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Between French and English, Between Ethnography and Assimilation: Strategies for Translating Moncton's Acadian Vernacular

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Résumé de l'article

Entre le français et l'anglais, entre l'ethnographie et l'assimilation: le vernaculaire acadien de Moncton en traduction - Le chiac, ce mélange de français et d'anglais qui sert de vernaculaire aux Acadiens de la région de Moncton, est de plus en plus utilisé dans l'écriture romanesque. Or ce vernaculaire présente à ses auteurs comme à ses traducteurs des difficultés particulières. Le parler local ayant peu de légitimité littéraire, les auteurs sont confrontés à la question de leur langue d'écriture : doivent-ils s'effacer devant la norme ou inscrire une différence qui risque de les marginaliser? Pour les traducteurs, la traduction des parlers vernaculaires comme celle du plurilinguisme représentent deux des défis les plus exigeants, de sorte que les oeuvres qui ont recours à ces procédés sont régulièrement taxées d'intraduisibilité. Dans le travail de Robert Majzels et de Jo-Anne Elder, respectivement traducteurs de France Daigle et de Gérard Leblanc, cet article dépeint les stratégies utilisées afin que les parlers du Moncton acadien – et notamment le chiac – puissent être accueillis dans un texte de langue anglaise : quels moyens les traducteurs emploient-ils pour se préserver des deux principaux écueils qui menacent la traduction de la différence linguistique, soit l'assimilation et l'ethnographie? Mots-clés : chiac, littérature acadienne, littérature acadienne en traduction, plurilinguisme littéraire, sociolectes et vernaculaires.

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Between French and English, Between Ethnography and Assimilation: Strategies for Translating Moncton’s Acadian Vernacular*

Catherine Leclerc

Situating Chiac between French and English

A mix of French and English, Chiac is the vernacular spoken by many Acadians in the south-east region of New Brunswick, especially around Moncton.¹ Linguists with a non-prescriptive approach generally agree that Chiac—despite its sometimes anglicized phonology, lexicon and even syntax—is a dialect of French. As Marie-Ève Perrot explains, Chiac is a mixed code where French remains dominant quantitatively, structurally, as well as symbolically (2005, p. 318). Indeed, from a sociological perspective, Chiac connotes a specific Francophone identity,

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¹ Marie-Jo Thériot’s song “À Moncton” (*Comme de la musique*, 1995), provides a good example of Chiac: “Gisèle, je te call rien que de même/À cause c’est boring à soir/Et qu’y a rien qui va on/ [...] J’ai coaxé Mike at least trois fois/Pour qu’y vienne watcher un movie avec moi/But y veut rien savoir.” (“Gisèle, I’m calling you just like that/Cause it’s boring tonight/And there’s nothing going on/I coaxed Mike at least three times/To come and watch a movie with me/But he doesn’t want to.”). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

as only Acadians speak Chiac. “[D]ans les représentations des locuteurs, le chiac est généralement conçu comme une variété de *français* véhiculant une identité *francophone* particulière (‘le nouveau français de Moncton,’ selon l’un des informateurs du corpus de 2001)” (*Ibid.*).² In a more recent article (2007, forthcoming), Perrot goes even further and remarks that, for the speakers she talked to, speaking Chiac is equivalent to a refusal to speak English and to the affirmation of a Francophone identity.³

Incidentally, writing about it in English⁴ makes me realise how connected Chiac is to the French-speaking world. There are special challenges to writing about Chiac in English. Not that Chiac is familiar to Francophones around the world. On the contrary, Chiac is a local code with little influence outside its limited sphere, a code that subverts many grammar rules in standard French. According to Perrot, in Chiac, French acts as a matrix but is nonetheless modified by the inclusion of English:

Dans le cas du chiac, [c]e terme [de matrice française] ne sous-entend aucunement que la morphologie et/ou la syntaxe soi(en)t en tout point celle(s) du français, ni qu’à l’intérieur du cadre structurel français on relève uniquement des séquences ou îlots plus ou moins étendus composés d’éléments anglais conservant les traits morpho-syntaxiques de cette langue. Il ne sous-entend pas non plus que certains marqueurs

² “Speakers perceive Chiac as a variety of *French* conveying a specific *Francophone* identity (‘the new French spoken in Moncton,’ according to one informant from the 2001 corpus [...]).” Perrot recorded the speech of teenagers from a Francophone highschool in Moncton during the years 1991 and 2001, and had them answer a questionnaire.

