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Bi- and Multi-Lingualism
in Canadian Drama

Canadian drama had to wait until the mid-1980s to be anthologized on the national level thus suggesting the existence of a canon (Knowles 91). *Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre 1934-1984* (Perkyns), *The Penguin Book of Modern Canadian Drama* (Plant), and *Modern Canadian Plays* (Wasserman) each wish to set up a reliable corpus, still have an individual standpoint of their own. Of the three, however, it is only *Modern Canadian Plays*, and its enlarged edition in two volumes in 1994, which includes a special — although not unique — phenomenon of Canadian plays. *Balconville* by David Fennario and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* by Tomson Highway represent completely different concepts of the theatre, still have one thing in common, i.e., using more than one language in their dialogues. The following article is an attempt at finding the theoretical background of changing from one language into another and at systematizing the plays that use this method.

Code-switching is the practical manifestation of bilingualism, a phenomenon that has triggered violent reactions, very often loaded with political overtones in Canada — but it also plays a more and more important role in various fields of daily life in many other regions of the world. This "alternation of two languages" (Grosjean 145) is an "extremely common characteristic of bilingual speech and some bilingual writers and poets reflect this in their works ... to enhance the content of the verse" (Grosjean 146). Susanne Romaine approaches bilingualism using John J. Gumperz's theory, for whom code-switching means the "juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two grammatical systems or subsystems" (Romaine 111). Code-switching, therefore, is possible on the level of two different languages as well as using varieties of the same language or style-levels within a language. In this article, however, code-switching will be used in the sense that it is the alternate use of two languages within the same play.

The dimensions of code-switching can vary; it may involve a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a whole passage. In the course of switching from one language to another — in contrast with borrowing a word or phrase from another language, and integrating it phonologically and morphologically into the base language — the switched element is not integrated (Grosjean 146). While most bilinguals

agree that on the level of everyday conversation they very often switch from one language to another spontaneously and unconsciously (Grosjean 148), in literature code-switching is performed consciously. Many of the general reasons for changing from one language to another also apply for literature, and especially for drama. For example, the speaker does not find the appropriate word in a given language, or the language itself does not have it in its vocabulary, while at other times the speaker knows the word in both languages and uses them alternately. Code-switching can be used for quoting or addressing someone, marking and emphasizing group identity, conveying confidentiality, and/or excluding someone from the conversation, as well as for expressing emotions; at other times it can change the role of the speaker: raise his/her status, add authority, show expertise, etc. (Grosjean 146). Thus, Code-switching can also convey extra information linguistically, stylistically, and socially (Grosjean 153). Code-switching or code-mixing is generally considered a discourse strategy with two main aspects: grammatical/syntactic and discourse/pragmatic, with a basically stylistic motivation. Code-switching itself can have different degrees and types, depending on the level how far the second language intrudes the units of the base language. The smallest degree is tag-switching, which does not involve a violation of syntactic rules. The second step, intersentential switching requires greater fluency, since the switch occurs at a clause or sentence boundary. Thirdly, intrasentential switching means changing from one language into another within a clause or a sentence, sometimes even within word boundaries and carrying the greatest syntactic risk (Romaine 112).

Moving from the linguistic aspects toward literature, we can agree with G.D. Keller that code-switching has three basic categories: it can have thematic reasons, can be used to characterize protagonists, and finally, it can be a rhetorical device to achieve formal stylistic effects (172). I am inclined to put experimentation into this last category, as a sub-group. While underlining the significance of Keller's suggestion as an indispensable contribution to the analysis of literary texts from the point of view of code-switching and bilingualism, I also wish to point out that there are remarkable differences in the application of this method in different genres of writing. Keller, when he works out his classification system, uses examples from Chicano poetry, therefore lays great emphasis on its stylistic, aesthetic, and rhetoric elements. In drama — even if these elements are very often present — code-switching very often carries other cultural layers, such as social, and within that, ethnic, implications. Code-switching presupposes a certain level of bilingualism. The issue of bilingualism has provoked much discussion and scholars do not agree on what they mean by the term. In literature, it has been present for thousands of years (Foster; Mackey 1971) and approaching the end of the twentieth century, it still seems to be a question of great importance, enriched by special aspects as a consequence of changes in life and approaches to writing (Iyer 50-55). Of the many definitions of the term itself — carefully listed and commented upon by E. Simpson (4) —

I find that of Weinreich most applicable for my purposes. For him "the practice of alternately using two languages will be called bilingualism, and the persons involved bilingual" (4). Following this phrasing, E. Simpson calls "l'alternance de deux ou plusieurs langues dans la même oeuvre ou plusieurs oeuvres ... par un auteur ou des co-auteurs" literary bilingualism (5). She also points out that "le bilinguisme en littérature créatrice n'est qu'un phénomène restraint ... l'unilinguisme semble être la règle générale dans le domaine de la création littéraire" (Simpson 5). Further on, I will focus my attention on the alternate usage of two or more languages in the same work, by the same author.

