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AUTHOR   Starets, Moshe
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ABSTRACT
                A study conducted in grades 4 and 5 in French Canadian
schools in Atlantic Canada and Ontario investigated differences between
students' vernacular and standard spoken French, with regard to learning how
to eliminate interference in students' learning of standard usage. The
discussion focuses on mistakes caused by borrowings from English, including:
direct and indirect objects in the vernacular, English, and French; verb
phrases with "etre" in the vernacular, "to be" in English, and "avoir" in
French; the preposition "dans" in vernacular and French; and "dessus"
preposition in the vernacular, whose semantic content is closer to English
than French. Several syntactic features of the vernacular differing from
French are also examined. These results are presented as they are to a native
French class. The paper concludes that the vernacular spoken by children in
this area of Ontario should be treated for research purposes as a linguistic
system, albeit unstable, similar to an interlanguage, and that a full
description of it should have important pedagogical applications for French
native language instruction. (MSE)

Identification and Eradication of Linguistic Interferences in the Target Language.

Dr. Moshe Starets, Professor, French Department, University of Windsor

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Dr. Moshé Starets, Professor, French Department, University of Windsor
Windsor, Ontario, CANADA, N9B 3P4
Tel:(519) 253-4232; Ext. 2066   E-Mail: starets@uwindsor.ca

Identification and Eradication of Linguistic Interferences in the Target Language

We conducted research projects in several French Canadian school systems in Atlantic Canada, (the Acadians) and in South West Ontario (Franco-Ontarians) that have been published in several books, articles and papers some of which are listed in the bibiography given in the handout. Although we focus in this presentation on a specific population of students, it seems to me that the lessons that we will draw from this study are relevant to any language teaching situation..

The French population of Ontario is approximately 450,000 strong, 7% of the general population of this province. In the city of Windsor (200,000 inhabitants) there are four elementary and one secondary French schools in which most of the subjects are taught in standard French, the variety of French which the schoolchildren of Windsor are expected to master. The Francophone pupils in the French schools of Windsor, like many French Canadians outside of Quebec, speak English with their friends, the dominant language of Ontario, they watch American and English Canadian television and listen to American and English Canadian radio. Many of them speak the French Canadian vernacular at home which differs from standard French in many ways. Consequently, deeply rooted non-standard features pervade their vocabulary and syntax. We will give several examples of these features later on. From a pedagogical point of view, this situation presents a major challenge to the teaching of standard French to these pupils.

A comparative study between mainstream French and the student's vernacular would reveal the main structural and lexical differences between the two linguistic systems. Those differences, commonly known as mistakes, errors, are mainly americanisms and archaisms. They should be targeted by the learning materials and teaching strategies used in the school system. The second step would consist of the preparation of the learning materials and teaching strategies based on the findings of the comparative study. Their goal would be to sort out the non standard features in the pupils' performance in mainstream French, explain to them the nature of those "errors" and teach them the equivalent form in standard French. Having understood the nature and origin of their mistake and having acquired the standard form, the pupils would then practice its usage. Learning would thus be performed in three main stages: The **cognitive stage** in which the learners would be made to understand their errors, particularly the ones caused by linguistic interferences from the vernacular; the **acquisition stage** in which the learners would learn the French form; the **practical stage** in which the learners would practice the newly acquired forms.

We shall elaborate more on the proposed methodology in our Conclusion.

This paper is based on our research into the oral expression of Franco-Ontarian schoolchildren in grades four and five (ages nine and ten) in the French school system of Windsor. Please refer to the bibliography for other research work. The children in our sample belong to the same sociolinguistic environment. Our corpus of free speech was built by means of interviews of one hour each conducted by Franco-Ontarian interviewers who, at the time, were my students in French linguistics and applied linguistics at the University of Windsor. Those same interviewers transcribed the whole corpus. Male and female schoolchildren are fairly equally represented in this corpus. Since our sample is made up of children from three different schools we were able to neutralize the teacher and school factors in our findings. Only linguistic features found in more than three speech samples in more than one school (generally in all three) were taken into account in our study. This study is actually a linguistic description of a students French vernacular, the kind of vernacular that, for pedagogical purposes, would be typified by Selinker, L. (1974) as *Interlanguage* (see bibliography).