³ “Parler chiac, c’est donc ici refuser de parler anglais, c’est parler français et affirmer ainsi son identité francophone.” Paradoxical as it may seem, this association between Chiac as a hybrid language and a Francophone identity is widely held by scholars, their informants, and artists alike. Some see a form of poetic justice in the creation of a hybrid language where French dominates out of circumstances where English dominates. As Perrot puts it: “le chiac inscrit le conflit linguistique à l’intérieur de la langue dominée, inversant ainsi dans ses formes mêmes le rapport entre les langues en présence.” (“Chiac inscribes the linguistic conflict inside the dominated language, inverting in its very form the relationship between the two languages.”)

⁴ My contributions to the scholarship on Chiac in French include Leclerc 2004 and 2005.

anglais susceptibles d'apporter de réels bouleversements structurels ne puissent être insérés par endroits. (1998, n.-p.)⁵

However, regardless of the challenges that Chiac imposes on French, only in the French-speaking world is this subversion sometimes noticed. And when it is, it is not always described with accuracy.⁶ In the English-speaking world, Chiac does not raise debates because its existence barely registers on either the public or the scholarly radar.⁷ Competent commentators of Chiac—linguists such as Annette Boudreau and Marie-Ève Perrot or literary critics such as Raoul Boudreau and François Paré—tend to write in French, just as writers who use Chiac as a means of literary expression do so in order to address issues that pertain to Francophone literatures and the habits of Francophone speakers. It is mostly in French, not in English, that these writers are published. It is with Francophone readers in mind that their texts are edited. Writing in Chiac (and, to a lesser extent, writing about Chiac) is to be part of a battle against the ideological stigmatisation, under the influence of Parisian literature, of the literary use of vernacular languages in all literatures written in French.⁸ In addition, writing in Chiac creates a distinction from the better known Québec literary norm, which also imposes its standards and vision of what vernaculars are acceptable on its own French-Canadian periphery (Paré, 1994, pp. 41-42; Boudreau and Boudreau, 2004, pp. 167-169).

Despite its strong affiliation both to the French language and to a Francophone identity, whether Chiac can belong to French is far from obvious when ideology is taken into account. Yes, Chiac is a language of

⁵ “In the case of Chiac, the term ‘French matrix’ does not mean that morphology and/or syntax have to be those of French in every point, nor that inside the French structural frame only sequences or blocks of varying length conforming to the morpho-syntactic characteristics of English are to be found. It does not prevent the occasional presence of English elements capable of disturbing the French structure either.”

⁶ Moura, for instance, mistakenly confuses chiac with the archaic Acadian French spoken by Antonine Maillet’s *La Sagouine* (1999, p. 134, n. 3).

⁷ Söderlind (1991, p. 212) mentions Chiac as “The closest Acadian equivalent to *joual*,” without distinguishing the two despite their important differences.

⁸ Boudreau and Boudreau (2004, p. 170), insist on how centralized and prescriptive the French language literary system is.

identity, but it is also a language of contact. More importantly, it is a language of *asymmetrical* contact between speakers of French and English. As such, Chiac is a reminder of the difficult position of Acadians as a minority in New Brunswick, forming less than 35% of the province's population and living in a world that functions mostly in English.⁹ French Canada has a tradition—inherited from European nationalism and German romanticism—of equating language and culture. It has a tradition of equating its collective future with the preservation of the French language. As a result of such assumptions, Francophone intellectuals in Canada have been suspicious of linguistic hybridization.