It is up to the bilingual author to decide which language to use as base language and whether to code-switch or not. It is generally accepted that there are different levels and degrees of bilingualism. Proficiency is the key factor in judging the level of bilingualism which may have different functions and uses and it manifests itself in interference, i.e., "the extent to which the individual manages to keep the languages separate, or ... fused" (Romaine 11). On the semantic level, bilinguals very often are able to "express meaning better in one language than another" (Romaine 13). "Equilingualism" (Mackey 1978, 3) or "balanced bilingualism" (Romaine 14) is generally considered to be an exceptional case. Regarding the presence or degree of interference, the two main groups of bilinguals are compound: speakers not able to separate out the two codes, therefore mixing languages constantly, even within phrases and sentences, and co-ordinate bilinguals, who do not alternate codes involuntarily (Keller 179). Approaching the question of bilingualism from the psychological point of view, Hamers and Blanc make a distinction between bilinguality, i.e., the psychological state of the individual, and bilingualism, which includes bilinguality and also refers to the state of a linguistic community in which two languages are in contact (6). When analyzing these multi-dimensional phenomena, they take into consideration the relative competence, the cognitive organization, the age of acquisition, the exogeneity, and the social cultural status of the individual, as well as the speaker's cultural identity. Based on José Lambert's theoretical framework with regard to language competence, they make a distinction between "the balanced individual who has equivalent competence in both languages and the dominant bilingual for whom competence in one of the languages, very often the mother tongue, is superior to his competence in the other" (Hamers and Blanc 8). Compound and co-ordinate bilinguality are the two ways of cognitive organization, while the age of acquisition may be in childhood, i.e., before age ten (within this group the two possibilities are simultaneous and consecutive) during adolescent years and as an adult. With regard to the presence of second language community in the environment, they speak of endogenous and exogenous bilinguality, based upon the presence or absence of L2 (second language) community. According to the relative status of the two languages, the two possibilities are additive, i.e., both languages socially valorized, resulting a cognitive advantage, and subtractive bilinguality, when L2 is valorized at the expense of L1 (first

language), resulting a cognitive disadvantage. Finally, when speaking of cultural identity, the main divisions are bicultural bilinguality, meaning double member-ship and bicultural identity, L1 monocultural bilinguality, L2 acculturated bilinguality and deculturated bilinguality (Hamers and Blanc 9). Looking at the social aspects of this problem, it is generally accepted that monolinguality is more commonly found in economically dominant groups, while members of minority or subordinate groups tend to be bi- or multilingual (Hamers and Blanc 13). Canadian writers of ethnic origin — very often a minority within a minority — at times work with three languages as many cases of Italian-Canadian writing demonstrate (Pivato 31).

The various aspects and implications of bilingualism in Canada have been elaborated by a number of scholars (see Mackey 1987, 1975, 1988; Juhel). With regard to the linguistic side, I wish to recall some points made by Jean Darbelnet. As a result of the two languages that interact in Canada, firstly there are several words borrowed from one language into the other (most frequently from English into French), secondly, the contact may influence the meaning of words, as well as the word arrangement or sentence structure. French language in Canada is vulnerable to interference, i.e., semantic and syntagmatic infiltration from English. There are also several typographical Anglicisms, very often in the form of abbreviations. Morphological interference also occurs, but the most widely spread manifestation of interference is on the semantic level, with a smaller number of examples on the syntactical level (Darbelnet 12-14). Since of all literary genres, plays are the closest to everyday language, we will find several examples for the interaction of the two languages. In recent years, literary bilingualism in Canada has been touched upon by more and more scholars who most frequently analyze novels (see Hodgson and Sarkonak; Simon; Grutman). A special type of bilingual writing drew the attention of Francesco Loriggio who examined the relationship of ethnicity and the language use, based mainly on Italian-Canadian examples. In line with the basic statements of other researchers — e.g., "the bilingual is more than the sum of two monolinguals" (Hamers and Blanc 15), or "bilingualism can be an asset to the creative writer even to the writer who learns a second language as an adult," and "bilingual expatriate writers have indeed been a blessing to the literatures to which they have contributed" (Mackey 1988, 20-21) — Loriggio considers the ethnic element of a writing carrier of extra meaning. Ethnicity, in his view, is a perspective — it "cannot be defined formally: any style, any genre can be ethnic" (Loriggio 55). Since Canadian literature is a literature where all literature is hyphenated, more attention has been paid to ethnic minority writing, although much more work is needed. In Loriggio's words,

