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Article

French loanwords in Quebec English: Bilingualism, language proficiency and intraregional variation



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Abstract. The article examines the issues associated with the difference in the relative frequency of French loanwords in Quebec English in Montreal and other cities of this Canadian province. The existing studies note that the loanwords with fewer occurrences are more widely used outside Montreal, the largest and most bilingual city in Quebec. The study illustrates this phenomenon with regard to the use of French loanwords in X (formerly Twitter) publications for the period from 2014 to 2024. It provides statistics on the use of various French loanwords in Montreal, as well as in the other major cities of the province: Quebec City, Saguenay, Gatineau, Sherbrooke and Trois-Rivières. The research seeks to explain this counterintuitive observation, as bilingualism is generally thought to facilitate and encourage borrowing. To this end, the paper discusses the nature of bilingualism in Quebec, its historical and cultural origins, as well as the geographical and demographic boundaries for the different levels of bilingualism and the English language proficiency in the province. The study concludes that less frequent French loanwords are relatively more widely used in Quebec outside Montreal because bilinguals there, speaking almost exclusively French in everyday life, tend to have it as their dominant language and therefore rely on French as a mediator when expressing concepts in English.

Keywords: bilingualism, borrowing, French loanwords, Quebec English, language proficiency

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Научная статья

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Франкоязычные заимствования в английском языке Квебека: билингвизм, языковая компетенция и внутрирегиональные различия

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются вопросы, связанные с разницей в относительной частотности франкоязычных заимствований в квебекском варианте английского языка в Монреале и других городах этой канадской провинции. В существующих исследованиях отмечается, что заимствования с меньшим числом употреблений более широко используются за пределами Монреаля, крупнейшего и наиболее билингвального города Квебека. Настоящее исследование иллюстрирует этот факт на примере использования франкоязычных заимствований в публикациях в X (бывший Twitter) с 2014 по 2024 г. В работе приводятся статистические данные по использованию различных заимствований из французского языка в Монреале, а также в других крупнейших городах провинции, среди которых Квебек, Сагеней, Гатино, Шербрук и Труа-Ривьер. В исследовании предпринята попытка объяснить это контринтуитивное явление, поскольку традиционно считается, что двуязычие, напротив, облегчает и способствует процессу заимствования. С этой целью в статье рассматривается природа двуязычия в Квебеке, его исторические и культурные основы, а также географические и демографические границы, разделяющие различные уровни билингвизма и владения английским языком в провинции. В исследовании делается вывод о том, что менее распространённые французские заимствования встречаются относительно чаще в Квебеке вне Монреаля, так как местные билингвы, использующие в повседневной жизни почти исключительно французский язык, с большей вероятностью имеют его в качестве доминирующего языка и, как следствие, прибегают к нему как к посреднику при выражении концептов на английском языке.

Ключевые слова: билингвизм, заимствование, французские заимствования, английский язык Квебека, языковая компетенция

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Introduction

Bilingualism is generally thought to encourage and facilitate borrowing. Some linguists argue that bilingualism is a prerequisite for this process, since any borrowing innovation requires knowledge of both languages, whereas monolinguals can only use those loans that have been previously introduced into the receiving language [1, p. 174].

Indeed, it is widely accepted that lexical borrowing is a direct result of “the ability of bilinguals to draw on lexical items from both their languages” [2, p. 508]. A. Backus also points out that bilingual contact leads first to code-switching and then to borrowing through the conventionalisation of these “new elements” [3, p. 29]. In this respect, code-switching can be seen as the main source and starting point of borrowing [2, p. 508].

The modalities of borrowing as a result of language contact or bilingualism depend on a number of socially defined conditions. These include various asymmetrical relationships between the languages and their speakers: the relative size of the speech communities, which may represent a linguistic majority or minority, the level of prestige of the languages in question, the aspects of cultural domination [4, p. 345]. Naturally, the language tends to borrow elements from a numerically superior language in contact or a language that is perceived as more prestigious institutionally and socially, even if this language belongs to a minority [4, p. 345]. However, according to F. Field, two factors are the most important: the length and the intensity of the contact. The first implies that “the longer a particular community remains bilingual, in principle, the more likely speakers and languages will affect each other”, while “the farther into the fabric of society that bilingualism runs”, the more substantial is the influence on the receiving language [4, p. 345]. As a historically bilingual country, Canada provides a unique setting for studying the effects of bilingualism on the borrowing process and the use of foreign loans. This is even more true in the case of Quebec, the only French-speaking and the most bilingual province of Canada.