Many Québécois writers and journalists—from Jacques Ferron (1991 [1966-1967]) to Dominique Payette (2005)—have shown an interest in Acadians and their language. Their belief is generally that Quebec needs to protect itself from linguistic hybridization such as is observable in Chiac. In Chiac, they see a fate that Quebec must avoid if it is to maintain its culture. This understanding of Chiac as indicative of assimilation into English is also present in Acadie.¹⁰ Although widespread even in situations of public discourse (Boudreau and Leblanc, 2000), the use of Chiac is stigmatised and questioned by Acadians themselves. Herménégilde Chiasson, for instance—one of the best known Acadian writers and now Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick—once described Chiac as the distinctive sign of “a gradual shift towards English” (“un glissement progressif vers l’anglais,” 1998, p. 86).

Stigmatization and Legitimization

Increasingly, however, such an understanding is being challenged. Throughout Western societies, the “homogeneous” (Blommaert et Verschueren, 1998) clustering of language, nation and culture no longer seems as obvious as it used to. Language loyalty (Weinreich, 1974) is therefore being questioned. With globalization comes a legitimization of languages in contact. As Monica Heller remarks, “linguistic minorities

⁹ According to the 2001 census, Francophones represent only 33% of the population of New Brunswick. In the Moncton region, they form 40% of the population (34% in Moncton and 77% in Dieppe, a Moncton suburb).

¹⁰ For reasons that will become clear over the course of this paper, I follow Jo-Anne Elder's preference for the use of Acadie over that of Acadia.

are suddenly fashionable icons of the new hybridity. Long accustomed to making bridges among worlds and resolving tensions and contradictions among them, they discovered borders long before cultural studies did” (1999, pp. 15-16). This new trend seems to free Chiac from its stigma and gives it a certain appeal. Moreover, on a local scale, Moncton is doing well, both culturally and economically. Acadians, in particular, thrive in Moncton: they are actively responsible for the city’s cultural and economic boom. Long perceived as the place where Acadian identity dissolved, Moncton is now driving this identity to further achievements.

In this new context, Chiac no longer seems so threatening. With the help of writers and other artists, Chiac is being reinvented as the language of a modern and urban Acadie. Indeed, writers are attempting to contribute to the change in status of Chiac by increasingly using it in their works of fiction. As Annette Boudreau and Matthieu Leblanc remark:

[Les artistes acadiens qui font usage du chiac] veulent marquer leur spécificité et faire montre d’une identité qui s’appuie sur une acceptation de la diversité qui appelle à la reconnaissance de différentes variétés linguistiques même si certaines d’entre elles montrent les traces d’une possible anglicisation. (2000, pp. 234-235)¹¹

This activism is, at its roots, an attempt to legitimize Chiac. Gérald Leblanc, one of the first artists to undertake such an attempt, states that Acadian artists in Moncton “have transformed what was a source of contempt into an expressive force bearing witness to an actual, articulate and acknowledged reality”¹² (2003, p. 520). Such an activism uses Chiac as a subversive tool with the potential of challenging the traditional representations of Acadie, while still normalizing it through written,

¹¹ “Acadian artists who use Chiac want to demonstrate their specificity and show an identity that relies on an acceptance of diversity entailing the recognition of different linguistic varieties, despite the potential anglicized appearance of some of them.”

¹² “[Ces artistes] ont transformé cet objet de mépris en une force d’expression qui témoigne d’une réalité vécue, articulée et assumée.”

public use.¹³ It further conveys the unique linguistic identity of Chiac as a means for Acadians to gain not only self-recognition with regard to language, but also a distinct visibility on a more global scene.

While far from triumphant,¹⁴ this attempt to legitimize Chiac has resulted in the successful change of its perception by many Acadians, especially within the Moncton artistic community. If protecting the French language remains an important goal for Acadian writers, the potential of Chiac to widen the breadth of possibilities of literary works written in French is increasingly becoming a worthwhile ambition. Chiasson, thus, is no longer so ready to depict Chiac as nothing but a threat to Acadian identity; instead, he now proposes viewing its literary use as an ambiguous strategy of resistance:

Le chiac se situe à la frontière et manifeste une double ambiguïté soit une volonté de solidarité avec une lutte historique et un désir de participer à une culture qui semble en voie de définir les grands enjeux de l'Occident du XX^e et du XXI^e siècle. (2004)¹⁵