In order to simplify our presentation, we will refer to the children's oral expression as **vernacular** and to mainstream (standard) French as **French** .

We will concentrate our discussion on mistakes caused by borrowings from English; we will examine the following features:

A.   Direct and indirect objects in the vernacular, in English and in French.

B.   Verb phrases (VP) with *être* in the vernacular, *to be* in English and *avoir* in French.

C.   The preposition **dans**   in the vernacular and in French.

D.   **Dessus,** preposition in the vernacular, whose semantic content is closer to English than to French. *Dessus* is an adverb and a preposition in the vernacular and an adverb only in French.

The literal non stardard translations into English are given in italics and quotation-marks .

We will analyse hereafter several examples of syntactic features of the vernacular that differ from French. It is the same kind of analysis that I do with my students as part of their learning process.

You will find all the samples in the handout and in the transparencies. It is the same material that I use in my applied linguistics course. You can follow either one of them

or both. They are identical.

A. <u>Direct and indirect objects in the vernacular, in English and in French</u>.

Some verbs in the vernacular govern an indirect object; the analogous verbs in English also govern an indirect object whereas their respective counterparts in French govern a direct object. We will examine hereafter some of those verbs:

In French, *attendre* (*to wait*) is a transitif verb governing a direct object. In the vernacular, like in English, *attendre* governs an indirect object whose preposition is *pour* (*for*). Thus, the structure in the vernacular is identical to the English structure with the verb to *wait* and different than the structure in French with the verb *attendre*. Also, the preposition *pour* in the vernacular is identical to the preposition *for* in English.

1.   (The informant, talking about his dog)
    Vern   (...) *après, quand je sors, elle ... attend **pour** moi* .

    Eng   (...) later, when I go out, she ... waits **for** me.

    French: *(...) elle m'attend* .   The pronoun *me* (*m'*), here is the direct object governed by *attendre* .

A preposition in English can change the semantic content of a word. Thus, *to look* has the general meaning of *to direct the eyes in a particular direction* (Webster, Encyclopedic Edition) whereas to *look for* means *to search (for)* . In French, to *look* is *regarder* and to *look for* is *chercher* ; both are transitif verbs. The vernacular forms are closer to the English ones: *regarder* (*to look*) and *regarder pour* (*to look for, to search*):

2.   (The informant, talking about a book he read):
    Vern   *Tu lis puis tu regardes **pour** mars dix-huit puis ça dit pourquoi quelque chose ...*

    Eng   You read then you look **for** March eighteen and it says why something "*happened* ")

    French: *Tu lis et tu cherches le dix-huit mars (...)*

The same preposition (*pour*) is used in the vernacular with the verb *chercher* (*to search*). In French *chercher* is a transitif verb. In English the verb *to search* , in the same contexts, can govern the preposition *for* :

3.
    Ver   (...) *on jouait des jeux , on cherchait **pour** du manger* .

Eng   (...) we played games, we searched **for** food.

French (...) on cherchait de la nourriture
(The informant, talking about his dog)

B.   Verb phrases (VP) with *être* in the vernacular, *to be* in English and *avoir* in French.

Many idioms in French consist of a noun or an adjective governed by the verbe *avoir* (*to have*). The equivalent idioms in English are governed by *to be* and in the vernacular by *être* . Since *to be* is normally the English counterpart of *être* , the structure of those idioms in the vernacular is closer to their equivalents in English than to their equivalents in French (see Starets 1989 and 1993). We suggest that the vernacular borrowed from English the structure *être + noun* or *adjective* of those idioms. We will compare a few idioms from the vernacular with their counterparts in English and in French.

a. NP governed by *être* in the vernacular, *to be* in English, and *avoir* in Fench

Vernacular **"être" + NP**	**English** **"to be"+ NP**	**French** **"Avoir"+ NP**
4. *Elle* **est** *jus(te) vingt-neuf ans*	She **is** just twenty-nine " *years*"	*Elle* **a** *seulement vingt-neuf ans*
5. *Quand j'***étais** *trois ans, i a asseyé de me mordre*	When I **was** three " *years*" he tried to bite me	*Quand j'***avais** *trois ans, il a essayé de me mordre*

b.   AP governed by *être* in the vernacular and by *to be* in English; NP governed by *avoir* in French

