

THE INTEGRATION OF WORDS OF ENGLISH ORIGIN IN BAIE SAINTE-MARIE ACADIAN FRENCH

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The variety of Acadian French spoken in the Baie Sainte-Marie region of Nova Scotia is conservative when compared to other Acadian French communities which are in a minority language situation. In this variety of Acadian French, “point” is the main negator (not standard “pas”) (Flikeid 1989b, Comeau 2006a), the simple past tense is highly productive (Flikeid 1989b), and subject clitics remain syntactic subjects rather than being affixes on the verb (Comeau 2006b). Despite the retention of features of French which have been lost in many other varieties, Baie Sainte-Marie has long been in contact with neighbouring English-speaking communities and this has resulted in extensive code-switching and borrowing from English. In this paper, quantitative methods are used in order to establish the borrowed status for two specific loanwords, “about” and “tight”; these are analyzed in terms of degree of semantic and syntactic integration into the borrowing language.

1. The Community and the Corpus

1.1 Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French

The Baie Sainte-Marie region is located on the shores of southwestern Nova Scotia and is comprised of a series of Acadian villages. Its establishment in 1768 coincides with the return of Acadians after the *grand derangement*, which began in 1755. Baie Sainte-Marie has a population of 9067 of which the majority are native Acadian French speakers (StatsCan 2001). The corpus used for this present study is made up of thirty-three sociolinguistic interviews which were recorded in the village of Grosses Coques which has a population of 362. Grosses Coques is one of the many villages which make up the region of Baie Sainte-Marie.

These interviews were conducted by a native speaker of this variety of Acadian French in 1990. They are composed of seventeen female and thirteen male consultants ranging in age from fifteen to eighty-four. The corpus is not stratified by social class since Baie Sainte-Marie does not have a clear social division among its citizens, given that it is a small rural community dependent on the local fishing industry as the major driving force of the economy. These data are supplemented by my own native speaker intuitions combined with consultations with other native speakers who presently live in Baie Sainte-Marie.

* The data upon which this paper is based come from the Butler Grosses Coques Sociolinguistic Corpus (1989-1990) constructed under the supervision of Gary Butler, York University and funded by the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council of Canada. These data are used with the permission of Professor Butler.

For the Grosses Coques corpus, just over two percent of the data consists of English loanwords (excluding multi-word code-switches). Similar results for Baie Sainte-Marie were found in Flikeid's (1989a) study of loanwords in Nova Scotia Acadian French.

However, results such as these, while informative in themselves in terms of providing a rough measure of the use of English in an Acadian speech community, do not really show the influence English has had on the local vernacular. This paper will illustrate the importance of examining individual items on a case by case basis in order to understand the influence English has had on one variety of Acadian French.

2. The Case of *Back*

2.1 *Back* in Canadian French

I illustrate the approach through a consideration of a particular borrowing which has already figured in the borrowing literature. *Back* has been previously examined in other varieties of French, most notably in Prince Edward Island Acadian French (King 2000) and Ontario French (Canale, Mougeon *et al.* 1977). Typically, *back* occurs in many Canadian French communities which have low normative pressure.

Canale, Mougeon *et al.* (1977) note the occurrence of *back* in Ontario French, as in the following example:

- (1) Là, je mettais la roue **back** ensemble.
 there 1SG put the wheel back together
 'There, I put the wheel back together.'

Canale, Mougeon *et al.* (1977) argue that *back* occurs with the meaning "return to a former place or state" because the *re-* prefix has lost its semantic value in French.

However, King (2000) records much more "advanced" usage of *back* in Prince Edward Island French. Here *back* takes over a second meaning of the *re-* prefix, "to repeat an action or process":

- (2) Veux-tu **back** me conter ça?
 want you again me to-tell that
 'Do you want to tell me that again?'

In addition, *back* has undergone semantic reanalysis to become a full-fledged French adverb. As evidence of this, King provides data which shows *back* occurring before an infinitive, as in (3) and before a past participle, as in (4).

- (3) Puis je voulais pas **back** aller.
 and I wanted NEG back to-go
 'And I didn't want to go back.'

- (4) J'ai jamais **back** été dans un pool depuis.
 1SG never back gone in a pool since
 'I've never gone back in a pool since.'

The examples in (5) and (6) show that these same changes have taken place in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French.¹

- (5) Je mangerai jamais **back**.
 I will-eat never back
 'I'll never eat again.'

(Speaker 8, GC-21)

- (6) J'ai **back** amené la tape.
 I have back brought the tape
 'I brought back the tape.'

(Speaker 4, GC-7)

In the following sections I analyze two words of English origin not previously examined in the literature.

3. The Case of *About* and *Bout*

3.1 *About* in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French

Among its English-origin loanwords, Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian borrows a number of functional items, a result of long-standing language contact. The English preposition *about*, seen in (7), is an example of a functional item used in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French:

- (7) Bien il m'a toute radoté **about** une fois que sa femme l'a quitté.
 well he REFL have all talked about a time that his wife REFL him has left
 'Well, he talked all about the time his wife had left him.'