Such an evolution in the perception of Chiac seems to be widespread. According to a survey done by Perrot, it is shared by Francophone highschool students in the Moncton region. In 1991, the students met by Perrot were speaking Chiac but did not mention it as a language. In 2001, when asked what language they spoke, they freely answered “Chiac.” In other words, it is now common for speakers of Chiac to name their language and to talk about it (Perrot, 2005, pp. 311-312). Furthermore,

¹³ The public use of Chiac, in addition to works of fiction, includes the speech of radio broadcasters (A. Boudreau, 2005; Boudreau and Leblanc, 2000), T-shirts sold to tourists, signs in commercial areas (Perrot, 2005, p. 311, n.7), etc.

¹⁴ Annette Boudreau writes: “Encore aujourd’hui, la présence du chiac dans les œuvres suscite des réactions négatives; son usage ébranle les discours dominants sur la langue” (2003, p. 185). (“To this day, the presence of Chiac in literary works provokes negative reactions; its use undermines dominant discourses on language.”)

¹⁵ “Chiac is located at the border and shows a double ambiguity, that is a desire for solidarity with a historical struggle [the struggle for the survival of a distinct Acadian identity], and a wish to participate in a culture [an Anglo-American culture] which seems to be in the process of defining what will be at stake in the Western world during the 20th and 21st centuries.” Even as he now acknowledges the literary use of Chiac as a valid strategy, Chiasson, in his own writing, still reserves it for theatre—that is, for oral, not written use.

the ambiguity described by Chiasson as a strategic reason for writers to use Chiac seems to find echoes throughout the Acadian community in Moncton:

Majoritairement perçu par ceux qui le parlent comme une variété de français véhiculant une identité francophone, le chiac permet un double positionnement, en résistance à l'anglais (langue dominante) et au français standardisé (variété dominante). (Perrot, 2007, forthcoming)¹⁶

Speakers of Chiac are happy to pit French's centralized standards against English hegemony. They find it convenient to take pride in their local identity through their linguistic practice while still being open to intercultural contacts. In this respect, Chiac is facilitating the expression of a local Francophone identity while at the same time weaving itself into the cloth of an English-dominated global culture.

Praising Chiac with little Chiac: Gérard Leblanc's *Moncton Mantra*

Very few writers have been so constant in their attempt to legitimize Chiac as Gérard Leblanc. Leblanc even wrote a collection of poems entitled *Éloge du chiac – In praise of Chiac*. His project, as far as Chiac is concerned, substantiates the double strategy described by Chiasson and Perrot. Leblanc dedicated his entire writing career to turning Moncton, a somewhat small town with very little going for it, into a great literary metropolis (R. Boudreau, 2007, forthcoming). Despite the fact that Acadians do not form a majority in Moncton, this literary capital, as created by Leblanc from the 1970s to his death in 2005, had to be Acadian. It also had to be open to the world, a cosmopolitan city on a par with other metropolises. In Leblanc's writing, Moncton is where culture—Acadian and international—is created; and Chiac is described (though not always used) as the most appropriate vehicle to express Moncton and its culture.

In this respect, the novel *Moncton Mantra*, published in 1997, is particularly interesting. *Moncton Mantra* tells the story of the young writer Alain Gautreau, from the moment he leaves his native village of Bouctouche with the intention of attending the Université de Moncton in

¹⁶ “Perceived by a majority of its speakers as a variety of the French language conveying a Francophone identity, Chiac enables a double position, resisting both English (the dominant language) and standard French (the dominant variety).”