Based on his NARVS (North American Regional Vocabulary Survey) project from the early 2000s, C. Boberg points out that French loanwords with relatively few occurrences tend to be used more frequently outside Montreal, the largest and most bilingual city in Quebec [5]. Although there are many studies on the role of bilingualism in the process of borrowing and the resulting nature of

borrowed items and the extent of their use, this counterintuitive gap in the relative frequency of less widely used French loanwords in Quebec English has received very little attention. Therefore, it is particularly relevant to consider this research topic.

The aim of this paper is to identify and analyse the patterns of use of French loanwords in Quebec English by Montrealers and residents of other major cities in Quebec and to determine the reasons for the above-mentioned difference, thus adding a new perspective to existing variationist studies of Quebec English and the relations between bilingualism and borrowing in general.

Methodology

This study builds on the phenomenon first described by C. Boberg (2012) and integrates insights from A. Backus (1996), Li Wei (2007), J. Treffers-Daller (2010), M. Fee and J. McAlpine (2011), P. Durkin (2014, 2020) and Y. Matras (2020).

A key component of the research is a quantitative content analysis of French loanwords in Quebec English, focusing on their usage in Montreal and the rest of the province. The analysis is based on geolocated X (formerly Twitter) posts published between 01.01.2014 and 01.06.2024. Only posts automatically identified as written in English were included, with manual verification ensuring accuracy.

The study presents frequency data for ten French loanwords, five of which were classified as highly frequent (occurring more than 100 times in Montreal posts) and the other five as less frequent. The selection of loanwords for analysis was based on those previously identified in studies by cited researchers (e.g., C. Boberg, M. Fee and J. McAlpine), with priority given to the terms that appeared consistently throughout the study period. Although the initial set included a slightly wider range of loanwords, those with extremely rare occurrences (fewer than ten) or with limited available data (not covering the entire period from 2014 to 2024) were excluded. This approach ensured that the final sample consisted of loanwords with stable usage patterns, allowing for a reliable comparison between Montreal and the rest of Quebec.

Historical Background and Official Bilingualism in Canada

From the very beginning of its modern history, Canada was home to both English-speaking and French-speaking settlers. The French were the first to establish a colony on the shores of



Acadia (now the province of Nova Scotia) in 1605 and on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, with Samuel de Champlain founding the future Quebec City in 1608 [6, p. 37]. In 1610, the English also established several settlements in Newfoundland [6, p. 82]. Although Canada remained undeveloped and sparsely populated for more than a century, there was constant contact between French-speaking and English-speaking settlers and traders. The entirety of Canada came under British rule when France ceded what was then known as New France to Britain in 1763 [7]. However, the colony remained predominantly French-speaking. The English-speaking majority in Canada did not emerge until after the American Revolution, when so-called United Empire Loyalists (Americans that remained loyal to Britain) emigrated to Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia [6, p. 105]. They were later followed by immigrants from Great Britain and Ireland. These demographic changes, combined with a certain concern on the part of the government for the loyalty of the French-Canadian population, led to discriminatory practices and attempts at assimilation against French-Canadians [7, 8]. Nevertheless, as early as 1867, the British North America Act, which effectively created the Canadian federation, established “English and French as legislative and judicial languages in federal and Quebec institutions” [9]. The rather limited implementation of these norms, together with the fact that the French-speaking population of the rest of Canada was not granted the same rights, led to certain tensions between the English-speaking and French-speaking communities in the mid-20th century.

To ease tensions with the French-speaking minority, with some voices calling for the independence of Quebec as the only way to ensure the survival of the French language, the Official Languages Act was passed by the Canadian Parliament in 1969 [10]. The Act established both English and French as the official languages of Canada at the federal level. It also stipulated that substantial minorities across Canada speaking one of the official languages should be provided with education and government services in the official language of their choice. Provincial implementation of these standards varies. New Brunswick is the only province in Canada that is officially bilingual. In Quebec, French has been the only official provincial language since 1974, although the English-speaking minority has access to some government services in English. Nevertheless, all provinces have policies to promote bilingualism, especially in school education [10].

