreting requirements serve to some extent to differentiate the two French dubbings I compare below.

21 Grams

The American film, 21 Grams by the Mexican director Iñárritu, tells the story of three intersecting lives. Cristina (Naomi Watts), an ex-junkie, is completely overwhelmed by the news that her husband and two young daughters have died in a hit-and-run accident. Jack (Benicio Del Toro), the driver
of the vehicle, is an ex-convict, but a religious Latino family man who suffers terrible guilt pangs. Paul (Sean Penn), a teacher who receives a heart transplant from Cristina’s husband, is completely focused on the donor’s identity and on his widow. Of interest for the dubbing, the characters in the English original come from various social backgrounds and levels, different regions of the USA, and speak accordingly. My focus is on language register, as revealed in questions and negations.

**Questions**

In Chapter 8 of the DVD, Cristina’s father has arrived at the hospital after the accident. He is not sure exactly what is wrong.

**English (original) Version**
What happened, sweetheart?

**Franco-French Version**
Qu’est-ce qui s’est passé, ma chérie?

**Québec Version**
Que s’est-il passé, ma chérie?

In Chapter 12, Paul, the teacher, irritated by his girlfriend’s indiscretions asks:

**English (original) Version**
Why does everyone have to know our private life?

**Franco-French Version**
Pourquoi tout le monde devrait connaître notre vie privée?

**Québec Version**
Pourquoi tout le monde doit-il connaître notre vie privée?

These examples, among many others, reveal the tendency throughout the Québec translation to use the inversion of subject and verb to formulate a question, something that is often considered a relatively erudite and complex syntactic operation. The French version keeps a simpler question formulation and uses either est-ce que and question words such as qui or qui, or an affirmative formulation with rising intonation to mark the interrogative intention.

This use of the more literary (or written) interrogative form, despite the oral and often squalid environment of the film’s action, seems surprising when done for an audience that knows the française of the film’s context. The Franco-French dubbing, meanwhile, stays with contemporary usage, in particular with the option of rising intonation. It thus contrasts with Maj-Britt Mosengaard Hansen’s 2001 study on the subject of inversion in interrogatives, which showed that the phenomenon is hardly used in contemporary French. In the corpus she studied, only 2.83% of the
interrogative sentences used inversion, 14.57% used the introductor phrase *est-ce que*, and 82.59% were marked by rising intonation. Mosegaan Hansen asserts that questions expressed in affirmative form with risir intonation are "the basic interrogative form in contemporary French" ar that questions using subject inversion are "exceedingly rare in this mediu [a conversation]" (479). It is therefore highly unlikely for a father/ grand father who has been summoned to a hospital by his weeping daughter say "Que s'est-il passé?" in the face of her distress.

**Negation**

The "ne" that marks negation in French is disappearing from everyday use in spoken French; however, it appears throughout the Québec version of *Grains*. The French dubbing on the other hand systematically leaves it out. In Chapter 1, for example, the ex-convict Jack talks to a young delinquent he wants to influence positively:

**English (original) Version**

They didn't lock you up this time 'cause you're not 18 yet.

**Franco-French Version**

Ils t'ont pas mis en taule parce que t'as moins de dix-huit ans.

**Québec Version**

Ils ne l'ont pas mis en taule parce que tu n'as pas dix-huit ans.

In Chapter 8, Cristina replies to her father's question "What happened, sweetheart?" as follows:

**English (original) Version**

I don't know. They haven't told me anything yet.

**Franco-French Version**

Je sais pas, on m'a encore rien dit.

**Québec Version**

Je n'en sais rien, on ne m'a encore rien dit.

In Chapter 12, Paul, seeking the identity of the heart donor, meets a priva eye (in a bowling alley) who says:

**English (original) Version**

Sorry, I couldn't cancel this appointment [...] 

**Franco-French Version**

Désolé, je pouvais pas annuler la partie.