1971 to the publication of his first book at the beginning of the 1980s. In telling the autobiographical story of how he became a writer, Leblanc describes the birth of Acadian literary institutions. He comments on the work and personalities of the instigators of literary modernity in Acadie. More importantly, he insists on the role of Moncton and its language in Acadian modern literature. “Implicit in *Moncton Mantra* is an argument that this modest New Brunswick city has become a gathering point where the talents of Acadie can meet and feed off each other as they carve out their creative niche,” *The Telegraph Journal* from Saint John, New Brunswick reported about the novel (trans. Elder, cover). In *Moncton Mantra*, Leblanc writes:

Je veux des histoires de ville, des contradictions et des exaltations urbaines, la vie d’aujourd’hui quoi, comme moteur de création.
(p. 104)

I craved for stories of the city, the contradictions and exaltations of urban life and the here and now. They were what fuelled my creativity.
(trans. Elder, p. 90)¹⁷

For Alain Gautreau, Leblanc’s narrator and alter ego, Chiac is the language of the here and now, of *la vie d’aujourd’hui*:

La langue que je parle est un mélange de français dit standard et de vieux français acadien qui me vient de mon origine villageoise, parsemé de bouts d’anglais. Le chiac, c’est tout ça aussi, mais mêlé davantage dans une symbiose assez originale. (p. 30)

The language I spoke was a mixture of standard French and the old Acadian French spoken in my village, sprinkled with bits of English. *Chiac* was all this too, but its mixture was smoother, an original symbiosis. (p. 25)

Instead of being perceived as *contaminated* French, Chiac, thanks to Leblanc, is rather viewed as *enriched* French. It has the advantage of acknowledging multiple influences. Also, it has the power to connect a local Acadian identity to the American counterculture that was so important for people of Leblanc’s milieu and generation:

¹⁷ All translations of *Moncton Mantra* are from Elder, 2001. Some of the translation decisions made by Elder will be discussed later in this paper.

L'épine dorsale me rétrécit quand j'entends un freak folklorique déclarer concernant la guitare électrique : "C'est pas acadien." Je ne peux que répondre : "J'm'en god-dam ben." (p. 104)

My spine tightened at the thought of all the folkie freaks who declared that things like electric guitars "weren't Acadian." I couldn't help but think, "I don't give a good goddamn." (p. 90)

Despite these advantages, including Chiac in literary works remains quite a risky venture. In Leblanc's writing, Chiac is celebrated as the music of the city as he experiences it:

Gilles m'apprenait à apprécier la musique de cette langue, la musique de l'expérience d'une ville, son aspect ludique. (p. 30)

Gilles was teaching me to appreciate the music of this language, the music of the experience of the city, the way you could play with speech. (p. 25)

The writer insists on the pleasure he gains from using local words and expressions:

Nous butons parfois sur l'épellation, nous demandant, par exemple, si "poutine" prend un ou deux "n", et nous voilà à pouffer de rire au plaisir que nous procurent les mots de notre réalité. (p. 46)

We sometimes questioned the spelling of *poutine râpée* or some other word, and then burst out laughing with the pleasure of using our own words, the language of our own reality. (p. 39)

However, such pleasure is only enjoyed in moderation. Being a minority in Moncton creates an exciting tension:

Pourquoi Moncton? Dans un premier temps, les amis. C'est aussi une ville. Nous sommes minoritaires, certes, mais j'aime la friction que cela occasionne parfois. (pp. 135-136)

Why Moncton? First of all, because of my friends. It was also a city. We were a minority, certainly, but I liked the friction caused by two cultures rubbing up against each other. (p. 117)

Invigorating as it may be, the minority condition is also alienating. In the face of this alienation, standard French can provide a reassuring sense of security, whereas linguistic hybridization can be disconcerting: "Le

phénomène m'intrigue sans que j'y voie très clair" (p. 30); "It was an intriguing phenomenon, but one I had trouble understanding completely" (p. 25). And:

J'ai l'impression que ma langue n'appartient pas à ce décor, tout en sachant qu'elle habite cette ville depuis toujours, subtile et séditeuse. Je remarque, après avoir décidé de ne plus parler anglais nulle part, que je l'entends moins. Ou plutôt le français passe au premier plan, entouré d'un bruit autre, comme celui d'une radio qui joue dans une pièce à côté. Ainsi je circule dans ma langue en explorant ma ville. (pp. 47-48)

