

The real Quebec lexicon: what words mean

STEPHEN SCHEINBERG
and GRAEME DECARIE

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master - that's all."

- Lewis Carroll

Old words have taken on new meanings in Quebec society so that the unwary may find political discussion difficult without a guide. The following definitions are offered to give all citizens the opportunity to understand political discourse and the changing terminology of Quebec political life. Remember, only those who control Quebec's dictionary can also control its destiny.

Bilingual education: A little-understood virus. All that is known about it is that it is beneficial to anglo and immigrant children but extremely harmful to young francophones.

Country: The geographic home of a people united by blood and culture. Quebec is a country. Canada is not one, nor the United States. For that matter, most of the places commonly called countries will not qualify. In fact, Quebec may be the only true country on Earth since only in Quebec are people exactly alike.

Civic or territorial nationalist: A sub-species of the genus nationalist who rejects the ethnocentric baggage of the Abbé Groulx school. However, the civic nationalist states this rejection only under his breath, and is never heard from when minorities are attacked by separatist leaders. Its silence has led some observers to question whether this sub-species really exists.

Decentralization: A process whereby centralized authority in Ottawa is recentralized in Quebec.

Democracy: A system of government under which majorities are entitled to discriminate against minorities. Also a system under which a majority does not win a vote until it is able to come up with the right answer.

Election fraud: Support given to stage a feder-

alist rally. This should not be confused with massive swindling of the vote count, which is simply a minor infraction.

Ethnic: One who enjoys the benefits of Quebec's legendary tolerance of those who are different. Also a misguided - at best - individual who votes against separation, sometimes paired with "money."

Extremist: An anglophone who is not satisfied with aspects of the status quo no matter how unjust they may be; therefore should be compared with FLQ terrorists.

Humiliation: An emotion simulated by separatists at the (rare) sight of the federal government standing erect. See also "provocation," "enslavement," "oppression," "persecution," etc.

Moderate: A separatist who while striving to destroy a nation refers to anglo-rights spokesmen as extremists.

Pure laine: Outmoded term that according to a certain Parti Québécois (who verbally attacked a Hispanic hotel desk clerk on referendum night) belongs only in the "shmate" industry. But see above, "ethnics."

Québécois: Anyone can be one (non-whites will not, however, be counted in the birth rate) but one must become a separatist to deserve this appellation (see David Payne or Osvaldo Nunez, but not Howard Galganov).

Quebec economy: An economic life governed predominantly by climate or evil actions of the federal government.

Rapprochement (or bridge-building): A one-way street to separatism taken by some breast-beating anglos, not to be confused with real dialogue.

Referendum: A variety of quiz game in which one of the players sets the question, makes all the rules and ignores them whenever it is convenient. If that player loses, he or she then charges unfairness, and the game is played again and again until he or she wins. At that point, all play ceases and any renewal of the game is declared illegal. (See above: democracy).

Rights: Legislation enacted to protect majorities from minorities (See: Bill 101).

Rule of law: That which is essential when ap-

plied to contracts with Newfoundland but is inapplicable to a unilateral declaration of independence.

Separatist: Archaic term, not used in polite society. Could only apply to one who would establish an independent Quebec that would sever all economic relations with the remainder of Canada. Not applicable to those who would have their separate cake and eat it, too.

Social democrat: One who expresses rhetorical sympathy for the Quebec masses while cutting welfare, education and health spending then saddles the elderly with high drug-prescription fees. Social-democratic principles have survived primarily in preserving the safety net for MNAs and civil servants.

Soft sovereignist: One who requires more than 20 years to make up his/her mind.

Sovereignty: Nobody knows what this term really means. When used in a referendum, it is aimed at those who can read the label on an Aspirin bottle and might not be confused if "separation" were used instead. (See lobsters in the pot).

Tolerance: A feeling of acceptance extended to all people different from oneself - so long as they do not look, dress, act or talk differently.

Vendu: A separatist who becomes a federalist "clown" (see Guy Bertrand) but not a federalist who sees the clear light of separatism (see Lucien Bouchard, Marcel Masse, et al). Also appears as a sign outside a Westmount house, though the form "a vendre" is more common.

"Will of the people": The unanimous desire of all the people of Quebec, with the exception of those who do not count (see ethnics, extremists, vendus, etc.); 50 per cent plus one will be deemed to be the unanimous expression of such a "will."

These definitions, which may offer an element of humor, are alas, quite serious. Vocabulary is a powerful tool in governing our thought and our political action. When meanings are turned inside out, when commonly accepted definitions are twisted, we have an Orwellian world in which hate is love and war is peace. The battle over words is fundamental to the struggle for our future.

■ *Stephen Scheinberg and Graeme Decarie are both professors of history at Concordia University.*