(Speaker 1, GC-5)

This example illustrates a case of borrowing from English in which the item has not undergone any semantic or syntactic changes. In (8), *about* is being used as it would be used in English as well:

¹ While the loss in meaning of *re-* has been linked to the emergence of *back*, it may be the case that it is still productive in Baie Sainte-Marie French, unlike in the PEI case, as shown in example (20) below in which *re-* is attached to a recent borrowing "to tighten." Another possibility is that *re-* was borrowed from English in "retighten." More data is needed to resolve this issue.

- (8) Puis on peut point s'assir pour **about** vingt minutes.
and we can NEG REFL to-sit for about twenty minutes
'And we can't sit for about twenty minutes.'

(Speaker 1, GC-19)

In (8), *about* is an adverb which acts as an operator which quantifies over the following DP. This use of *about* has certain Acadian equivalents, such as *alentour de*, *à peu près*, *environ*, *moellement proche* and *être pour dire*, illustrated in (9) and (10):

- (9) Il était **alentour de** dix heures du soir.
it was around ten o'clock in the evening
'It was around ten o'clock in the evening.'

(Speaker 14, GC-23)

- (10) Ça lui a duré **à peu près** six semaines.
that him has lasted around six weeks
'It lasted him around six weeks.'

(Speaker 10, GC-12)

It is this use of *about* which I argue is important for the emergence of a distinct lexical item, *bout*, discussed below.

3.2 The Case of *Bout*

About, usually, but not always, occurs with an initial vowel in the speech of consultants in the Grosses Coques corpus. This is not the case with what is arguably a separate lexical entry, *bout*, which is both semantically and syntactically distinct as seen in (11) and (12):¹

- (11) T'en voudrais **bout** un autre?
you will would-want probably another
'You'll probably want another?'

(Speaker 1, GC-21)

¹ The discussion which follows reflects my own usage as a native speaker of this variety, along with that of several speakers in the corpus. I note that for a number of other speakers, there is variation with respect to whether or not an initial schwa is realized for the two meanings. Sorting out the structure of this variation will be the subject of further research.

- (12) Sp. 7: Crois-tu Dad va pouvoir...trainer Comet?
 think you Dad is-going to-be-able to-train Comet
 ‘Do you think Dad will be able to train Comet?’

Sp. 9: **Bout.**
 probably
 ‘Probably.’

(Speaker 9, GC-29)

It is clear that in these two examples, *bout* is different than either prepositional *about* (7) or from adverbial *about* (8). *Bout* may be translated into English as *probably* and it also distributes in the same way. Unlike *about*, *bout* has epistemic modality properties.

Further evidence that these are two distinct lexical entries can be found when both *about* and *bout* occur in the same syntactic context since there is a semantic contrast. In (13), adverbial *about* occurs and would be translated as “approximately”:

- (13) Et euh, ils avient resté là **about** trois mois en toute.
 and euh they had stayed there about three months in total
 ‘And euh, they had stayed there about three months in total.’

(Speaker 14, GC-23)

When (13) is contrasted with (14), it is clear that there is a difference in meaning:

- (14) J’en ai, su le fait d’un bureau, j’ai **bout** une quinzaine là.
 I some have on the top of a bureau I have probably fifteen there
 ‘I have, on the top of a bureau, I have probably fifteen there.’

(Speaker 14, GC-23)

In both (13) and (14), either *about* or *bout* could potentially have occurred, but the presence or absence of the initial vowel, combined with information obtained from the surrounding discourse, suggests that in (13), it is *about* being used while in (14), it is *bout* being used. In either example, either item could have been used, but the use of one item or the other would have signaled different readings.

3.3 Syntactic Distribution of *Bout*

Further support that *bout* is a separate lexical entry can be found in the syntactic distribution between *about* and *bout*. *Bout*, unlike *about*, can occur in the same syntactic positions as other French adverbs. (15) illustrates *bout* preceding an infinitive while in (16) it precedes the past participle, both positions available to other French adverbs:

- (15) Mais il va **bout** sortir su le dish, là.
but it will probably come-out on the dish there
'But it will probably come out on the dish, there.'
(Speaker 11, GC-21)
- (16) Là, t'es **bout** dû back pour aller à l'Amérique, donc?
there you are probably due back to-go to America then
'There, you're probably due again to go to America, then?'
(Speaker 1, GC-23)

Unlike *bout*, *about* acts as an adverbial operator which quantifies over DPs:

- (17) Ça te coûtera vingt-cinq piastres **about**.
it you will-cost twenty-five dollars about
'It'll cost you twenty-five dollars about.'
(Speaker 14, GC-23)

On the other hand, '*bout*' cannot occur in the context of (17):

- (18) *Ça te coûtera vingt-cinq piastres **bout**.

This is further evidence that the two items, *about* and *bout*, are separate lexical items.

3.4 The Status of *About* and *Bout* in the Community Repertoire

In terms of the status of *about* and *bout* in Baie Sainte-Marie, they both occur in the speech of all consultants. Evidence that this is not a recent borrowing can be found in the frequent use of *bout* by a speaker who was seventy-nine years old in 1990.