I had the feeling my language didn't really fit into this decor. At the same time, I knew that French had always inhabited the city, subtly and seditiously. I noticed, after deciding I would not speak English anywhere, that I was hearing it less and less. Or, rather, French was being foregrounded, surrounded by foreign sounds that were only like a background noise on a radio playing next door. I was living in my own language as I explored my city. (p. 41)

Here, referring to his own language, Leblanc's narrator has to remove English in order to make room for French. Granted, *Moncton Mantra*, as a story, defends Chiac vigorously. Leblanc's prose, however, the way he writes this story, is more timid. As Chantal Richard (1998, p. 33) rightly explains, Leblanc states his will to express himself in "a mixture of standard French and the old Acadian French spoken in my village, sprinkled with bits of English" (p. 25); but despite this desire, the text itself, for the most part, is written in standard French.¹⁸ The narrator's "own language" might as well be French instead of Chiac.¹⁹

Getting rid of linguistic inadequacy: Chiac by choice in France Daigle's *Petites difficultés d'existence*

This same ambivalence can be found in France Daigle's recent novels. After becoming well known for a prose with neither regional linguistic traits nor geographical roots, Daigle, with *Pas pire* in 1998 (*Just Fine*,

¹⁸ "[...] malgré la volonté de Leblanc de s'exprimer en 'un mélange de français dit standard et de vieux français acadien [...] parsemé de bouts d'anglais', il finit par bifurquer vers le français standard" (Richard, 1998, p. 33).

¹⁹ Boudreau and Boudreau (2004, p. 173) provide examples of this ambivalence in the discourse of Leblanc himself.

1999), started a series of novels which placed Moncton and Chiac speakers at their very centre.²⁰ Set in Dieppe, the Moncton suburb (then a village) where Daigle was born, *Pas pire* tells the story of an agoraphobic writer named France Daigle who, in recognition for her work, is invited to the cultural magazine of French channel TV5, *Bouillon de culture*, hosted by the famous Bernard Pivot. It also introduces us to Terry and Carmen, a young Chiac-speaking couple who plan to travel to France or Louisiana. In *Un fin passage*, published in 2001 (*A Fine Passage*, 2002), a now pregnant Carmen leads Terry on a trip to the deltas of France, and the couple meets some of the European and American characters populating Daigle's novels. The third book, published in 2002, *Petites difficultés d'existence (Life's Little Difficulties)*, 2004), shows Terry and Carmen coming back to Moncton to settle down. Étienne Zablonki, a painter they met in France, joins them with his wife Ludmilla after being bored by New York, thus turning Moncton into an international destination.

Of all Daigle's novels, the latest is definitely the most Chiac. In addition to its use by Terry, Carmen and all their friends, even the Zablonkis learn to speak it. But in *Petites difficultés d'existence*, for the first time, the use of Chiac is also disputed. Terry and Carmen still speak Chiac frequently. However, they no longer agree on the appropriateness of speaking it. For their children's benefit, Carmen would like them to speak a more standard French. In her opinion:

C'est pas beau un enfant qui parle chiac. (p. 144)

It's not very nice, a child speaking Chiac. (p. 116)

She tells Terry:

On dirait que tu fais exprès! [...] Ou en tout cas, tu te forces pas. (p. 150)

You'd think you were doing it on purpose! [...] You're not trying very hard, and that's for certain. (p. 122)

Terry, on the other hand, even though he spoke French "mieux que ça" (p. 150) ("a whole lot better," p. 122) when the couple was in France, is

²⁰ Robert Majzels translated all three novels of this series: *Pas pire*, *Un fin passage* and *Petites difficultés d'existence*, as well as *1953 : Chronique d'une naissance annoncée*, published in 1995 (*1953: Chronicle of a Birth Foretold*, 1997). The English translations of Daigle's novels quoted here are his.

insecure about his competence in standard French. Common amongst speakers of non-standard forms, his linguistic insecurity makes him fear that he might not be able to clearly articulate his thoughts using the proper French words.²¹ In addition to this, he does not like the idea of being censored:

Pis *anyways*, depuis quand c'est qu'y faut qu'on se force pour parler notre langue? Je veux dire, c'est notre langue. On peut-ti pas la parler comme qu'on veut? [...] J'veux dire, c'est-ti *actually* de quoi qu'y faut qu'on s'occupe de? (p. 150)

And since when do we have to work so hard to speak our language? I mean, whose language is it? Can't we speak our own language the way we want to? [...] Je veux dire, is it really de quoi we've got to be fretting about right here and now? (p. 122)

Daigle solves this conflict in a rather original manner. Her characters continue to speak Chiac, but they buy dictionaries so that they can also improve their knowledge of standard French.