All these measures, as well as the cultural and historical reasons mentioned above, result in a rather high percentage of bilinguals in Canada in general (up to 18% in 2021) and especially in Quebec (42.8% for English-speaking and 69.2% for French-speaking Quebecers)¹. More importantly, these numbers are increasing, especially among young people. For example, the number of young Canadians learning French as a second language has increased by 41.3% since 2011². Naturally, these trends and the long-standing historical particularities of the language situation in Canada have had a profound impact on the process of borrowing and the use of loanwords in the country. Due to the particularly high level of bilingualism in Quebec, the paper will focus on the use of French loanwords in the English language of this province.

Borrowing and Code-Switching

In the context of borrowing and the influence of bilingualism in this regard, it is important to distinguish between the terms “borrowing”, “loanword” and “code-switching”. Borrowing is usually understood as “the incorporation of features of one language into another” [11, p. 3]. This definition covers a wide range of elements: phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic. However, the most common of these is lexical borrowing [8, p. 10]. According to the British linguist P. Durkin, lexical borrowing is “the process by which lexical items from one language are replicated in another language” [1, p. 169]. In line with E. Haugen’s classification, he distinguishes in this category between loanwords and loan blends, the latter being represented by cases involving a certain degree of adaptation to the norms of the receiving language [1, p. 169].

Finally, a distinction must be made between borrowing and code-switching. Y. Matras defines code-switching as “the alteration of languages within a conversation” [12, p. 107]. Y. Matras says that two types of code-switching are usually recognised: alternational code-switching, which implies a change of language at the boundaries of sentences or utterances, and insertional code-switching, i.e. “the insertion of a word or phrase into an utterance or sentence formed in a particular base or frame

¹ Government of Canada. *Statistics on Official Languages in Canada*. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/official-languages-bilingualism/publications/statistics.html#a2> (accessed December 10, 2024).

² Ibid.



language” [12, p. 107]. The fact that individual words can also be seen as code-switching leads to a debate about how to distinguish borrowing from code-switching in these cases. Linguists sometimes try to distinguish between the two phenomena on the basis of their frequency, although there is no uniform way of doing so. Another possible criterion, first proposed by S. Poplack, D. Sankoff and C. Miller, is the degree of integration: those items that are structurally integrated into the receiving language are described as borrowed, even if the resulting loanword is not established in the receiving language from the point of view of its frequency – hence, the term “nonce borrowing” is introduced [12, p. 112]. However, there are scholars, for example A. Backus, who argue that when a single foreign word is “inserted” into a native language utterance, “that does not normally entail a switch in language” [3, p. 66]. Some linguists, such as H. Schendl, cited by P. Durkin, question the actual need for the distinction between borrowing and code-switching as distinct phenomena for multilingual speakers [13, p. 294].

Due to the complexity of the subject and the fact that in this paper we only consider established words of French origin in Quebec English that have already been mentioned by dictionaries and other researchers, any isolated cases of their use will be assumed to be the result of lexical borrowing rather than code-switching.

Borrowing in Quebec

Given the language situation in Canada, and in Quebec in particular, it seems plausible that all the criteria for the spread of borrowing should be met in the bilingual setting of this province. C. Boberg points out that the language policies in Canada and in Quebec in particular since the 1970s can be expected to lead to an increase in lexical and grammatical borrowing in Quebec English [5, p. 496]. On the basis of the profound French influence, M. Fee and J. McAlpine consider modern Quebec English to be a “distinct dialect, or regional variety, of Canadian English” [14, p. 480]. This should be all the more true in the case of Montreal, the largest and most bilingual city in Quebec: the overall proportion of bilinguals in the city rose to 56.4% according to the 2021 census, up from 52.4% in 2001³.

³ Statistics Canada. *2021 Census of Population. Profile table*. 2023. Available at: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed December 26, 2024).

C. Boberg cites data from his NARVS project, a survey of McGill University students from different regions of Canada in which respondents were asked to select a word from a given set that they used most often for a given definition. In the survey, C. Boberg included a number of words that are characteristic of Quebec English but are virtually unknown outside Quebec. He shows the results of the survey for different regions, including Montreal and Quebec outside the city. C. Boberg shows that for some of these words there is little difference between Montreal and the rest of Quebec (*all-dressed pizza*, a loan translation of the French *toute garnie*; *depanneur* for a convenience store; *chalet* for a cabin or a cottage; *one/two-and-a-half apartment*, reflecting the Québécois-style system of counting rooms – a number of separate rooms and a bathroom as a half), and for the word *trio* (a combo in a fast food restaurant), the rate was higher in Montreal than in the rest of Quebec. However, for the remaining 4 out of 9 words (*stage* for an apprenticeship or internship; *guichet* for an ATM; *autoroute* for a highway; *library* for a bookcase, modelling the French *bibliothèque* which can mean both a library and a bookcase), which are generally less frequent than the ones just mentioned, the frequency outside Montreal was significantly higher than in the city [5, p. 499–501].

