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STANDARDIZATION IN MULTILINGUAL AREAS

**From English to French: New trends in the translation of
Geographical names in Canada**

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From English to French: New Trends in the Translation of Geographical Names in Canada*

1. Introduction

This paper is a follow-up on initiatives undertaken by the Ontario Geographic Names Board (OGNB) in the area of linguistic treatment of geographic nomenclature and which were first presented at ICOS XVII in Helsinki (Lapierre 1990, Smart 1990). The Anglo-French context in which these innovations took place makes the Canadian experience an exciting monitoring area for those interested in contact onomastics. In this presentation, we shall focus on toponymic translation, primarily because of its inherent importance in multilingual areas of the world but also because new trends which are presently developing will eventually require some measure of standardization.

Geographical name translation may be viewed as an onomastic universal in multilingual areas. It appears to be a natural speech process as evidenced by field work and by the many translated names found in the onomasticon of several major languages of the world. One may even argue that the existence of exonyms in many languages is a related variant of the same phenomenon. Although there may be theoretical debate as to what may be considered a translated name (Dorion 1972), there seems to be little disagreement among scholars that translation *per se* is a significant linguistic process involved in the creation and evolution of geographical nomenclature.

The translation of geographical names is not new to Canada. Ever since the adoption of the Official Languages Act in 1969, the Federal Government has developed considerable expertise through its Translation Bureau, the body responsible for devising principles and procedures of translation. In particular, the Bureau has devised a comprehensive set of rules for the treatment of geographical nomenclature at the federal level, and designed to

provide acceptable French forms for official English names in prose-text applications (Gélinas-Surprenant 1991). These rules also serve as guidelines for various provinces as they deal with the translation of minority French names which come under their jurisdictions.

2. Geographical Name Translation in Ontario

In 1986, the Ontario Legislature enacted the French Language Services Act in order to answer the needs of its francophone population. One of the main features of this legislation was to provide services in the French language in areas where francophones constituted at least 10% of the population. Some 22 districts were so identified, mainly in the East and Northeast areas of the province.

One of the tasks involved in implementing the policy was the translation of all provincial statutes and legislation into the French language. Of particular onomastic concern were pieces of legislation such as the Land and Territorial Division Act which included a substantial number of geographical names. Although professionals in their area of expertise, translators sometimes experienced difficulties in providing the French form of an English toponym because of discrepancies between the form obtained by the application of Translation Bureau rules and the form actually used in the speech community. Franco-Ontarians are for the most Anglo-French bilinguals with several occurrences of language contact phenomenon, including translation, in their everyday discourse (Mougeon & Beniak 1991). However, in almost all cases, about 95% of the total nomenclature of the province, there was agreement between the forms provided by the translators and those locally used in the francophone speech community.

But this was not always the case. For instance, applying federal rules to an official name such as *Giants Tomb Island* would normally yield *île Giants Tomb*. Field work in the Franco-Ontarian community revealed that the locally used form for that feature was *île*

Travers, a totally different toponym, not a translation of the official English name. In other areas of the province, it was found that Franco-Ontarians used the official English name such as in *Mondor Creek* in lieu of the French translation of the name, *ruisseau Mondor*. It soon became clear that the translation process could not go ahead without a prerequisite assessment of linguistic usage in the francophone communities of the province and the establishment of some kind of protocol for the linguistic treatment of French geographical names within a more general policy of place name standardization.

To assist in providing the necessary ground work for a comprehensive policy on French naming in Ontario, an Interministerial Task Force on Bilingualism in Toponymy was struck in 1988. At the same time, systematic field work in the 22 districts was undertaken in order to determine actual linguistic usage and to provide the necessary information for the development of a comprehensive protocol. After several years of deliberations and consultations, the Task Force recommended a policy based on the recognition of three types of names in Ontario: a) the *Official Name* as approved by the appropriate authorities and listed in the provincial gazetteer, b) the *Officially Recognized Alternate Name*, i.e. a name other than the official name in use in the francophone community for the same feature and c) the *French Text Equivalent*, i.e. a non-official form of the official name obtained through translation for use mainly in prose-text applications. Details of this policy, including the interface between the three categories of names, have been discussed elsewhere (Lapierre 1999). This paper focuses on the last category, French Text Equivalents (FTE), as it is the only category where forms are obtained by systematic application of translation rules.

3. Areas of Innovation

As mentioned earlier, in the vast majority of names, application of the federal translation rules by the Ontario Government generated French Text Equivalents which were acceptable and matched patterns recorded in the field when Franco-Ontarians themselves

translated English names into their language. For instance, a substantial number of translated names follow the general rule of translating the generic element of a place name while maintaining the specific element intact, as in *Rice Lake* > *Lac Rice*.

Some names however follow more complex structural profiles and do not translate easily into French. Applying the federal rules in these instances sometimes produced unnatural forms which, although grammatically correct, were contrary to established usage in francophone communities. In other cases, they yielded forms which were grammatically questionable. As a result, the Ontario Government struck a small group of experts to review these problem areas. It was fully realized that this approach would involve a compromise between several imperatives, namely respect of the integrity of the geographical name, proper translation process, French rules of orthography and usage in the speech community. The following are some cases where exceptions to the federal rules were allowed and new initiatives undertaken.

3.1 French-English Homographs

Federal rules support the integrity of the specific element of a name. As a consequence, specifics are generally not translated. However, when the specific was a French/English homograph with the same meaning in both languages and which differed only by the presence or absence of diacritics, the Ontario FTE used diacritics in the French form of the specific.