the fact is that literary theory has always assumed that literature is produced in an environment self-evidently unitary. When we read about German or Italian or French or English texts, we imagine them, as we have been accustomed to do, as components of an indivisible entity in which language, culture and sometimes territory coincide. Ethnicity introduces a series of wedges, of hyphens in that homogeneity. (56)

Turning toward the presence of two or more languages in the same work in Canadian literature, we have to remember that it has been the case since the beginning of writing in the country (see Grutman; Kürtösi 1987, 1989). The degree and function of using more than one language may vary according to the genre, the topic and the background of the writer, and the degree of his/her bilinguality. My general approach to the study of bi- or multilingual texts is following that of G.D. Keller who is convinced that "bilingual literature in theory can display all of the stylistic features that have been unearthed in the literary analysis of monolingual literature at all levels, whether the structure, the sound-stratum, the imagery, rhetorical devices, diction, tone, or whatever, as well as some additional features not available to monolingual texts" (18O). In the course of my analysis, I will focus my attention on the additional features however hard they may be to describe. Like in other genres, in drama, too, code-switching has been present for several centuries — it was very often a tool for the playwright to achieve comic effect, e.g., in *Maître Pathelin*, or for suggesting the social role of a character or his nationality. Still, the best-known example from earlier times may be Shakespeare's *Henry V* where we can detect a number of the strategies to be used in our Canadian examples: speaking about the foreign language (III.iv 1-3), the lack of language competence (III.iv.3), translating the words of a character to those who cannot speak the other language (V.ii 112-22, 382-85), making the first steps toward mastering another language (III.iv), speaking it with mistakes (V.ii 368, 385), and finally overcoming the difficulties posed by the problem (V.ii 410-20) (Kürtösi 1994, 485).

Within the corpus of Canadian drama, I am going to concentrate on plays of the past thirty years the texts of which are available in published or manuscript form, therefore, to my great regret, I have to exclude the shows done by, e.g., Robert Lepage and *Carbone 14*, even if they also utilize code-switching — along with switching from one art into another — abundantly. Marcel Dubé and Gratien Gélinas are not considered to be bilingual Canadian playwrights, and I myself do not wish to change their general classification. Yet, while using French as their base language, each of them uses code-switching as a strategy in their well-known plays of the mid-1960s. In Dubé's *Les Beaux dimanches* four couples around their 1940s face a critical period in their personal lives. Some of the characters use English loan words, and one of them, Paul is frequently ready to say phrases or short sentences in English (Dubé 50, 57, 61). This habit of his helps us form an image of him as different from the other men in his company — sometimes he is showing off a bit, a man of the world with several ways to

please women. Later on we can see that using English means more in his case than just a stylistic element for making his language more colourful. When it comes to political issues, his views are typical of the members of his generation, as opposed to revolutionary young people (89). Gratien Gélinas in *Hier, les enfants dansaient* further elaborates two of the questions touched upon by Dubé, as well: the relationship of Québeckers with Ottawa, and the basic differences in the political views of the older generation and the young ones. These two issues are introduced in a monolingual passage (40). At several points of the play, language is the topic of conversation, and not only a tool (112-13). Code-switching proper occurs in a situation related to social hierarchy (55-57). Geographical location also has a symbolic role: the play takes place in Montréal, and in scene V of Act I Gravel has a phone call from Ottawa, because the Prime Minister would like him to accept a position in the federal government. Parallel with Gravel's enthusiastic English conversation on the phone, his son André and his girl friend comment on the same news in French in a quite different manner (56). Soon Gravel joins them, switching into French and this is the point where the conflict of the whole play becomes clear. The choice of language and the readiness to switch underline political standpoints and help us to see a fuller picture of the characters. The rhythm of code-switching helps to elevate the tension of the play: Gravel changes into English, then the two languages are side by side, finally we return to French, the base language. André, the representative of the younger generation — unwilling to obey Ottawa — speaks French, although he can speak English, too, but is ready to code-switch only with an ironical overtone, pretending to quote someone (137). In André's view, if his father betrays his mother tongue, he cannot expect faithfulness toward himself from the other side.

