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ABSTRACT

This paper comments on the lack of attention given to cross-cultural relationships between the United States and Quebec, Canada despite the growing trade relationship, and offers information on Quebec to use as cross-cultural examples in international business communication classes. The paper dispels myths concerning Quebec and its inhabitants, such as the myth that Quebec is officially a bilingual province. David Victor's LESCANT model is used in studying Quebecers, with emphasis on the Language component because Francophone Quebecers are similar to Americans and Anglophone Canadians in the other components. Quebec laws that regulate the language of the workplace, education, communication, commerce, and business are reviewed. The recurring fear of Quebecers that French language and culture will be snuffed out is described, noting that the official position of bilingualism across Canada has become a facade and that legal protection given to the French language may be the only means of safeguarding it. The implications for U.S. business people conducting business in Quebec include, among others: all business documentation such as brochures, catalogues, labels, and product directions must be in French; a French-speaking employee should handle telephone communication and business negotiations; and business letter writing should be more rhetorical and diplomatic. (JDD)

# EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

## *Thirteenth Annual EMU Conference on Language and Communication for World Business and the Professions*

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## PAPERS ON INTERNATIONALIZING BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

### "Quebec and the United States: A Cross-Cultural Case Study of International Trade and International Business Communication."

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**Boise State University**

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**ACTUAL PRESENTATION**

Much ink has flowed concerning the cross-cultural relationship between Americans and the French in your discipline and, in mine, French language and literature. Comparatively speaking, cross-cultural relationships between the U.S. and Quebec and between Quebec's French and English speakers have drawn much less attention. In David Victor's seminal text on international business communication, discussions on France and French culture occupy 49 pages or 20% of his 246 page book; French-speaking Canada occupies only 9 pages. In my perusal of the program for ABC, mine is the only title that mentions Quebec as the main subject matter, despite the fact that our conference is currently taking place in Montreal.

The study of French language at all levels of instruction in the U.S. focuses almost exclusively on France to the detriment of other Francophone cultures such as Quebec's. Most U.S. college catalogues, depicting the French major, list no course on Quebec. In more enlightened programs, the study of Quebec is thrown into a general course called "Francophone Literatures and Cultures." Few schools offer one or more courses on Quebec culture, literature, and civilization.

The growing relationship between Canada and the U.S. as a result of the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement necessitates that your students and mine have access to information that describes the province that represents 25% of Canada's population and gross domestic product. Furthermore, 73% of Quebec's exports go to the U.S.; 44% of Quebec's imports come from the U.S. If U.S. companies prepare for trade with Quebec by hiring employees who are knowledgeable of Quebec's language, culture, and business practices, an attractive market of 6 million people awaits them. My goal this afternoon is to offer you information on Quebec to use as cross-cultural examples in your international business

communication classes and for preparing your students to conduct business successfully in Quebec.

I'd first like to point out some myths concerning Quebec and its inhabitants. Many people think that Quebec is an amorphous, homogeneous mass of French speakers. In fact, according to the 1991 Canadian census, 83% of Quebecers speak French as their first language, 10% are native English speakers, and 7% of Quebecers, known as Allophones, are immigrants who usually speak English rather than French. Quebec's political views are as diverse as its geography. In Montreal, where more than one half of all Quebecers live, you will find few separatists compared to the *Saguenay Lac St. Jean* region where I spent a good portion of last summer. Residents of *la Côte Nord*, the French-speaking home region of Brian Mulroney is vastly different in its political outlook than that found in the Eastern Townships, which are peopled by ancestors of former British Loyalists who fled political persecution during the American Revolution.