C. Boberg points out that a number of loans in Quebec English have been imposed administratively: the public institutions such as the *CEGEP* (*Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*, a two-year pre-university college that provides a diploma required for university admission) are prohibited by law from being translated into English [5, p. 497]. The same applies to political parties, such as the current governing party in Quebec, the *CAQ* (*Coalition Avenir Québec*), or the former governing pro-independence party, the *PQ* (*Parti Québécois*), while their members and supporters are sometimes referred to as *caquistes* and *péquistes*.

In addition to these words, the present study will discuss the frequency of use of the more freely chosen loanwords: *SAQ* (*Société des alcools du Québec*, a provincial monopoly on the sale of alcoholic beverages and, through metonymy, a liquor store), *terrasse* (a restaurant patio), *pure laine* (a Quebecer of pure French-Canadian origin), *chalet* (a cottage or cabin), *vedette* (a movie star) and *garderie* (a daycare centre).

Based on X (formerly Twitter) posts between 01.01.2014 and 01.06.2024 in the English language with the specified geolocation, we divided French



loanwords in Quebec English into more and less frequent categories and identified a number of their occurrences for tweets posted from Montreal and from the five largest cities in Quebec outside Greater

Montreal: Quebec City and its metropolitan area, Saguenay, Gatineau, Sherbrooke and Trois-Rivières. Table 1 below presents statistics on the use of more frequent French loanwords.

Table 1. More frequent French loanwords in Montreal and other cities in Quebec

Loanword	Montreal (M)	Other cities (Q)	Q to M ratio, %
CAQ	1267	188	14.8
		Quebec City – 118 Saguenay – 3 Gatineau – 61 Sherbrooke – 0 Trois-Rivières – 6	
CEGEP / cégep	124	32	25.8
		Quebec City – 23 Saguenay – 3 Gatineau – 2 Sherbrooke – 1 Trois-Rivières – 3	
chalet	149	27	18.2
		Quebec City – 14 Saguenay – 3 Gatineau – 3 Sherbrooke – 7 Trois-Rivières – 0	
PQ	632	108	17.0
		Quebec City – 82 Saguenay – 0 Gatineau – 22 Sherbrooke – 3 Trois-Rivières – 1	
SAQ	202	38	18.8
		Quebec City – 28 Saguenay – 0 Gatineau – 3 Sherbrooke – 4 Trois-Rivières – 3	

It shows that the difference in frequency of use between Montreal and other major cities in Quebec is relatively large for these loanwords. However, this does not mean that these words are less used outside Montreal: most of them are related to everyday topics such as politics, education and government administration. Rather, these figures reflect the disparity in population (about 1 to 4 for the ratio of the combined population of the five cities to the population of Montreal). Nevertheless, the results are different for loanwords with fewer occurrences, as shown in Table 2.

As can be seen, these less frequent French loanwords tend to be used more commonly in Quebec outside Montreal, since their number of occurrences in the city and in the rest of the province is relatively close, despite the difference of 1 to 4 in terms of population. C. Boberg explains this fact by the greater immersion of Quebecers outside Montreal in the French-speaking social environment and by “more pervasive bilingualism” [5, p. 501].

This last argument seems unconvincing. The idea that the intensity and length of bilingual contact affect the nature and extent of borrowing suggests



Table 2. Less frequent French loanwords in Montreal and other cities in Quebec

Loanword	Montreal (M)	Other cities (Q)	Q to M ratio, %
garderie	12	4	33.3
		Quebec City – 2 Saguenay – 2 Gatineau – 0 Sherbrooke – 0 Trois-Rivières – 0	
métis / metis	88	73	82.9
		Quebec City – 26 Saguenay – 1 Gatineau – 44 Sherbrooke – 1 Trois-Rivières – 1	
pure laine	16	16	100.0
		Quebec City – 14 Saguenay – 1 Gatineau – 0 Sherbrooke – 1 Trois-Rivières – 0	
terrasse	69	48	69.5
		Quebec City – 41 Saguenay – 1 Gatineau – 2 Sherbrooke – 4 Trois-Rivières – 0	
vedette	4	8	200.0
		Quebec City – 6 Saguenay – 0 Gatineau – 0 Sherbrooke – 0 Trois-Rivières – 2	

