

# Journal des traducteurs Translators' Journal

## The Shape of Things to Come

Nolin Trudeau

---

Volume 5, numéro 3, 3e trimestre 1960

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1057945ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1057945ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

---

Éditeur(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0316-3024 (imprimé)

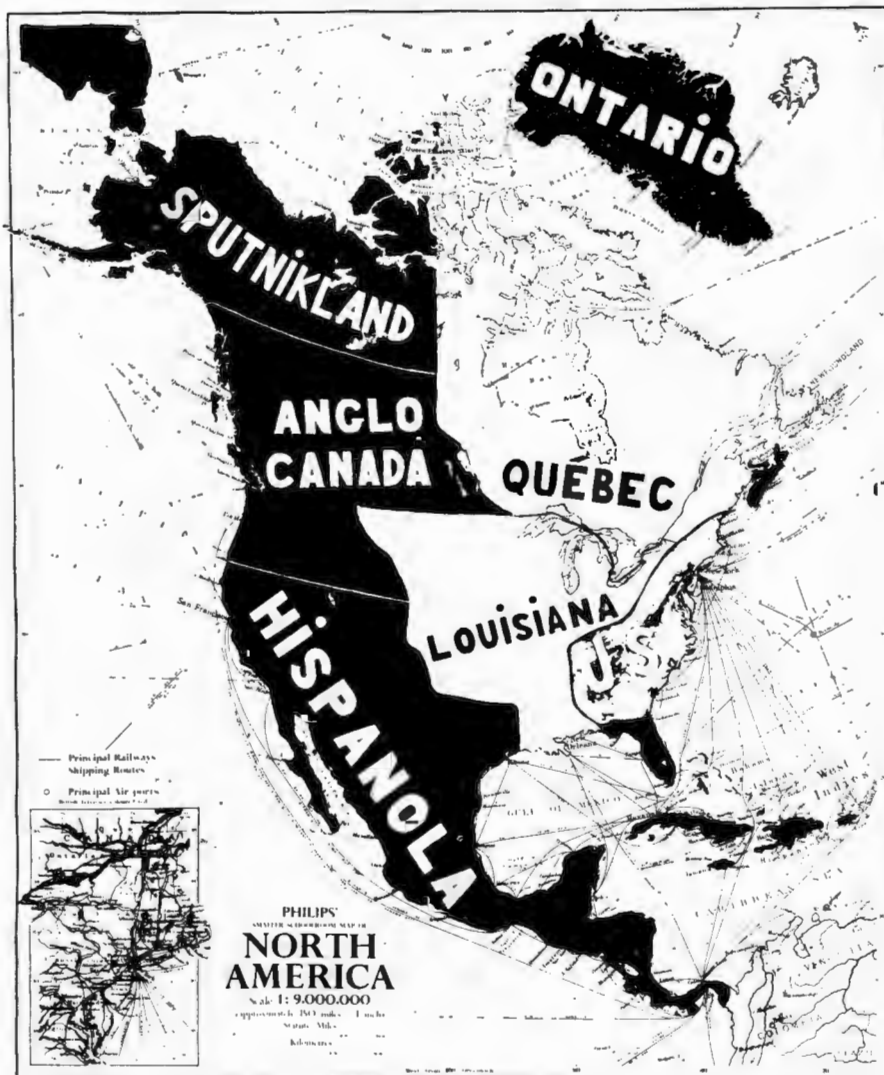
2562-2994 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

---

Citer cet article

Trudeau, N. (1960). The Shape of Things to Come. *Journal des traducteurs / Translators' Journal*, 5(3), 76–80. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1057945ar>



**NORTH AMERICA — YEAR 2060**

## THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

*Nolin TRUDEAU, Montréal*

My talk to you today is in a way a fable. Some may call it a vision, others a prediction, but most will think it is just wishful thinking, which maybe it is.

Let us suppose we are in the year 2060. Needless to say many changes have occurred since 1960.

Between 1960 and 2060, we have had three wars : one in 1984, which was won by Russia, introducing George Orwell's era of the big brother; the second, won by the Allies, in the year 2018, after a four-year conflict which began in August 2014 with the assassination of the president of the Republic of England, at the hands of a member of the I.R.A.; and, finally, a third great war with which this continent had nothing to do. It took place from 2039 to 2045, when India and Japan united to defeat the combined forces of China and what was left of the Soviet Union.