This solution reveals just how careful Daigle is in dealing with Chiac. Her writing does attempt to legitimize Chiac; but by italicizing English and by limiting Chiac to the dialogue of characters, it is also effectively keeping Chiac at a distance. Daigle's strategy makes sense, in that it distinguishes two possibilities for Chiac: firstly, as part of a wider French repertoire and secondly, as a mixed code in the process of replacing French. Daigle favours the former possibility over the latter. This is why she conveys Chiac as a language variety to be used alongside others, not as a separate code isolating its speakers.²² According to Raoul Boudreau (2000, p. 62), Daigle's writing insists on the compatibility of Acadian French with other varieties of French. As part of Acadian French, Chiac is interesting to Daigle for the local connections it makes visible, but also for the contribution it can make to the French language

²¹ About linguistic insecurity in Acadie, see Boudreau and Dubois, 1992.

²² Of course, there is much ideology in thinking that speaking a language form different from the standard isolates speakers (Heller, 1999, pp. 91-134; Hymes, 1996, pp. 25-62). Such an ideology, however, still dominates Francophone literatures (Casanova, 1999, pp. 93-107 retraces the history of the standardization of French as a literary language; Lane-Mercier, 2001, pp. 142-143, explains that very few sociolects are deemed acceptable in literatures written in French and how, as a result, Francophone readers are not used to reading literary texts in their own sociolects).

and to Francophone literatures. But in order to make such a contribution, it must dissociate itself from a stigma of linguistic inadequacy. Therefore, its speakers must prove that they use Chiac by choice, not by ignorance. They must prove (and hence improve) their competence in standard French.

Translating a translation problem

Incidentally, Daigle and Leblanc's ambivalence to Chiac can be understood, at least metaphorically, as a translation problem. As François Paré explains in his book *Les littératures de l'exiguïté* (*Exiguïty*), literary works created in minority and hybridized situations often "reside at the limits of what is intelligible" (Paré, trans. Burman, 1997, p. 14) (The original reads: "se loge[nt ...] à la limite de l'intelligibilité" (Paré, 1994 [1992], p. 19)), even in their own language. In order to be understood, their writers must "translate" their experience into a recognized literary code that has no tradition of expressing it, no usual words for such an experience. They must explain something that will not be readily understood. In *La république mondiale des lettres* (*The World Republic of Letters*), Pascale Casanova offers a striking description of their dilemma:

Pour accéder à la reconnaissance littéraire, les écrivains dominés doivent donc se plier aux normes décrétées universelles par ceux-là même qui ont le monopole de l'universel. Et surtout trouver "la bonne distance" qui les rendra visibles. S'ils veulent être perçus, il leur faut produire et exhiber une différence, mais ne pas montrer ni revendiquer une distance trop grande qui les rendrait, elle aussi, imperceptibles. N'être ni trop près ni trop loin. Tous les écrivains dominés linguistiquement par la France ont fait cette expérience. (1999, p. 218)²³

According to Casanova, dominated writers' erasure has two poles: on the one hand, assimilation, which causes them to disappear into the norm;

²³ "In order to achieve literary recognition, dominated writers must therefore yield to the norms decreed universal by the very persons who have a monopoly on universality. More than this, they need to situate themselves at just the right distance from their judges: if they wish to be noticed, they have to show that they are different from other writers—but not so different that they are thereby rendered invisible. They must be neither too near nor too far. All writers from countries under the linguistic domination of France have had this experience" (Casanova, trans. De Boise, 2004, p. 156).

on the other hand, differentiation, by which they are defined and ultimately reduced to their differences. Following this model, Chiac writers, in their quest for “the right distance,” need to compensate for the radical difference that Chiac represents.