Vernacular **"être"+ AP**	**English** **"to be"+ AP**	**French** **"Avoir"+ NP**
6. *Quand je joue au hockey, je* **suis** *pas trop chaud*	When I play hockey, I **am** not too hot	*Quand je joue au hockey, je n'***ai** *pas trop chaud*

c. Alternation of a French type and an English type structure in the same vernacular sentence

In sentence 7 given below the informant alternates the vernacular structure *être +*, borrowed from English, with the French structure *avoir + NP* whose usage seems

to attest to school French influence:

Vernacular	**English**	**French**
7. *Ma soeur Rachel **est** treize ans, Michel **a** dix-sept ans puis Maurice **a** dix-huit ans*	My sister Rachel is thirteen *"years ",* Michel *"has "* **is** seventeen *"years "and Maurice "has "* **is** eighteen *"years "*	*Ma soeur Rachel **a** treize ans, Michel **a** dix-sept ans puis Maurice **a** huit ans*

Sentence 7 is particularly interesting because it seems to point to the concurrent influence of English and French on the formation of the childrens vernacular. The concurrent use of two competing structures, with *être* (To be) and with *avoir* (To have) in the same sentence, reflects an intermediary stage in the development of this vernacular. Both structures are available to the children and at some point in their linguistic development, under the right circumstances, they will probably choose one structure over the other. From the pedagogical point of view it is very important to create a methodology that will help these learners to make the "right" choices.

d. The phrase *être + adjectif* (*to be + adjective*), in the vernacular, can be also found with *chaud* and *froid* ; in French, those phrases, are governed by "*avoir* " (*to have*).

Vernacular "être"+ AP	English "to be"+ AP	French "Avoir"+ NP
8. *Quand je joue au hockey, je suis pas trop chaud*	*When I play hockey, I am not too hot*	*Quand je joue au hockey, je n'ai pas trop chaud*
9. *Quand il était si froid, il avait les shivers*	*When he was so cold, he had the shivers*	*Quand il avait si froid, il avait le frisson*

e. In some structures, English uses the adjective *scared* where our informants use the French noun *peur* as an adjective in order to create a syntactic structure analogous to the English structure *to be scared* .

Vernacular "être"+ AP	English "to be"+ AP	French "Avoir"+ NP
10.*Y avait deux avions qui ont frappé ensemble; maintenant ma soeur est peur des avions*	*(...) now my sister is scared of air planes*	*(...) maintenant ma soeur a peur d'avions*
Y avait beaucoup de	*There were many*	*Il y avait beaucoup*

personnes (dans l'avion),	people, and I was really	de personnes, et
puis, j'étais vraiment peur	scared	j'avais vraiment
		peur

f. The adverb *late* , depending on the context, can be translated into French by the adverb *tard* and by the adverbial locution *en retard* . *En retard* would usually mean *after the expected time* whereas *tard* usually means *far on in a period of time* (both from Webster). In the vernacular, *tard* , like *late* in English, is used for both purposes:

Vernacular	English	French
"être"+ Adv P	"to be"+ Adv P	être +Adv Loc.
12.Y avait des Kermit *, les (...)	I went there,	(...) j'y suis allé, or,
petits bébés, pis, j'allai là	but I was too late, so,	j'étais trop en retard
pi, j'étais trop tard, pi, je	I didn't get it	par conséquent, je
l'ai pas eu		ne l'ai pas eu

C. The preposition *dans* in the vernacular and in French.

In French, the preposition *dans* governing a locative prepositional phrase conveys the notion of interiority in relation to a certain space. *À* , on the other hand, indicates only the general site of an action or a situation. Le Petit Robert (1984; *Dans*) explains this function of *Dans* as follows:

> *Préposition indiquant la situation d'une personne, d'une chose par rapport à ce qui la contient* .
> **A preposition indicating the situation of a person or of a thing in relation to what contains that person or thing** M.S.