I would like you now to take a look at this map of North America. You will see that following the Armistice of the year 2018, the United States had to sell back Louisiana to France, who paid 15 trillion francs for this territory as against the 15 million dollars the U. S. paid for it way back in 1803. Louisiana is one of the two areas marked in white. In 1987 and again in 2015, this area was invaded and destroyed by the Russians.

To the West, in black, starting from Mexico and stretching to the northern border of California, we have a Spanish-American country somewhat similar to that which existed prior to 1845, the year of the Texas annexation and 1848, year of the Mexican cession.

The area in the East shows the United States of 2060 made up of its original 13 colonies. The area, known prior to the Lewis and Clark expedition as the Northwest Territory — ceded to England by France in 1763 and *given* to the U. S. in 1783 — has also been sold back to France and is now a part of Louisiana. Together with Ontario, which is now located in Greenland, this part which was the industrial heart of North America was also annihilated by the U.S.S.R.

The entire English population of Central Canada and of the Central United States was decimated. Following the repurchase of Louisiana, more than two-thirds of the population of France moved into the reacquired territory. And in 2060, the French population here now totals 100 million, as opposed to 75 million English-speaking people in the New England States and the Spanish-speaking population of 150 million in Mexico and what was formerly the Western United States.

Now French-Canada, which was spared the great Russian invasion of 1984, has become the most populous area of Canada. It stretches from Nova Scotia to the Red River. English-speaking Canada consists of the Western provinces, and spreads into the Oregon territory.

The population of French-Canada is 45 million and that of English-speaking Canada, approximately 15 million.

The bulk of commerce and industry in Canada is now run by French-speaking Canadians who, upon acquiring a healthy majority some 75 years ago, promptly reverted to unilinguism.

Within the boundaries of French-Canada, there are various small pockets of *bilingual* Anglo-Canadians, mostly of Irish descent.

Now in order to sell their goods and services to the English-speaking people of the West, the Franco-Canadian manufacturers, advertisers, and businessmen, must

of all necessity have their advertising, sales promotion material, recipes, operating manuals, and the like, translated into English, and they are doing what they believe to be their level best to make inroads in the expanding English-Canada market which had always been largely agricultural, but where great discoveries of oil, minerals, etc., are creating an industrial revolution.

Today, in Toronto, which has been renamed Fort-Rouillé, the "Cercle de la vente et de la publicité" (The Sales and Advertising Club) is holding an English market conference, in an effort to show the French-speaking advertisers who are its members, what they should do to sell their wares in English Canada.

Over the past 15 years, there has been a growing interest on the part of these French-Canadian manufacturers towards the English-speaking Canadian consumers. It is felt however that these Anglo-Canadians are a constant source of trouble. They have a large group of vociferous narrow-minded nationalists who repeatedly demand that their language be respected and claim that everything which is produced in French should be in turn published in English.

At this English-market conference, a panel of distinguished bilingual Anglo-Canadian experts have been endeavouring to convince the French advertisers that the West is now a big market and that if they want to tap it properly, they must sell to it in English.

We have with us today a gentleman by the name of O'Neill, who is explaining to us... in French, *because we do not speak English*... what it is all about. His firm specializes in English translation, copywriting and public relations, and he is trying to convince us that we cannot translate literally from French to English because this results in stilted, thus, poor English copy which will not achieve the desired results among the English people of Canada.

From here on may I quote Mr. O'Neill in his 2060 speech :

"*Lavigne and Pelletier*, of Quebec City, Canada's largest manufacturers of soap and beauty products, who are also important producers of food specialties, could secure a much larger share of the English-Canadian market if they employed a larger number of English-speaking salesmen.

"Some of the *Lavigne and Pelletier* salesmen who come to Calgary, speak no English whatsoever ! While in the larger cities of the West, like Calgary, Edmonton and Winnipeg, the population is fairly bilingual, it must not be forgotten that in smaller centers and in the agricultural areas, the English population speaks no French whatsoever and therefore cannot understand French salesmen, French circulars and French advertisements. This obtains even more West of the Rockies where the population is entirely English-speaking; Vancouver and Victoria, for instance, are completely unilingual cities, and their inhabitants have no intention whatsoever of learning French.

