Culture

Pierrette THIBAULT and Diane VINCENT, *Un corpus de français parlé. Montréal 84: historique, méthodes et perspectives de recherche, Recherches Sociolinguistiques 1*, Québec: Département de Langues et Linguistique, Université Laval, 1990. 145pp + vi

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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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What we seem to have, therefore, is an excellent study of traditional and modern reincarnation belief among North American Indians and Inuit —the book's essential purpose; and a tempting enticement to explore how ancient, marginal spiritual traditions can impact upon larger contemporary religious and cultural studies.

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In 1984, a group of Canadian researchers made yet another significant contribution to an already impressive body of research which over the past 30 years has kept Canada at the forefront of the field of sociolinguistics. Thibault and Vincent (1990) is an account of this important scholarly endeavor, a project referred to as *Montréal 84*.

The *Montréal 84* research team of Thibault, Vincent, D. Sankoff and Kemp proposed to add a real time dimension to the already well-known Sankoff-Cedergren 1971 corpus of the spoken French of Montreal. The researchers of *Montréal 84* reinterviewed half of the original informants of the *Sankoff-Cedergren* project which added a time depth of 13 years to the speech data. Although not normally considered a full generation lapse, it still presents an adequate passage of time for interesting sociolinguistic phenomena possibly to occur.

A good deal of Thibault and Vincent (1990) compares various aspects of the *Montréal 84* project to its predecessor, the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus. *Montréal 84* involved the reinterviewing of 60 of the original 120 informants of the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus. To this, they added 12 new informants between the ages of 15 and 25 years. This book discusses all aspects of the collection and transcription of the 72 interviews of the *Montréal 84* corpus. The goals of the two projects differ slightly, partly because of the changing social climate. The *Sankoff-Cedergren* linguists had a social statement to make about studying supposed "non-standard" dialects. It was a commonly held belief at that time that Québécois was full

of errors and aberrations. In response to this myth, many sociolinguists assumed the task of demonstrating the systematic grammars of "dialects". They showed that dialects had grammatical rules and patterns just like any standard languages. *Montréal 84* had no such social agenda. As far as the linguistic goals were concerned, the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus focussed on phonetics, morphophonology and morphosyntax, while placed more emphasis on syntax, lexicon and discourse.

From the "Introduction" one gleans that Thibault and Vincent (1990) could be viewed as a "manual" for sociolinguists or anthropological linguists. In this sense it is a highly useful tool in that it serves as a guide for researchers who intend to computerize or constitute a corpus themselves. Thibault and Vincent's work is especially important in this regard, since they spare the novice researcher the seemingly insurmountable obstacles involved in the groundwork of corpus creation (i.e. refinements in methodology, the "why's" behind transcription conventions). Their experience is valuable and can save future researchers from making irreparable mistakes that they otherwise could not anticipate. Furthermore, as is customary in sociolinguistic research, corpora are often made open to other linguists for consultation. Thibault and Vincent (1990) serves as a manual for visiting researchers. It is a detailed description of the methodology and essential background information for outside scholars.

Chapters Two and Three are a chronological presentation of the collection and transcription of the interviews. They compare aspects of the method used in the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus as opposed to improvements used in *Montréal 84*, especially in terms of numbers of researchers and time spent on each step. There is also an in-depth description of the social characteristics of the informants.

Chapter Two begins with a brief discussion of the ethical considerations involved in the task of reinterviewing the 1971 informants who were originally assured anonymity. The *Montréal 84* research team maintained the same high ethical standards and scientific rigour to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees as in the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus. Furthermore, there seemed to be little or no problem with a new group of researchers tracking down the original informants in the name of science. Once the *Montréal 84* informants were located, it was necessary to conduct additional fieldwork to fill the void left by the aging of the original informants. There was no

longer anyone remaining in the 15-25 age group. Thus, the *Montréal 84* corpus includes twelve new informants. The discussion in this chapter also details problems encountered in finding the original informants after a thirteen year period. Occurrences such as death and divorce as well as the building of a highway through a neighborhood impeded the search. The consequences of these inevitable changes led to more young informants than the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus, more women than men and more people from a higher socio-economic level. Most of the informants had moved. Few undertook or finished academic studies, and fewer were socially mobile.

The *Montréal 84* interviews were structured after the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus and conducted by students specializing in Anthropology and skilled in ethnographic field techniques. Among the usual field notes, the fieldworkers included remarks to indicate levels of outside noise as an indication for future possible acoustic analysis. In general, it was felt that the tapes probably contained too much interference in the form of normal household noise.

Chapter Three examines all aspects of the transcription process. Technological advances have improved the quality of transcription for *Montréal 84* as compared to the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus. Furthermore, in 1971 secretaries transcribed the interviews. They took 12 minutes of transcription time for each audio-taped minute. In 1984, students did the transcriptions, and took 18-20 minutes for each minute for a total of about three days per cassette. (The discrepancy in work time reflects the type of transcription: the one the secretaries did was a lot closer to standard French while the students were asked to respect the spoken characteristics of the language used by the interviewees.) The rigour with which the transcription process was conducted, while necessary and expected, is nevertheless impressive. The tapes were listened to at least two times and in many cases, three. Transcriptions were then read yet another time to ensure uniformity in transcribing.

The transcriptions consist of a complete text of everything uttered by both the interviewer and the informant. A second transcription consists of just the utterances of the informant which served as the base text to be concorded. The concordance also includes a reverse concordance (which the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus didn't have) to facilitate morphological studies of verbal endings and such.