The second myth is that Quebecers are bilingual and that Quebec is officially a bilingual province. Actually, only 44% of Francophone Quebecers are bilingual French and English vs. 54% of Anglophone Quebecers. Despite the efforts of Pierre Elliot Trudeau to make Canada a bilingual country, Quebec's official language of business and commerce is French. The majority of American businesspeople don't know that French must be used in all commercial communication, i.e., catalogues, brochures, product labels and directions, business meetings and litigation. This summer, for example, as I went to individual Chambers of Commerce and presented business and state brochures in English from the Idaho Department of Commerce, I was gently reminded that I was in violation of the law which states that "All Quebecers are entitled to conduct business in French."

Myth number 3 states that Quebecers are a bunch of disgruntled, paranoid separatists. In fact, during the 1980 referendum on separation, separatists attained only 40% of the total vote. In fact, not all separatists want Quebec to become an autonomous nation. In my discussions

with the former Vice Prime Minister Marc-André Bédard and Gérald Paquette, a leading official of the *Office de la Langue Française*, the French-language watchdog group, some politicians have considered applying for entry into the U.S. Most Quebecers, as evidenced by the strength of the federally minded Quebec Liberal Party, favor remaining in a confederated Canada with provisions that recognize Quebec as a distinct society.

Myth number 4 states that French-speaking Quebecers are French. One of my Marketing colleagues recently told me that Quebecers should go back to France if they're unhappy with the current state of affairs in Canada. In my visit with Gérald Paquette from the *Office de la Langue Française*, he emphasized that French-speaking Quebecers are not French but North Americans who speak French. Most French-speaking Quebecers are two, three, or four centuries removed from France. In fact, key Quebecer family names of today--Tremblay, Bouchard, Gagnon, Simard, Lavoie--date back to ancestors who settled New France with Samuel de Champlain in the early 17th century. Advising French-speaking Quebecers to return to France is analogous to telling third generation Italian-Americans to go back to Italy.

In studying Quebecers, I use David Victor's LESCANT model. For those of you who are not familiar with his model, LESCANT is an acronym that stands for LANGUAGE, ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY, SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, CONTEXTING, AUTHORITY CONCEPTION, NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR, and TEMPORAL CONCEPTION. I would like to focus primarily on LANGUAGE because in the other components of the model Francophone Quebecers are remarkably similar to Americans and Anglophone Canadians. LANGUAGE is the component of the LESCANT model that most illustrates the cross-cultural differences among the diverse residents of Quebec and between Americans and Quebecers.

Within Victor's LANGUAGE component, the category "language and cultural attachment" has the most impact on international business communication between the U.S. and Quebec. When it comes to the use of French in Quebec, "cultural attachment" is a gross understatement. In business and commerce, the use of French is the law and has been so since 1977. Françoise

Tétu de Labsade, a leading academic in Quebec, states that LANGUAGE is at the heart of political and cross-cultural conflicts.

Bill 101, also known as the Charter of the French Language, was promulgated in 1977 by the *Parti Québécois*, Quebec's separatist party. Bill 101, declaring French as the official language in Quebec, is the most significant event and piece of legislation affecting LANGUAGE in Quebec. The preamble of the Charter provides the reader with the essence of the position of Francophone Quebecers toward languages in Quebec: "Distinctive language of a people that is French-speaking in the majority, the French language permits the people of Quebec to express its identity. . . It is, therefore, resolved that French be the language of the State and of Law, as well as the normal and habitual language of education, communication, commerce, and business." Pertaining to business and commerce, Bill 101 affirms (1) the right of workers to perform their activities in French and; (2) the right of consumers to be informed and served in French.

Recently, Bill 86, promulgated by Quebec's Liberal Party took a major bite out of Bill 101. Among its provisions, Bill 86 limits unilingual French to billboards of large dimensions, advertising in public transportation, and bus stops and shelters. Unilingual English or the use of other languages is now permitted in advertising related to products having a cultural or educational nature--books, newspapers, magazines, records, films, cassette tapes; professional conferences (like this one), colloquia, fairs or expositions destined for participants having restrained language skills (like many participants at this conference). Bilingualism with a preponderance in French is permitted in advertising from government-run businesses such as Hydro-Québec; it is also permitted on provincial signs up to 15 kilometers inside the Quebec border. Bilingualism without a preponderance in French is permitted in public advertising in matters of health and public security, in zoos, museums, expositions, tourist sites, and in large international conferences designed for an international audience. The language of the workplace remains French and the law continues to promote the francization of businesses.

