

PREFACE

Canadian French has had a long and remarkable history; it has been at home upon this continent for almost four hundred years. From 1763 until recent times it survived upon its own, without substantial input from the mother country, France, which gave up its North American colonies at the Treaty of Paris.

Because of its remarkable history Canadian French has several outstanding features. One of these is the existence of archaisms, of old words and expressions that have disappeared or died out in France, such as the old weights and measures that were in use before the coming of the metrical system at the time of the French Revolution of 1789. The Revolution, coming a quarter of a century after the Treaty of Paris, was largely irrelevant to Canada. Another was the borrowing of Amerindian terms for the different life experiences of the New World. Some of these, such as *caribou*, found their way into international French, others remain purely local borrowings. Then there is the development of a distinctive regional accent, which other speakers of French recognize as “Canadian”. There is also the development of a distinctive form of expressive language that has led to Canadian francophones on holiday in Mexico being nicknamed *los Tabarnacos* by the Mexicans. Finally there is the influence of English, since the francophone population in Canada, largely centred in the Province of Quebec, is surrounded by a continental sea of English.

Canadian French is, consequently, a vast and fascinating tableau of infinite detail, a subject matter with which the Canadian student of French can become totally engrossed. This brief volume is designed as an introduction to the subject, with the understanding that the proper way to approach such complexity is to provide a guide through the maze of resources so that the students can inform themselves by their own researches rather than have second hand information fed to them by spoon.

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