**Québec Version**

Désolé de ne pas avoir pu annuler ce rendez-vous.
Again, these are just three examples of a marked tendency toward hyper-correction in the Québec-dubbed version. In the last example, the entire formulation is heavy but correct: it is not oral, it is not vernacular, it is not "la langue de proximité." There is no clear explanation for this tendency. Is it pedagogical? Does it have to do with training the audience in good French? Does it reveal an uncertainty about the French language and thus a tendency to hyper-correction? Why use such a strategy that does not conform to the context of the film or with current usage? Linguistic studies of contemporary French have shown the "quasi-absence de la particule [de négation] dans le français parlé au Québec" (Sankoff and Vincent, cited in Berit Hansen and Maderetz). Martineau and Mougeon, in work that traces the beginnings of the tendency to drop the negative particle to the eighteenth century, confirms that in contemporary French "[...] ne délétion is almost categorical in speech of all age groups, social classes, and both sexes, and in all linguistics contexts" (146). While the Franco-French dubbing observes this tendency, the Québec version does not. Indeed, much of the dubbed-in-Québec language examined over the course of this research proved to be very correct, not oral — but rather carefully literary. There were, however, exceptions to this rule.

Bridget Jones’ Diary
In the analysis of Bridget Jones’ Diary, a romantic comedy that follows the life and rather virtual love life of a young British woman in her thirties who is seeking a partner, I address a particular question of style.

Adverbs
In the segment below, Bridget Jones receives a rather clumsy, halting declaration of love from the gawky but successful lawyer, Mark Darcy. My focus is on the adverbs only, in boldface type in the excerpt below:

**English (original) Version**
I don’t think you’re an idiot at all. I mean, there are elements of the ridiculous about you. Your mother’s pretty interesting. And you really are an appallingly bad public speaker. And you tend to let whatever’s in your head come out of your mouth without much consideration of the consequences. I realize that when I met you at the turkey curry buffet that I was unforgivably rude and wearing a reindeer jumper that my mother had given me the day before. But the thing is, um...what I’m trying to say very inarticulately is, um, in fact...perhaps despite appearances I like you very much.

**Franco-French Version**
Je ne vous prends pas pour une demeurée. Je n’prétends pas nier qu’il y a une certaine part de ridicule en vous. Votre mère est assez étonnante, et vous êtes d’une nullité épouvantable quand vous parlez en public, et, et vous avez tendance à laisser tout c’qui vous passe par la tête sortir de votre bouche sans beaucoup
vous préoccuper des conséquences. J’ai conscience que lorsque je vous ai vu à la dinde au curry, je me suis montré d’une 
grossièreté impardonnable, et je portais un pull à tête de cerf 
dont ma mère m’avait fait cadeau la veille. Toujours est-il que, 
ce…ce que j’essaie de vous dire, d’une façon très confuse, 
c’est que, à vrai dire, malgré ce que les apparences peuvent laisser 
croire, c’est un fait: j’vous aime beaucoup.

Québec Version
Je ne crois pas que tu es idiote du tout. Eh bien, il y a des élé-
ments euh, de ridicule, c’est bien sûr; ta mère est plutôt intéress-
sante et tu es réellement euh, une épouvantable mauvaise présenta-
trice et euh, tu laisses ce qu’il y a dans ta tête sortir de 
ta bouche, mais sans en considérer toutes les conséquences. Je 
sais que quand je t’ai rencontrée, à ce dîner, à ce buffet, que j’ai 
etait incroyablement dur et que j’avais un tricot horrible que ma 
mère euh, m’avait donné la veille, mais en réalité euhm, oui euh, 
que je tente de dire vraiment avec difficulté c’est que euhm, 
que, en fait, peut-être que, en dépit des apparences, je t’aime bien, 
vraiment bien.