Rick Salutin, a Toronto playwright, often uses historical analogies to answer questions of our age, and this is what happens in his play, *Les Canadiens*, commissioned by Centaur Theatre of Montréal one year after the victory of the Parti Québécois in 1976. The French title of the play does not mean that it is in French. On the contrary, the base language is English, with only a few words or phrases in French, and even these are translated into English in the appendix of the published version (Salutin 179-86). The play itself gives a survey of the history of the relationship between English and French Canadians and in these scenes of retrospection several dialogues are about language: the difficulties of understanding as well as the process of mastering a language, and how accents have an important role in characterizing people. In Salutin's play it is the Anglophone hockey players who have to learn some French in order to be able to communicate with the Francophone members of the team. As the Third Anglophone Canadian puts it, "Nous travaillons avec des gars qui parlent anglais à nous. Et nous voulons parler francais à ... à ... à ... to them!" (Salutin 127). Owing to his difficulties in using the proper form of the pronoun, he makes

intrasentential code-switching, i.e., finishes a French sentence in English. In this situation it is clear that this type of code-switching can occur not only in the case of fluent bilinguals, but also when a speaker has only a limited knowledge of a given second language. Even if there are signs of intolerance from the point of view of language, Salutin's political standpoint is that language is an important tool of co-operation, trying to speak the other language "is a tradition. It's a legend, the unity between the French and the English on the club" (Salutin 129). Jean-Claude Germain in *A Canadian Play/Une plaie canadienne* also offers us a survey of different events in Canadian history, using the initiation ceremony of a Free Mason group as a frame. The bilingual title already suggests that the language issue is in the focus: the base language is French with several versions and phonetically transcribing different accents of French, like, e.g., in the case of Queen Victoria: "elle parle avec un fort accent britannique" (Germain 58). The ceremony requires very formal language with many rhetorical elements. Language has multiple roles, it can evoke the atmosphere, the style, and the pronunciation can contribute to the characterization of a person and the choice of language can itself convey extra meanings, since language choice has economical and political implications: "en anglais, c'est toujours l'a-r-g-e-n-t qui parle!" (Germain 82), "Roland: T'as coulé trop dbeton, Charles! On parle pus a même langue! Charles: Es-tu sur que cé-t-a-cause du beton, Roland? Parsque moué, chparle toujours le francais d'une industrie de chez nous! Mais toué, ca fait longtemps qutu parles l'américain dé-z-unions internationales!" (Germain 13O). Duality is present in every aspect of life, including culture. For some characters this is the most natural everyday reality, such as in the case of Lord Durham: "Ce n'est pas deux têtes ou deux cultures! C'est deux coeurs qui bettent sur le même rythme! Il enchaine naturellement sur l'hymne folklorique canadian ... I went to the market, mon petit panier sous le bras/The first girl I met, was la fille d'un avocat!" (Germain 115). In the first line, code-switching occurs at the boundary of two clauses, while in the second, the verbal element of a compound predicate is English, the noun element French, thus showing us an example of the most complex code-switching variety. Marianne Ackerman's play of 1992 also has a bilingual title: *L'Affaire Tartuffe or The Garrison Officers Rehearse Molière*. Similar to the case of the previous plays we have looked at, here, too, the scenes evoking history are embedded in a frame of contemporary events. This time, it is a party in which intellectuals discuss mounting a film, when, due to a blackout we go back in time to 1774 when English officers decided to stage *Tartuffe* in French. *L'Affaire Tartuffe* therefore uses the method of play within a play, together with a second language (French) within the base language (English). In the opening scene, the dialogues are in both languages, the same character speaking once contemporary colloquial French, another time contemporary English, sometimes translating or summarizing for another character in the other language. Act I scene ii takes us back to the rehearsal of the play by

Molière: this is a switch to his text, i.e., eighteenth-century French with some comments on how to understand or play it in twentieth-century English or French. "Oui, il y a des moments, voyez ... What about the part where ... Moi, je porte une jupe, et tu dis ... Have you read the play, Edward?" (Ackerman I.ii). These switches from one language to another are accompanied with discussions of language compatibility and different approaches to learning a second language "to learn a second language is to find a new and sometimes frightening door ... to the soul" (Ackerman I.iv). In the course of this process, several mistakes may occur. "Aimée: Ah! Excusez-moi. En tout cas, I will like to practice my English.... You mind to listen my bad accent? Ah oui, c'est ça le problème quand on essaie de parler une language étrangère. L'accent écorche les oreilles" (Ackerman I.vii).