In French *J'étais dans l'école* as opposed to *J'étais à l'école* would indicate that the speaker was *inside* the school rather than just *at* the school. In the vernacular the distinction between these locative expressions is often blurred since the children tend to use *dans* for both purposes. In 13 given below, the informant says *dans l'école* whereas in French it would be, for this same context, *à l'école* ; in 14, the informant says *dans Quebec* whereas in French it would be *à Québec* . It seems to me that in both cases French would use *dans* to underline the fact that the activities referred to in those sentences had taken place <u>inside</u> the defined areas and not just <u>at</u> those areas.

13.
Ver   C'est un livre que j'ai lu en arc-en-ciel **dans** l'école .

Eng   It is a book that I read in arc-en-ciel at the school.

French *(...) à l'école*

14.
Uer   *Elle était garde-malade quand on vivait dans Québec .*

Eng   She was a nurse when we lived in Quebec.

French   *(...) à Québec ; dans Québec would mean **inside the
    city of Québec***

I mentionned these usages of *dans* although I am not sure if they are borrowed
from English which distinguishes between *in* and *at* . A better explanation
might be that the general use of *dans* in the vernacular in contexts where
French would distinguish between *dans*   and *à*   (and other prepositions) is a
typical dialectal simplification.

In sentence 15 given below the function of *dans* is analogous to that of the English
preposition *in* in a similar context. Notice that *dans* governs a prepositional phrase
whose noun is the English word *wrestling* :

15.
Uer   *Mon frère est musclé parce qu'il est dans wrestling .*

Eng   My brother is muscular because he is in wrestling.

As we saw in the English version the prepositional phrase in a similar context would
be: *(...)* **in** *wrestling* . The informant is using a syntactic structure modelled after the
English structure **in** *+ name of a sport* (**in** *swimming,* **in** *football, etc* .), or after a more
generic structure, "**in** *+ noun denoting an activity* " (**in** *dancing ,* **in** *teaching,*
etc .). French would use a very different expression consisting of the verb *pratiquer*
(to practice) and the name of the sport. Thus the French equivalent of 15 would be:

16.
French   *Mon frère est musclé parce qu'il pratique la lutte .*

**D. *Dessus*, preposition in the uernacular, whose semantic content is closer to
    English than to French. *Dessus* in French is an aduerb**.
In French *sur* is a preposition whereas *dessus* , used as an independent lexeme, is an
adverb (as opposed to *au-dessus de, par-desssus de* , etc, that are prepositional
locutions). In the vernacular, *dessus* , used as an independent lexeme, can be an
adverb and a preposition. It is worth noting that the alternative usages of the

prepositions *sur* and *dessus* in the vernacular do not seem to follow distributional patterns. It's quite possible that the choice of one or the other is arbitrary. We will focus on the prepositional usage of **dessus**   in the vernacular.

In the vernacular, the preposition *dessus* can denote the spatial relationship *object ON /OVER object* ; in French *sur* would be the vernacular's prepositional counterpart in the same contexts:

17.

Uer   *Y avait beaucoup de chiens roses, avec du rose **dessus** le dos, avec des boucles dessus leurs têtes .*

Eng   There were a lot of pink dogs with pink on the back, with curls **on** their heads.

French (...) Sur le dos

18.

Uer   *Y faut que tu couches **dessus** ton vent(r)e.*

Eng   It is necessary that you lie **on** your belly.

French (...) sur   ton ventre

In French, *dessus* and *sur* never denote the spatial relationship of interiority. In the vernacular these two prepositions are influenced by the English preposition *on* which in certain contexts denotes the spatial relationship of *object ON/OVER/ object* and in other contexts denotes the spatial relationship of interiority. We find in the vernacular *Sur* or *Dessus* where in English one would use *On* and in French *Dans* .

19.

Uer   *Je jase avec mes amis pi on chante **dessus** l'autobus .*

Eng   I chat with my friends and we sing **on** the bus)

French   (...) dans l'autobus

20.

Uer   *Moi, je joue pas **dessus** une équipe .*

Eng   Me, I don't play **on** a team.

French   *(...) dans une équipe*

The influence of the English preposition *on* on the prepositional *dessus* seems quite obvious in the sentence 21 given below in which the informant uses a literal translation of the idiom *To go **on** a diet* . The sociolinguistic status of this idiolectal usage will have to be determined in further studies:

21. *Mon frère est plus gros que moi et il a allé dessus un diet* .