The repeated use of adverbs ending in -ment is noticeable throughout the 
Québec version, with the expression “épouvantable mauvaise présen-
tatrice” being the most extreme. This adverb is quite unlikely to be heard in 
spoken French. Indeed, as Mats Forsgren asserts, such long adverb + adver-
tive phrases, if used at all in actual spoken French, are placed after the noun 
in contemporary French; in 73.4% of cases where an adverb accompanies an 
adjective, the adverb/adjective combination comes after the noun (172). 
His study of eleven-four- or more-syllable adverbs ending in -ment shows 
that “l’antéposition brille par son absence” (172). Wolf Hollerbach concurs 
and offers the following example: “un très jeune ministre” but “un ministre 
exceptionnellement jeune” (145). Chantal Bertrand observes “il n’existe pas 
d’adverbe en -ment pour chaque adverbe [anglais] en -ly examiné […] le 
corpus anglais de l’Université Brown comporte plus de 12 000 adverbes en 
-ly. Or, seulement 1257 adverbes en -ment figurent dans le Dictionnaire in-
verse de la langue française […] de Juillard” (179). In other words, these dub-
bning versions seem to have little to do with contemporary spoken French, or 
even with “international French.” The Franco-French versions of “an ap-
palling call bad public speaker” [“d’une nullité épouvantable quand vous 
parlez en public”] and “unforgivably rude” [“d’une grossièreté impard-
donnable”] are, on the other hand, relatively colloquial (noun-based) solu-
tions. Here, the pedagogical moment was perhaps abandoned, but it 
resurfaced elsewhere in this film, and all the others under examination.

Explanations?
“International French” with its neutralized and often proper tone is defi-
nitely the norm for Québec dubbing. However, given the arguments for 
dubbing into the local vernacular— the “langue de proximité”— and
given the fact that Quebec-dubbed film is made almost exclusively for the local market and hardly ever circulated abroad, one could expect a little more Quebec in this work: lively expressions, dialects to match the surnaming of the American characters, some pronunciation that appropriates the foreign material into the local. Almost none of this occurs. Are there explanations? One explanation may be gleaned from an analysis of *Les Simpson*, one of the rare shows dubbed in Quebec that uses a certain amount of Quebec French. Eric Plourde has shown that in this version only the relatively uneducated working-class characters (Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa, and Grandpa Simpson, Chief Wiggum, Lenny, Agnes Skinner) speak Québécois, and a rough, vulgar version at that. The more educated residents of Springfield (Principal Skinner, Reverend Lovejoy, Kent Brockman, Sideshow Bob, Doctor Hibbert) speak standard French. The association of Quebec French with uneducated workers and standard French with elites in this series may go some way to understanding the pedagogical role assigned to language in the dubbing of regular Hollywood feature films. But Montreal studies mention other issues, including the fact that dubbing actors trained in Montreal have had Quebec French trained out of them for professional use and, while they use it privately, they do not produce convincing or coherent versions for film (Interview with Technicolor, July 2007). More importantly, Quebec audiences are embarrassed to hear their private idiom supposedly being spoken by Hollywood stars like Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. A translation strategy that uses this language — in whatever form — produces a mockery or a caricature. Indeed, Plourde’s study of *Les Simpson* has been read as reflecting a cultural schizophrenia on the part of Québec’s elite:

On the one hand they [the elite] give public lip service to the unique nature of Québécois French. They have to: for Quebec’s sovereignists see themselves as a true people, and what kind of people does not speak a language uniquely its own — and one equal in status to the world’s other tongues? On the other, most educated Quebecers know in their hearts that they must learn standard French to attain respectability in the larger Francophone world. [...] “We have learned to despise our language,” says Plourde. (Kay)

While this commentary from an English-language journalist writing for a Toronto magazine should perhaps be read cautiously, it seems to corroborate what the Montreal dubbing studios also express when asked why they impose international French. French may serve as one of the most important components of identity for francophone Quebecers, but the versions in daily use in Quebec are vernaculars with very specific forms, including regionalisms, anglicisms, archaism, and syntactic variations. These do not always align with standard French. However, they do serve a specific, identifiable purpose, which is to establish and maintain community, a sense of belonging, a certain disdainfulness in a hostile world. This has to do with the socially relevant and acceptable and not the proper uses of language; one speaks the local version of French in order to belong to the community, and
to express one’s sense of belonging, to include some — and exclude others.
And although a certain regional pronunciation may be stigmatized (as vulgar, uneducated, uncultured), the fact of using it expresses and affirms solidarity, closeness, togetherness — or as Marty Laforest puts it: “parler autrement, c’est trahir le clan, c’est se prendre pour qui on n’est pas” (89). The local vernacular — regionalisms, blasphemous expressions, Québécois pronunciations — serves to create and confirm the community. Yet, and this is important for the language of dubbing, for language-use in public, the speakers of this vernacular may well devalue, if not despise it: they experience what linguist Labov has termed “linguistic insecurity,” the result of the lack of coherence “notamment chez les membres de la petite bourgeoisie, entre la manière dont ils parlent et la manière dont ils disent parler” (Laforest 88-89). In effect, this group is very sensitive to the normed (prestigious) language which it strives to use, but does not always use, and at the same time critical of the language it actually speaks.