As expected, Bill 86 has caused a major stir between French-only proponents and proponents favoring a liberalization of Bill 101. I had the opportunity to follow the debate between the two camps in both *La Presse*, a Montreal daily and *Le Devoir*, a Quebec City daily. The position of English-speaking Quebecers and many French-speaking Montrealers is aptly stated in a June 7, 1993 letter to the editor of *La Presse*: "Anglophone Quebecers have a right to complain about square-headed nationalists who want French unilingualism to continue in Quebec, to the detriment of good sense, tolerance and respect that one wants for us, but that one denies to others. . . . What we're all looking for is serene cohabitation and mutual respect. We don not accept the excess of language by frustrated nationalists which will lead one day to bitter confrontation and hatred. We don not need that in Quebec. We humbly suggest that bilingual advertising with a preponderance in French reflects the opinion of the clear-thinking majority. Canada has two official languages and one should respect them equally."

The French-speaking perspective reflects a recurring fear of the omnipresent danger to Quebec's French language and culture. Canadian history, after the conquest of Quebec in 1760 by the English, is replete with examples of the conquerors' attempt to snuff out the use of the French language and Quebec's cultural heritage. Tétu de Labsade holds that French-speaking Quebecers, already a minority in Canada, risk being a minority in their own province. She points out the rising tide of immigrants, most of whom prefer to learn English rather than French, the anglicization of certain sectors of the Quebec economy, and the invasion of English-speaking television and radio programs, movies, magazines, and books. She supports the protection given to the French language within Quebec and views it as the only means of safeguarding it. Tétu de Labsade and others question the true existence of bilingualism in Canada, preferring to call it the "façade of bilingualism." In the promulgation of laws outside of Quebec, for example, all discussion, debate, and negotiations take place in English. French is only found in the subsequent translation. Often, labeling and product directions, which are supposed to be bilingual, are so poorly translated in French that they become incomprehensible

to some French-speaking Quebecers. Signs across Canada are far from being bilingual and reflect the dominant use of English. Proponents of Bill 101 wonder why Anglophone Canadians dispute the dominant use of French on signs in Quebec. The workplace in Canada outside of Quebec is quite naturally unilingual anglophone with few exceptions. Before Bill 101, French-speaking Quebecers had to become bilingual to attain any kind of management position in a company even inside Quebec. The converse was not and is not true today in the other nine provinces of Canada. The argument, therefore, for the so-called "square-headed and paranoid" proponents of Bill 101 is that if business and commerce are unilingual English outside of Quebec because of the French-speaking minority, why can't Quebec be unilingually French in business and commerce because of its French-speaking majority and English-speaking minority?

As in most intercultural conflicts, the opposing sides rarely understand each others' fears and frustrations and are rarely willing to sit down rationally to address them. Many Anglophone Quebecers as well as Anglophone Canadians do not seem sensitive to Francophone Quebecers' fears for their language and culture. On the other hand, many partisans of Bill 101 cannot understand the linguistic needs of nearly 20% of English-speaking Quebecers; they can only see a continuing attempt on the part of anglophone Canada to anglicize Quebec; they view Bill 86 as only the beginning of other measures that threaten the existence of the French language. French-speaking Quebecers need only point to events in France where one could argue that the French language is becoming so infested with English that it is losing its identity. The Parisian newspaper *Libération*'s tongue-in-cheek headline of *"Le Sommet du French-Speaking"* to identify the 1986 summit on Francophonia is but one example of a new "Franglais" dialect. It is no wonder that the *Office de la Langue Française* sees itself as the protector of the French language in all of the francophone world. It is the only administrative entity in the francophone world, unlike the French Academy, that has the legal "bite" to go along with its "bark."