"If you French-Canadian advertisers want to sell in the West and on the Pacific Coast, you not only have to secure English translations of your texts and hire English-speaking salesmen and advertise in English dailies, periodicals, over the radio and on television stations, but you must also try to place yourselves in the shoes of your Anglo-Canadian clients, and create English advertising from scratch."

Mr. O'Neill is highly critical of the tendency of the French-speaking manufacturers to have all their English translation done in Toronto... pardon me... Fort-Rouillé, Montréal, and Québec, at the last minute, when all the French copy has been approved, and when it is too late to effect changes in art treatment which is not suitable in the West.

"You spend hours, even weeks, creating French ads... some of which are intended exclusively for Western consumption and will never be used in French... but when it comes to writing that ad in English, you figure it is not worthwhile paying for a good job, getting a good man to do it, and giving him reasonable time to produce it. And, which is worse, you do not send him the art work !

"Sometimes, in Winnipeg," adds Mr. O'Neill, "we receive a stack of advertisements which are all ready to go to press in French. We are asked to translate them in a hurry, and rush them back to Fort-Rouillé where it is typeset. They rush them back to us, for proofreading, and vice-versa, and then it comes back all the way to the West. How illogical can you get ?

"Quite often", says Mr. O'Neill, "and I hope this will not offend my distinguished audience, the French copy you send us is rather poor, ambiguous, sometimes im-

possible to understand and even more difficult to translate. What used to be a clear, crisp, concise language has been bastardized to a point where all sorts of high-pressure words are coined at will, and for which we have no English equivalents.

"Furthermore", declares the speaker of the year 2060, "the French-Canadian mentality has evolved considerably over the past century. You have become more Gallic than your ancestors ever were. In our sedate, prudish provinces of Western Canada we are now getting advertisements which cause our young girls to blush and our Protestant Ministers to fulminate against the lax morals of this era. You should remember that in our neck of the woods, bosoms should be covered, legs not too evident, and that situations which suggest too much promiscuity should be carefully avoided. Edmonton is not Paris, nor are Vancouver and Victoria Sodom and Gomorrah! And while in the East, Bébé Latour is a national institution, we cannot stand what she stands for! We have our own celebrities, actors, personalities, traditions, and institutions, and you should build your English advertisement around them, not around Bébé Latour, Pit Caribou, Hon. Oscar Pelletier, the old-fashioned game of hockey which you still play, but which we abandoned years ago in favour of ice cricket. And leave us alone with your blue, fleur-de-lys flag. We still use the glorious Union Jack of pre-revolutionary days. And when it comes to food, why try and shove your "soupe aux pois, tourtières, fricot de pattes de cochon, and tarte à la ferlouche" down our throats. We have not got French stomachs, by gar!

"Coming back to the language difficulties" — if I may quote Mr. O'Neill further — "*Lavigne and Pelletier* have a product which is called 'Pschitt' and frankly, this sounds like heck to the English ears of Western Canadians". He adds that "such typically descriptive and very French trade names as 'Couvrefeu', 'Sainedent', 'Bon-matin', 'Jambonbon', are extremely tricky words to place in slogans, jingles, etc. because no English words rhyme with them. They are descriptive respectively of a fire extinguisher, a dentifrice, an alarm clock and a ham, but who knows that in English?"

In his address to the "Cercle de la vente et de la publicité de Fort-Rouillé (formerly Toronto)" Mr. O'Neill stresses the fact that it is extremely difficult for firms like his to adapt French proverbs which are already illustrated. For instance, in the case of "Bonne renommée vaut mieux que ceinture dorée" (a good reputation is better than a golden belt) Mr. O'Neill says that "a golden belt is meaningless in English Canada and it is essential to change the art work because it simply does not fit the English equivalent."

"You, Frenchmen", Mr. O'Neill states "have a tendency to use in your headings, the 'sex' of articles, forgetting that only people have a sex in English. For instance, last week, that ancient and respectable English daily, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, received an advertisement from the Quebec Advertising Firm of *Forget and Messier*, manufacturers and distributors of tobacco products and smoking accessories. The heading of this advertisement is: 'He is full of flame for her'. The art work shows a pipe and a lighter in the foreground, and a young couple in the background. In English we cannot use the slogan nor the illustration. However, being bilingual, I appreciate the fact that, in French, this ad is terrific. Furthermore, the name of the lighter is 'Feuconstant', which in English sounds like 'few constant', which sounds like the dickens! The pipe, which is one of the biggest sales items in French Canada, does not sell well out West because it is called 'La pipe Jos Latour', after a French Canadian rebel of the revolution which followed the war of 2018, whom you consider a hero but whom we consider a traitor. And if I may use this ad as a further example, the name of the firm *Forget and Messier* which is so prominently displayed in all their ads, is certainly not conducive to increased sales in English Canada where it sounds as it reads 'Forget and Messier'."