<u>Official Name</u>	<u>French Text Equivalent</u>
Aeroplane Lake	lac Aéroplane
Detention Island	île Détention
Aerobus Creek	ruisseau Aérobus
Confederation Lake	lac Confédération

3.2 Feature Qualifiers

As a general rule, when an adjective is deemed to qualify a generic, it may be translated. Cardinal points fall into that category so that *West Abinette River* translates as *rivière Abinette Ouest* and *East Catfish Creek* translates as *ruisseau Catfish Est*. However the translation of comparative adjectives such as *lower, middle, centre, upper, inner* and *outer* poses a particular problem because they introduce into French toponymics feature qualifiers which are seldom found in common usage. Interestingly, their suggested translations: *inférieur, médian, central, supérieur, intérieur* and *du large*, were not recorded during Franco-Ontarian field work. Furthermore, a scan of the Commission de toponymie du Québec database revealed little or no usage at all of these adjectives. Forms such as *lac Médian Wildcat, rapides médians Philip, lac Goose Supérieur* and *Ile Duck du Large* sound unnatural in French. It was therefore decided not to translate the above-mentioned feature qualifiers.

3.3 Township and County Names

These names do not fall under federal rules so that the Ontario French Text Equivalents had to parallel local usage in the francophone communities where cardinal points in township and county names are usually translated into French. Likewise, prepositions linking two county or township names are also translated. Consequently, translation of these elements was allowed.

<u>Official Name</u>	<u>French Text Equivalent</u>
Plantagenet East	Plantagenet Est
Prescott and Russell	Prescott et Russell
Lennox and Addington	Lennox et Addington

3.4 Hagionyms

In feature names containing the name of a Saint which, according to available documentation, is a French first or given name, the prefixes were francized and joined with a hyphen according to French rules of orthography.

<u>Official Name</u>	<u>French Text Equivalent</u>
Lake St. Joseph	lac St-Joseph
Lake St. Pierre	lac St-Pierre

In cases of doubt however, the English prefix was not changed. In the same way, if the name was an English first name or family name, no francization was allowed.

<u>Official Name</u>	<u>French Text Equivalent</u>
Lake St. Anthony	lac St. Anthony
Lake St. Peter	lac St. Peter

3.5 Names with French First Names or Surnames

In the case of known French first names or surnames, when there is evidence to believe diacritics were inadvertently omitted, these were reinstated in translated forms.

<u>Official Name</u>	<u>French Text Equivalent</u>
Andre Creek	ruisseau André
Benoit Creek	ruisseau Benoît
Remi Peninsula	péninsule Rémi
Sauve Lake	lac Sauvé

In all other cases, or in case of doubt, no francization was allowed.

3.6 Names with Genitives

The translation of such names is problematic. When it could be determined that the specific element was a name related to a person, it was decided that the 's would be deleted and translated by the preposition *de*, to avoid a clash between English and French grammatical rules within the same toponym.

<u>Official Name</u>	<u>French Text Equivalent</u>
Doan's Hollow	dépression de Doan
Bradley's Marsh	marais de Bradley
Oliver's Marsh	marais d'Oliver

In all other cases however, the federal rules were followed.

<u>Official Name</u>	<u>French Text Equivalent</u>
Heckler's Bay	baie Heckler's
Chief's Island	île Chief's
Dead Man's Island	île Dead Man's

3.7 Names of Royalty

French versions of names of royalty are well-known and used in Canada's francophone communities. Consequently, British royalty names were francized when they occurred within a geographical name and made to follow the rules of French orthography.

<u>Official Name</u>	<u>French Text Equivalent</u>
Prince Edward Bay	baie du Prince-Édouard
Prince of Wales Falls	chutes du Prince-de-Galles
Princess Charlotte Island	îles de la Princesse-Charlotte

3.8 Quebec Transboundary Names

There are 48 officially named features in Ontario which cross the Quebec-Ontario boundary. In the Ontario portion of the entity, the name is usually English, and in the Québec portion in French. In translating the Ontario portion to French, some resulting forms were found to be in disagreement with the officialized form for the same feature by the Commission de toponymie du Québec. It was decided to give precedence to the Quebec forms as FTE, since the Quebec forms were based on local usage.

<u>Official Ontario Name</u>	<u>French Text Equivalent</u>
Lower Allumette Lake	lac aux Allumettes
Harricanaw River	rivière Harricana
Labyrinth Lake	lac Labyrinthe

Other problem areas involving names requiring decisions by several jurisdictions such as National Parks and Indian Reserves were also addressed and are still under study. Perhaps the most important innovation was the decision by the Ontario Government to disseminate the French Text Equivalents in the form of a two volume bilingual glossary (MNR 1995) in order to assist the translation community and the general public. In this document, some 57,000 official names are listed alphabetically with their French Text Equivalents, followed by feature identification and geographical coordinates. In accordance with the 1967 United Nations recommendation that in multilingual areas, name authorities should "give a clear indication of equality or precedence of officially

acknowledged names" (CPCGN 1968:101), Officially Recognized Alternate Names are given precedence over French Text Equivalents in the glossary.

4. Conclusion

With these minor adjustments to the federal translation rules, it was possible to strike a balance between the needs of translation, grammatical correctness and the Franco-Ontarian speech community while respecting as much as possible the integrity of the official name. Thanks to the bilingual glossary, translators and the public in general can now rely on immediately available French Text Equivalents for the entire geographical nomenclature of the province. In agreement with its policy to follow provincial translations when available, the Federal Translation Bureau now uses the Ontario French Text Equivalents. Were it only for the potential standardization benefits it affords, the Ontario model should be seriously considered by other jurisdictions with francophone minorities for possible implementation.

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