What are, then, the implications of Victor's LANGUAGE component and the linguistic debate for U.S. businesspeople conducting business in Quebec? First and foremost, despite the changes to Bill 101, French is still the official language of business and commerce in Quebec. All business contacts to Quebec customers should be made in French. All business documentation such as brochures, catalogues, labels, product directions, etc. must be translated into French, not just any French but French using the business and technical terminology found in the *Office de la Langue Française*'s *"banque de terminologie."* This terminology bank contains words for business and technology that have been chosen by the *Office*'s linguists. They cover categories from agriculture to zoology. Also unique to Quebec is the feminization policy sponsored by the Office's linguists. Few of the vestiges of sexism in Parisian French are found in official Quebec French. For example, Kim Campbell used to be known as *"Mme la Première Ministre"* whereas Edith Cresson, a recent prime minister in France, was referred to as *"Mme le Premier Ministre."*

Business letter writing in Quebec is remarkably close to business letter writing in France. You will still see, within the Quebec letter, for example, the flowery and diplomatic means of kindly reminding one's customer to pay one's bill. I quote: "We are surprised to report that you have not yet responded to our letter of November 15 concerning the settling of your bill due October 1, etc. Please be so kind as to permit us to remind you that this sum id $760. If you are in the impossibility of acquitting the entirety of this sum, please be so kind as to notify us as soon as possible so that we can discuss alternatives. With our anticipated gratitude, we present to you, Sir, our distinguished salutations." An American letter is often more direct: "We are presently notifying you that, despite the reminders that we have sent, your account remains unpaid. If your check doesn't not arrive here by December 2, we will have to resolve this problem legally. We don't like to cause this type of embarrassment to our customers, and it is rare that we do so. However, your tardiness in sending the check constrains us to do so. I hope you will profit from this last chance to avoid the disagreement of legal

action." A major cross-cultural issue in training American students is to get them to write using the French rhetorical style versus the direct American approach. Often their language is flawless, but their direct approach insults their French-speaking readers.

One specific business practice, however, reflects the North American influence on French-speaking Quebecers. For example, I was shocked by the quick use of the informal "tu" by Quebecer businesspeople during my interviews with them. Even my landlord used the informal "tu" when he asked me to pay my rent. A Frenchman or woman would be as shocked and insulted as I was. American students, trained in the use of Parisian French, need to know this cross-cultural difference to avoid any possible misunderstanding. Remarkable similarities between business letter writing in France and Quebec. Differences between American and French business letters.

To conclude, I would like to leave you with some suggestions for conducting business in Quebec and for using Quebec as an intercultural example in your international business classes.

1. Provide students with an overview of the historical, political, economic, and cultural factors behind language laws in Quebec. While you're in Montreal, go to a bookstore and buy Michel Gratton's *French Canadians: An Outsider's Inside Look at Quebec.* This book will help you and your students gain an understanding, not necessarily an acceptance, of Quebec's language policies.

2. A translator or business associate should have expertise in Quebec language, culture, language laws, and business practices. Don't take for granted that a France specialist can do the job in Quebec. The expert must also be knowledgeable of Quebec business and technical terminology, and the services of the Office de la Langue Française. Differences between French and Quebecer cultures and business practices point to the need for major modifications in Business French classes at U.S. colleges.

3. If you're a U.S. business that doesn't know where to start, call the *Office de la Langue Française* or the World Trade Center for help in getting started. They'll even use English to get

you started.

4. Be prepared to have brochures, catalogues, product labels and directions translated into Quebec French.

5. If you're a U.S. company, make sure to have a French-speaking employee to handle phone communication, business letters, faxes, and business negotiations.

If you follow these suggestions, you will find Quebec a w derful market for your goods and services and you will find that Quebec has many excellent goods and services to offer the U.S. market. Enjoy!!