Luckily, another kind of value is associated with the use of the less prestigious forms of language: this is the prestige of “chaleur, solidarité, humour, douceur, sympathie — valeurs ‘humaines’ [qui] compensent le déficit en valeurs sociales (compétence, élégance, statut élevé) associées aux variétés prestigieuses” (Laforest 89). This also means, however, that this language is in perpetual conflict with the norms of French, as understood and learned from the colonialist past as well as the more international present. To sum up, in Québec, and French Canada more generally, “The poetics and aesthetics of French demand standard, normed French — while the local, or the human, is expressed in vernacular.”19 This conflict is at the heart of the discourses, arguments, conflicts, and parliamentary debates on film dubbing in Québec, a conflict that is assuaged by recourse to the neutrality of international French and its synchronien applications.

Notes

1 The research for this article was funded by a grant from SSHRC, for a project entitled “Double-Dubbing: The French of Film Translation” (2004-2007).


3 This irritation is evident in letters to the editor, journalists’ opinions, blogs such as www2.canoe.com/divertissement/cinema/nouvelles and the UDA (Union des artistes) website at www.uniondesartistes.com/ which promotes dubbing in Québec, and which recently ran a campaign entitled “On veut s’entendre.”

4 The success of homemade local TV productions that reflect this reality has been documented and commented upon by Murray, de la Garde, and Martin (5-6, 15-18).

5 On-site interviews with dubbing studios such as Cinéluame and Technicolor were held in Montreal in Summer 2007.

6 Interviews conducted in both French and Québécois dubbing studios in Spring/Summer 2007 confirm this.
7 This occurs in the Québec-dubbed version of *The Simpsons*, a rather exceptional case, where a very strong Québécois accent and language register is used for the uneducated characters. See Plourde 2000.

8 This is a term used by film connoisseurs who object that their filmic experience is undermined by dubbing into international French.

9 Lampron argues that it has been shown that it is important to dub into the local version of a language, the “langue de proximité.” He does so to provide arguments against importing audiovisual products dubbed-in-France and to bolster the Québec industry.

10 www.doublage.qc.ca, accessed 23 March 2008; also 27 March 2010

11 A list of these was supplied to me by Robert Paquin, and has been published in Flotow.

12 The Gendron Commission was also known as “La Commission d’enquête sur la situation du français et des droits linguistiques au Québec.” Its report, published in 1972, was used by the Bourassa government to devise Bill 22, the forerunner of Bill 101 (Bouchard 262-64).

13 The Institut québécois du cinéma (IQC) — now part of the Société de développement des entreprises culturelles (SODEC) — was created 19 June 1975 by the adoption of the Loi sur le cinéma to meet long-standing demands from Québec cinematic groups. Its mandate was to promote and support the creation, production, distribution, and showing of high-quality films in Québec. The law also defined certain requirements for dubbing, subtitling, children’s films, and film research that were designed to strengthen the Québécois presence in the industry. The members of the IQC represented all sectors of the industry and its clientele. http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA00004018, accessed 27 March 2010.

14 In the 2008 report by SODEC, this number rose to 800.

15 See UNESCO Declaration on cultural diversity (2001) and the Montreal amendment to this (2007).

16 In 2007, Montreal became the seat of the new “Fédération internationale pour la diversité culturelle.”

17 Isabelle Totikaya, who grew up in Paris, completed all undergraduate work there and thus qualified as a bona fide Francophone from France, was working for the government of Canada as a trained translator. Isabelle Brisebois, a Québécoise who had completed her undergraduate work in Québec and spent several years working at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa in the section devoted to francophone theatre, was also a freelance translator into French and thus considered the bona fide Francophone from Québec.

18 Grutman, Rainier, Department of French, University of Ottawa, in conversation (July 2008).

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