Every researcher who transcribes must confront the difficult and involved decisions regarding how and what to transcribe. Two main objectives guided the transcription conventions for *Montréal 84*: comparability and accessibility. The researchers anticipated comparative analyses with the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus as well as other computerized corpora. They also wanted "user friendly" conventions to facilitate analysis. The level of standardization aspired to by the sociolinguists of *Montréal 84* is described in the following quote:

"Les transcriptions des corpus de 1971 et de 1984 suivent l'orthographe standard, ce qui permet de regrouper dans les concordances les occurrences des items lexicaux, indépendamment des variations phonétiques qu'ils connaissent à l'oral....Une priorité a été accordée au repérage de certaines élisions de morphèmes et des prononciations non standard des consonnes finales, à la distinction entre quelques homophones et à l'identification des expressions toutes faites....Les transcripteurs étaient invités à signaler...les prononciations stigmatisées ou particulières..."[1] (p. 35).

In addition, the level of detail transcribed in *Montréal 84* is innovative in comparison to the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus in its treatment of back-channel phenomena.

Chapter Four is a discussion of the interview as a speech event ("une interaction verbale"). It also examines the content of the recordings in reference to the questions asked. The *Sankoff-Cedergren* interviews were semi-spontaneous or partially-directed in the interests of obtaining better quality data for linguistic analysis. This facilitates comparative analysis since the interviews are then more uniform. The *Montréal 84* procedure for interviewing continued in the same vain also for the purposes of comparison across the *Montréal 84* interviews, as well as with the *Sankoff-Cedergren* interviews. The majority of the interviews were conducted within the home. Occasionally there was more than one informant present, usually another family member.

This chapter also details the communicative situation as well as the types of analyses appropriate for the type of data collected. The authors felt that it was equally important to describe the contents of the recordings as inspired by Goffman's concept of an "interaction" in which one must clarify the rapport between the speakers during the interview to reveal any possible interactional constraints at play. This type of discussion is too often absent in sociolinguistic studies. Informants are well aware of the dialogic structure of the interview and by agreeing to be

interviewed, they agree to "cooperate" conversationally (i.e. let the interviewer ask the questions, agree to respond voluntarily, reveal a great amount of personal information to a near stranger, etc.). This cooperation is well-illustrated in the excerpt of one of the *Montréal 84* informants, "Procédons. Pose-moi tes questions" (p. 46). By comparison, less emphasis on the description of the questionnaire and the situation surrounding the interview is contained in reports on the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus. Another emphasis in *Montréal 84* is a complete, personal profile of the individual's aspirations and degree of success in life. For the most part the two sets of interviews are nearly identical; the differences are more or less subtle. The *Montréal 84* interviews are characterized by more unity and are much tighter structurally. In the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus the interviews are conducted on a "cold" visit while the first contacts for *Montréal 84* were by telephone. The procedure for the latter project was largely guided by ethical concerns.

Different aspects of discourse structure of the interviews are examined in Chapter Five. While the main goal of the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus was to facilitate conversation with the informant, *Montréal 84* placed more emphasis on getting high quality linguistic content in the responses. Fewer questions were asked and, as a result, more narratives were elicited. Nevertheless, the diversity of discourse types is comparable between the two samples. In this chapter, the authors examine the discourse composition and the interactive dynamics of the interview. *Montréal 84* yielded longer and more complex discourse structures than the *Sankoff-Cedergren* corpus. In analyzing the discourse structures, a technique was devised for quantifying discourse productivity and volume in order to study the correlation of the frequency of complex responses with the occurrence of variables directly tied to discourse analysis (i.e. discourse markers, connectors, etc). This innovation is meant as a possible direction for future research, and its significance will become apparent only after more analyses are conducted.

Thibault and Vincent (1990) also contains seven useful appendices. The first is the form used to record the technical information surrounding the interview: the duration of the interview, persons present, place of interview, etc. The second appendix lists the characteristics of the informants. This table includes informants from both 1971 and 1984. For example, some informants changed professions over the thirteen years. Also some informants spoke for a longer or shorter period of time, so the number of

lines of transcription and type of discourse style was indicated for both projects. The next four appendices contain a sample transcription, an excerpt of concorded text, the transcription conventions, and the questionnaire, respectively. Lastly, the seventh appendix is a full bibliography of all research published on both the *Sankoff-Cedergren* and *Montréal 84* corpora. Helpful annotations of the number of informants sampled for each work, when applicable, are also included.

In the conclusion, the writers reassert that Thibault and Vincent (1990) is not meant to be a presentation of the method used for variation studies. There is no discussion of the procedure for the selection and coding of data nor for the preparation of the data for statistical analysis. Rather this book is a detailed exposé of the methodological constraints tied to the collection of speech samples which constitute the base material for their analyses. From their enlightened viewpoint, they also propose directions for furture research such as the coding for "socio-symbolic" characteristics (i.e. social aspirations, linguistics attitudes and lifestyle). Thibault and Vincent (1990) may be a small book (only 145 pages), but it is a wealth of information.

1. "The transcriptions of both the 1971 and the 1984 copora are based on standard orthography, and allow a grouping of lexical items within the concordances, independently of the phonetic variations which occur in speech. Priority was given to locating certain morphemic elisions and non-standard pronunciations of final consonants, to the distinction between a few homophones, and the identification of idiomatic expressions... The transcribers were invited to point out... stigmatized or particularized pronunciations" (p. 35, editor's translation).

Jean-Claude MULLER, *Collections du Nigeria : le quotidien des Rukuba*, Neuchâtel, Suisse : Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel, 1994 : 191 pages.

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La "passion" de Jean-Claude Muller pour les Rukuba, une population vivant sur le plateau de Jos, au Nigéria, l'a poussé à publier cette fois-ci leur "quotidien". Ce "quotidien" il nous le présente à partir des objets matériels utilisés par les Rukuba dans toutes leurs activités existentielles.