4. The Case of *Tight*

4.1 *Tight* in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French

Another lexical item of English origin which occurs in the Grosses Coques corpus is *tight*. In some of the data, *tight* occurs in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian as it is used in English. In (19), *tight* is being used as an adjective which is translated as "greedy" or "stingy" and mirrors English usages:

- (19) Elle est assez **tight** à mort.
she is so tight to death
'She's really tight.'
(Speaker 2, GC-19)

In (20), *tight* is a verb morphologically incorporated into French since the French verbal past tense marker *-é* is attached to *tight*. In this example, it is being used as a verb which is translated as "to retighten":

- (20) J'ai **retighté** le double chassis, il l'a **tighté**.
 I have retightened the double frame he it had tightened
 'I retightened the double frame, he had tightened it.'
 (Speaker 20, GC-16)

In (21), *tight* is being used as a resultative adjective:

- (21) J'avions packté **tight** nos suitcases.
 we had packed tight our suitcases
 'We had packed tight our suitcases.'
 (Speaker 1, GC-21)

The borrowing of *tight* as a resultative adjective, as in (21) has led to substantial innovation, as shown in (22) and (23). In the following two examples, *tight* seems to be behaving as an intensifying adverb which could be translated in English as "really."

- (22) Il était dopé **tight**.
 he was doped tight
 'He was really high.'
 (Speaker 1, GC-30)

- (23) Ça va la gêter **tight**.
 that is-going her to-spoil tight
 'That is going to really spoil her.'
 (Speaker 4, GC-6)

4.2 The Distribution of *Tight* in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian

Although it may translate as English "really," *tight*, unlike *back* or *bout*, cannot occur in the same syntactic positions as do other French adverbs. (24) illustrates the use of the French adverb *beaucoup* preceding the infinitive:

- (24) Ça va **beaucoup** la gêter.
 it is-going really her to-spoil
 'It's going to really spoil her.'

(25) illustrates that *tight* cannot occupy the same position as *beaucoup*. As previously illustrated in (23), *tight* must follow the infinitive:

- (25) *Ça va **tight** la gêter.

Once again, (26) illustrates *beaucoup* preceding the past participle while (27) shows that *tight* cannot occupy this position.

(26) Il est **beaucoup** dopé.
 he is really doped
 ‘He’s really high.’

(27) *Il est **tight** dopé.

Further evidence which argues against an analysis of *tight* as a full-fledged French adverb is that there are certain predicates which with *tight* cannot occur. An example is the category of unergatives. Example (28) illustrates the French adverb *beaucoup* occurring with the unergative predicate *boire* (“to drink”):

(28) Elle boivait **beaucoup**.
 she drank a lot
 ‘She drank a lot.’

(Speaker 7, GC-14)

Unlike *beaucoup*, *tight* cannot occur with the predicate *boire*, as seen in (29):

(29) *Elle boivait **tight**.

Another example of a predicate which cannot occur with *tight* is the verb *parler* (“to speak”):

(30) Il parle **beaucoup**.
 he speaks a lot
 ‘He speaks a lot.’

(Speaker 1, GC-17)

(31) *Il parle **tight**.

Examples (24)-(31) illustrate that despite that *tight* seems on semantic grounds to be occurring in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French as a French adverb, it does not distribute like one.

4.3 The Trajectory of *Tight*

In light of this evidence, it is important to consider the ways in which *tight* occurs in English. In many varieties of English, *tight* occurs as a secondary predicate in small clause constructions such as “locked tight,” “closed tight,” “packed tight,” and “tied tight,” all with idiomatic status. *Tight*, in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French, has lost this idiomaticity, but does occur as a secondary predicate.

Tight is used in constructions with verbs such as *gâter* (“to spoil”), *être vargué* (“to be laughed”), *couper* (“to cut”), *geler* (“to freeze”), *être dopé* (“to

be high”), *être épais* (“to be thick”), *être enflé* (“to be swollen”), among others. Along with these predicates, anecdotal evidence gathered from native speakers of Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French suggests that *tight* is spreading to other two-place predicates in the speech of younger speakers. (32) is an example of *tight* occurring with another two-place predicate, although this example was gathered from anecdotal evidence.

- (32) Il l’a fessé **tight**.
 he him has-hit really
 ‘He really hit him.’

There were no examples of *tight* occurring with this predicate in the 1990 Grosses Coques corpus. This is a topic which merits further research with younger speakers.

4.4 The Status of *Tight* in the Community Repertoire

Unlike *back* and *bout*, *tight* is only found in speakers under thirty years old in 1990. A new corpus, constructed in 2005-2006, will examine its current use among younger speakers to determine if it has diffused to other verbs (types).

5. Conclusions

This paper has attempted to examine the facts regarding an older borrowing *about*, and a more recent one, *tight*, in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French. They have both undergone syntactic and semantic reanalysis in the borrowing language, processes which would go unobserved if borrowings were looked at only globally (in terms of rates of borrowing) instead of on a case by case basis. Detailed work of this type is important to further understand the borrowing process.

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