May I remind you here again that Mr. O'Neill is speaking to a group of several hundred completely French-speaking executives who know no English whatsoever, have little desire to learn it, and feel it is not fair to have to spend such a great deal of money on a population of 15 million people when the French population of Canada totals 45 million.

According to Mr. O'Neill, last month, October 2060, Jos Bilodeau, President of the largest advertising agency in Canada, *Bilodeau, Tranchemontagne, Lalancette & Latremouille*, of Montreal, was heard to say: "Those English-Canadian translators never agree on what is good English. We use one man one week and fifty other English translators find his material lousy. Now, I learned English in high school

and I had satisfactory notes. So I know English well enough to read it, and this piece of copy which was translated by Patrick O'Brien, seems quite satisfactory to me because it sounds like English, and I can understand it, whereas this man Sean McCarthy, he re-writes our copy and we don't know what he is talking about, although some people claim that his work is excellent."

I am still quoting Mr. O'Neill who is still quoting Jos. Bilodeau: "Furthermore," says Mr. Bilodeau, "I have an English secretary. She's perfectly bilingual. Quite often, when we are in a hurry, I will have her translate an advertisement for us from French to English. Although I don't know much English, I am sure she does a wonderful job. She's a graduate of a Vancouver high school, you know. But when we send out these advertisements to the Western papers, you should hear the howls! It's just like a client of ours. He had one of his own English-speaking salesmen do a translation of a catalogue from French to English. Granted it was technical, but the man sells these products, so he should be a good translator. Well, there were so many complaints that the client had to have his catalogue retranslated.

"Now in Winnipeg (I am still quoting Mr. Bilodeau) there are some advertising agency services which claim that all our translation should be done in the heart of the English market. I'm against that. Some agencies do it, but I use local English translators. If I followed Mr. O'Neill's advice, we would have to send every piece of French copy to Winnipeg, wait until the translation comes back to Montreal, have it typeset by French-speaking typesetters who do not know any English and send it back to Winnipeg for proofreading by the English translators. This is a costly procedure and entails considerable loss of time in spite of the new Sputnik mail service. I frankly believe that the English market is too small to warrant all this trouble and expense."

Is Mr. Bilodeau right? In this year 2060, should he not realize that 25 per cent of the population of Canada may well represent the margin of profit of all his clients? Would he not be wise to have a branch in Winnipeg and one in Vancouver, well staffed with English-speaking Canadians who are capable of creating brand new campaigns for the important English market?

At the conclusion of his remarks, Mr. O'Neill states: "I have here before me a document which is a hundred years old, and in which a speaker, addressing a French market Conference in 1960, stated:

'If your sales and advertising functions cover the whole of Canada, remember that from twenty-five to thirty per cent of your customers are French-speaking. If you operate only in Eastern Canada, the percentage jumps to over forty. If you are restricted to Quebec province, it exceeds eighty per cent. And if you are a wholesaler or retailer, dealing only with the Greater Montreal area, your territory is more than two-thirds French. In the latter two cases, the importance of your French-speaking purchasers far outstrips that of your English-speaking customers.

'Hence, when one considers the French market on an exclusively provincial or local basis, one begins to wonder whether it would not be more expedient and economically sound to communicate with that market directly in its own language, and by that I mean to create and originate the sales message, the advertising campaign, directly in French, rather than perpetuate that frequently unsatisfactory and almost always too hasty practice of English-to-French translation.

'The French market, which is rapidly approaching the five million mark if it has not exceeded it, certainly deserves such a treatment. This would provide the ideal means of communicating with your consumers of French extraction who, in these prosperous years, and in these days of constantly increasing wages, have billions to spend on your products and services.'

"My recollection of what occurred in the ensuing years is vague" says Mr. O'Neill, "but it seems to me that what applied to the minority French market of 100 years ago applies just as well to the minority English market of today."