that it should theoretically be more common in Montreal or, at least, that its frequency should be at the same level regardless of the number of occurrences. As mentioned above, 56.4% of all Montrealers are bilingual. In Montreal, English is the first official language of 26.3% of the population, compared with 17% in Gatineau, 5.1% in Sherbrooke, 1.9% in Quebec City and only 1.4% in Trois-Rivières⁴. At the same time, the number of people who speak both languages is considerable in all these cities: 65% in Gatineau – even more than in Montreal, 46.1% in Sherbrooke, 42.7% in Quebec City and 33.1% in Trois-Rivières⁵. These figures show that

although a significant proportion of the population in Quebec's smaller cities is also bilingual, they largely prefer to speak French when given the choice. This suggests that their overall level of English proficiency is lower than that of Montrealers. Given this widespread bilingualism in Quebec, with varying levels of proficiency, the fact that loanwords with fewer occurrences are used more frequently outside Montreal seems to be explained by the individual behaviour of bilinguals, which is largely determined by their linguistic and social environment.

Language Proficiency

In this context, the aspect of bilinguals' language proficiency (in other words, whether they

⁴ Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Population. Profile table. 2023. Available at: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed December 26, 2024).

⁵ Ibid.



have a dominant language or are equally fluent in their languages) seems to be particularly important.

A. Backus explores this subject through the example of three generations of immigrants, a topic that can be however linked to our own discussion. The initial generation of immigrants, upon their arrival in the new country, find themselves in a state of forced bilingualism. They continue to predominantly use their mother tongue (ML) and acquire only a limited number of words from the language of their new home (EL). These words are used to fill lexical gaps, as local realities may have no equivalent in their mother tongue (otherwise they would use the counterpart from the ML). However, more complex units remain strictly in the ML, which means that for newly arrived immigrants, elements of the EL have no “collocational entrenchment”. These elements can only be used consciously [3, p. 134].

The second generation, typically the children of these immigrants, are inherently more immersed in the linguocultural realities of the new country. This is due to the fact that they spend more time interacting with native speakers in educational and professional settings. At the same time, the language at home is still the ML. This leads to a situation where items from the EL are accessed and used more freely, similar to the alternatives within the ML. However, the language of the parents (ML) remains dominant: despite the adoption of certain elements from the EL, speech still largely follows its structure and patterns [3, p. 134–135].

Finally, children born in the new country grow up to be balanced bilinguals. This means that there is no longer a clear dominant language. Even at home, both languages are used actively and equally, as their parents are most likely to be of the middle generation and therefore to use the EL from time to time. According to A. Backus, these balanced bilinguals “possess a high degree of collocational entrenchment, in addition to the inherent entrenchment typical of specific units” as a result of being native speakers of both languages [3, p. 136]. This means that their use of a given language does not differ lexically or syntactically from that of a monolingual native speaker. Proficiency in both languages leads to code-switching at “constituent, clause and sentence boundaries” [3, p. 135]. In the case of balanced proficient bilinguals, syntagmatic code-switching, or in A. Backus’ terms “selection of units”, which involves “a switch in language”, requires a high degree of awareness [3, p. 136]. Thus, for such bilinguals, code-switching may even be seen as a matter of conscious

choice. A. Backus points out that it is at this stage that bilinguals become “Weinreich’s ideal bilinguals”, meaning precisely that their utterances, irrespective of their complexity, are essentially monolingual: “they speak two languages and use them in the appropriate contexts, but they do not mix them” [3, p. 399].

This may be partly due to the mental representation of the two languages. Based on previous research, Li Wei suggests that in the mind of a bilingual there is a “language store for each of their two languages and a more general conceptual store” [15, p. 14]. These three stores are linked through the mediating channels of association, translation and shared images in the conceptual store. They function differently depending on the level of language proficiency. Speakers who have a dominant language tend to use it as a mediator to access their weaker language, while those who are highly proficient in both languages can articulate a concept directly in the desired language [15, p. 14].