(My brother is *"fatter "* bigger than *"me""*   I am and he went on a diet.)

Concerning sentence 21, it is worth noting that most compound tenses in the vernacular, like in other French Canadian dialects and in Old French, are conjugated with *avoir* whereas in French some are conjugated with *avoir* and others with *être* . The verb *aller* (to go) is conjugated in sentence 21 with *avoir* whereas in French it would be conjugated with *être* .

Conclusion

The vernacular spoken by the children in this area of Ontario should be treated for research purposes as a linguistic system, albeit still unstable, consisting of a set of grammatical rules, phonetic rules and a vocabulary. As we said in our introduction, from a pedagogical perspective this system is analogous to the interlanguage described by Selinker (1974:36). Under certain circumstances, this interlanguage could become a permanent vernacular. I think that the same reality exists in many language learning situations therefore, in principle, our analyses are pertinent to those realities. The interaction between the various linguistic systems that form the vernacular is manifest in the influence of English on the usage of many archaic and contemporary French forms. As we saw earlier, for example, the archaic prepositional *dessus*   assigns to its noun phrase the locative role of interiority. This particular role assignment by the vernacular prepositional *dessus* , which is an adverb in French with the general meaning of *above, on top* , is influenced by the English preposition *on* which normally assigns the locative role of *object over object* but can also assign the locative role of interiority. Interaction between French and English is also manifest in the usage of English expressions with French words: *Aller sur un diet* (to go on a diet).

A full description of this vernacular should have important pedagogical applications. A methodology capable of eliciting the differences between the vernacular and standard French and of explaining their nature and origin would be much more pertinent to the schoolchildren of Windsor and other schoolchildren in French Canada than a methodology that ignores their linguistic reality. Such a methodology, which has been proposed by Starets (1988, 1993, 1994) and mentioned

in the introduction, would comprise a cognitive stage followed by a practical stage. At the cognitive explanatory stage of every lesson the learners would become aware of the nature and origin of certain specificities of their vernacular as compared to analogous features in standard French. To give just a very simple example, the teacher can say to the students: In English we say *to go on a diet* therefore you say, *aller sur un diet*. In French we say, *suivre un régime*. As in many idiomatic expressions in any language, the individual lexical components of both *to go on a diet* and *suivre un régime* lose at least part of their semantic content. In other words, the expression *to go on a diet* was acquired by the children as an indivisible semantic and syntactic unit. The choice of the lexical components of *to go on a diet* cannot be idiosyncratic. One cannot choose *to walk on a diet* or *to go under a diet*. By and large, the same applies to the French equivalent, *suivre un régime*. Therefore, it would not be necessary to explain, especially to very young chidren, the basic semantic content of each component of the French expression. They would acquire and use it as a holistic independent unit. Concerning this particular idiomatic expression it should also be noted that unlike its English counterpart, there is nothing in the French expression that points to a reality related to food as long as long as the normally implicite component *alimentaire* (*régime alimentaire*) is not expressed. The word *régime*, unlike *diet*, does not imply food. This is very interesting because the English word *diet* is a borrowing from French. In French, *diète*, like *diet*, is related to food but unlike *diet* its semantic field is limited to the medical sphere. It may be argued that in *aller sur un diet* the informant is expanding the semantic field of the French *diète*. I disagree with this view mainly because the word is used within an English context and is pronounced [daiət] and not [djɛt].

I suggest that all this can be explained to the students, at least to the older ones.

At the practical stage of the lesson the learners would put into practice the linguistic knowledge acquired at the first stage by means of exercices in which they would, among other tasks, contrast vernacular and standard forms, learn to choose standard forms as opposed to vernacular forms, etc.

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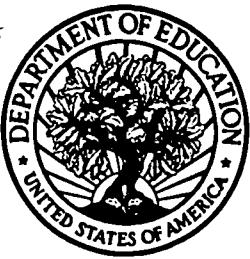
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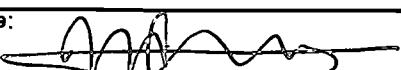
Printed Name/Position/Title: Dr. MOSHE STARETS, PROFESSOR

Organization/Address: French Studies University of Windsor Windsor Ontario, Canada N9B 3P4

Telephone: 519 253-4232 ext 2066
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