In most cases, immigrants have to master a new language in order to find their place in the country that receives them. Even if they keep their mother tongue for family life and other in-group activities, it is their second language that is socially valorized: they become dominant compound subtractive bilinguals. The plays written by second generation immigrants Marco Micone and Pan Bouyoucas show that they are preoccupied with the frustration and often humiliating situation of people who are not native to the country. Their characters face a multiple humiliation; it is a result of immigration, the lack of language competence, and sometimes of being a woman. Ethnicity, as Loriggio puts it, cannot be defined formally, but there are recurrent motifs which gain extra meaning in ethnic minority writing: generation "designates sub-types, the degree of distance toward the cultural past and the cultural present" (Loriggio 57), and the readiness to code-switching also depends on which generation the given character belongs to. Their roots in the old country are frequently mentioned — "the commemoration of genealogy acts as a magical antidote to displacement" (Loriggio 58) and this aspect is underlined by the vocabulary, too. Each play makes a point of showing or mentioning the acquisition of a foreign language, "language in its cognitive, communicational function" (Loriggio 61-62). But the first important question is how to choose the base language of the play. Obviously, it cannot be the language of the old country since it would result in total isolation from the new country environment. What happens, therefore, is writing in the majority language. However, this again results in further implications. Firstly, "in ethnic literature language has a sort of indefiniteness attached to it. Yet when the writer uses an official language he or she is accepting its borders" (Loriggio 65). As residents of Montréal, both Micone and Bouyoucas use French as the base language of their plays, but this French really stands for the mother tongue — Italian, or rather, Calabrese and Greek, respectively — and code-switching takes place in relation to this already switched code. The base language is the second language of the writer in both cases, further switches involve English, i.e., their third language, and occasionally the mother tongue.

Based on a reading of three plays — *Gens du silence* and *Addolorata* by Marco Micone and *Le Cerf volant* by Pan Bouyoucas — we can state that all the main code-switching strategies are manifested in them. The characters themselves are conscious of language as an issue. While French is the language of the street and of the workplace, in their value system English is the language that might facilitate the next generation to achieve a higher social position. "l'faut qu'i'apprennent à gagner. C'est pour ca qu'il'faut les envoyer à l'école anglaise" (Micone 1982, 46). The result is that — in contrast with the parents' generation who are fluent only in their mother tongue and learnt a bit of French to be able to arrange their daily affairs — the younger generation speaks three languages. In *Les Gens du silence* Gino says, "Je parle le calabrese avec mes parents, le française avec ma soeur et ma blonde et l'anglais avec mes chums" (Micone 1982, 76). Colloquial Montréal French is the base language of *Le Cerf-volant*. Georges, the representative of the second generation of immigrants, often switches into English, and in a key scene acts as an interpreter between his parents whose French is very limited, and Céline, their Québécoise tenant. But his translation is not correct: ashamed at his parents and their simple way of thinking he mistranslates in both directions, this way abusing his privileged position among first generation immigrants and the local people (Bouyoucas 66, 75-76). The vocabulary of all these three plays contains several elements which refer to the basic experiences of immigrants, like "ce pays," "notre propre pays," "chez nous," "déraciné," "autres," "immigrants," "langue," naming languages, mentioning important figures of historical or cultural heritage, e.g., "Alexandre le Grand," "Nana Mouskouri," "Athens," "Zorzes Moustaki," etc.

As a conclusion, we can state that the language pattern of plays by Italian-Canadian ethnic minority playwrights is a complex one: the base language is their second language, and the switches are both into the first language, and into a third language, English which has an air of authority about it. These plays manifest many of the general features of bi- or multilingual plays: speaking about language and language competence, learning or teaching another language and therefore speaking it with mistakes, trying to include, or exclude characters in the conversation, translating or mis-translating. Language, therefore, occupies a central position in these plays.

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