Indeed, the work of J. Abutalebi, S. F. Cappa and D. Perani indicate that there is psycholinguistic evidence of a kind of competition between the two languages in lexical retrieval (the process of getting from a concept to a spoken word), particularly in bilinguals with a dominant language when speaking a weaker one. Production in the dominant language is more automatic, potentially leading to cases of interference in the weaker language. Recent research suggests that this competition to achieve language selection involves control mechanisms in the prefrontal cortex that cognitively process the weaker language, which is “mastered with a low degree of proficiency” [16, p. 490]. The need for such control mechanisms diminishes as proficiency in the second language increases, as evidenced by reduced prefrontal cortex activity in highly proficient bilinguals [16, p. 490]. This view is supported by the Dutch linguist K. de Bot, who believes that “cross-linguistic influences can be indicative of a lack of knowledge”. He argues that the speaker may resort to the first of the two languages when their knowledge of the second turns out to be insufficient [17, p. 400].

The boundaries for such different levels of proficiency may be generational, as in the example of immigrant communities by A. Backus, or historical, related to changes in the language situation in certain areas. Naturally, these boundaries can also be geographical and demographic. The data from the 2021 Census discussed above show that of the major cities in Quebec Montreal has the most bilingual



population, with the exception of Gatineau, and the largest proportion of Anglophones for whom English is the first language. The other cities, including Gatineau, also show significant levels of bilingualism, but they are predominantly francophone. For these French-speaking communities, less frequent exposure to English means lower level of English proficiency. This is not to say, of course, that Quebecers outside Montreal do not know how to express their ideas exclusively in English. But since French is their dominant language, which they speak most of the time, lexical retrieval in this language is likely to be more automatic for them [16, p. 490]. This in turn means that they are likely to use French as a mediator to articulate a particular concept in English, possibly leading to an increased use of less common borrowed terms. On the contrary, bilingual Montrealers, who are more exposed to contacts in both English and French due to the larger proportion of anglophone population and the generally more international nature of the city, can be generally expected to be more “balanced” and proficient in both languages. Thus, a concept can be expressed directly in a desired language without the dominant one acting as a mediator.

This reason may explain the fact that the more frequently used and therefore more established loanwords are found in proportional numbers both in Montreal and outside the city (with many of them being the names of government agencies, political parties or expressing local realities with no equivalent in English), while the less frequently used French loanwords (which often have an English equivalent), are more characteristic of the speech in Quebec outside Montreal. In the context of the present research, the same applies to the publications on X (Twitter).

Conclusion

Bilingualism remains an important feature of the language situation in Quebec and dates back to the early stages of Canada’s history.

In Quebec, more than half of the population is bilingual. The number of bilinguals is significant in all the considered cities of Quebec, ranging from 33.1% in Trois-Rivières to 65.0% in Gatineau. In Montreal, the province’s largest city, bilinguals represent 56.4% of the population. However, the majority of people with English as their first language live in Montreal (26.3% of the population). In smaller cities, their proportion is considerably lower: from 17% in Gatineau to only 1.4% in Trois-Rivières.

The statistics collected on recent posts on X (formerly Twitter), discussed in the previous paragraphs, clearly show that French loanwords with fewer occurrences are used disproportionately more often in Quebec English outside Montreal compared to more common loanwords (with more than 100 occurrences in the X publications from Montreal). The figures for these more common loanwords correlate with the population ratio: 4 to 1 for the population of Montreal compared to that of the other five largest cities in Quebec.

This phenomenon is attributed by C. Boberg to “more pervasive bilingualism” and “more complete immersion in Francophone society experienced by Anglophones outside Montreal” [5, p. 501]. However, the present study associates it with the findings on the nature of bilinguals’ linguistic behaviour, especially regarding the role of bilinguals’ language proficiency in lexical retrieval. Bilingual Quebecers outside Montreal tend to use exclusively French in their everyday interactions. This essentially limits their language use to that of a French monolingual speaker, inevitably affecting their proficiency in English.

There is growing evidence that, for a bilingual, two languages are linked by a common conceptual store. Bilinguals who are highly proficient in both their languages can be expected to articulate a given concept directly in a desired language. They are also more likely to code-switch at larger segments of speech. Overall, this seems to be the case for Montreal as a more bilingual international city.

On the contrary, for bilinguals with a dominant language, articulating a concept in their first language is faster and more automatic. For this reason, the first language is often used as a mediator to access the concept in the second language. The use of French as a mediator, resulting from less frequent interaction in English, is thought to be the reason for the relatively more frequent use of French loanwords with fewer occurrences outside Montreal. As for the loanwords with more occurrences, their widespread use in both Montreal and the rest of the province can be explained by their more established status in Quebec English, partly because of the higher frequency itself and partly because many of them have no direct equivalent in English.

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