Now, how do you translate—literally, not metaphorically—such a translation problem? Exiguity writers, in fact, and Chiac writers in particular, are rarely translated²⁴. When they are, their dilemma is often displaced and intensified by translation. From a translation perspective, Chiac brings together two of the most difficult challenges a translator can face: that is, the translation of multilingualism, as well as that of vernacular language. Regarding the translation of multilingualism, Jacques Derrida wonders, “how is a text written in several languages at a time to be translated? How is the effect of plurality to be ‘rendered’? And what of translating with several languages at a time, will that be called translating?” (Derrida, trans. Graham, 1985, p. 176)²⁵. With regard to the translation of vernacular language, Antoine Berman is rather pessimistic. “Unfortunately, vernacular adheres to its roots and resists any direct translation into another vernacular. *Only standard languages can translate one into another*,”²⁶ he says (my translation; 1985, p. 78).

But let us not be discouraged by the limitations set by these great thinkers. After all, it is possible to answer Derrida’s questions with Berman’s theory, and accept that translation does not have to be homogenizing. We need to historicize and put into context what translation is, and what it can be (Berman, 1984, pp. 13-14; Berman, trans. Heyvaert, 1992, pp. 2-3). In that respect, partial non-translation is an “*eminent mode of translation*” (Berman, trans. Heyvaert, 1992,

²⁴ In this respect, it is not surprising that Leblanc’s *Moncton Mantra* and France Daigle’s novels, which still pay tribute to the standard, are translated, whereas Jean Babineau’s novels, which are often *narrated* in Chiac, are not.

²⁵ “Comment traduire un texte écrit en plusieurs langues à la fois? Comment ‘rendre’ l’effet de pluralité? Et si l’on traduit par plusieurs langues à la fois, appellera-t-on cela traduire?” (Derrida, 1985, p. 215)

²⁶ “Malheureusement, le vernaculaire, collant au terroir, résiste à toute traduction directe dans un autre vernaculaire. *Seules les langue ‘cultivées’ peuvent s’entretendre.*”

p. 189).²⁷ Similarly, we can answer Berman's objection to the translation of vernacular language with Gillian Lane-Mercier's belief that translated vernaculars simply show more clearly what translation is at its core: displacement, manipulation, and appropriation.²⁸ In other words, while their lack of legitimacy points to vernacular languages' specific roots, standard languages are not any freer of specificity. Rather, it is their hegemony that makes standard languages appear universal (and therefore more easily translatable). In reminding us of language displacement and enrootedness, the translation of vernaculars brings us back to the fact that translation always involves a change in context. How this change is handled is a matter of strategic choice and social possibilities. As a result, vernacular language serves as the perfect tool to exemplify a translator's role as an agent, and perhaps even an activist.²⁹ Through the translation of vernacular, a glimpse can be caught of a translator's actions regarding the source text.

But first, it is necessary to acknowledge how risky translating vernacular multilingualism such as Chiac can be, as the space for just the right distance is rather narrow. Berman summarizes these difficulties in terms similar to those of Casanova. Whereas Casanova finds her "right distance" between assimilation and differentiation, Berman mentions a tension between ennoblement (standardization) and exoticization (1985, p. 79). In seeking to transmit a positive image of the source text, the translator runs the risk of ennobling the vernacular, and therefore destroying it. In attempting to preserve this difference, she or he will have to filter the translation, taking into account the target culture's perception of the source language. This can, however, result in creating stereotypical otherness. Facing such a demanding challenge, it is no wonder that English Canada, in its attempts to translate French Canadian

²⁷ "[l]a non-traduction d'un terme valant comme mode éminent de traduction" (Berman, 1984, p. 302).

²⁸ "les sociolectes traduits démasquent de manière on ne peut plus éloquente les manipulations et les gauchissements inhérents à l'activité traductive en général, de même que le travail d'appropriation sur lequel cette activité repose" (2001, p. 133); "translated sociolects show with great eloquence the manipulations and distortions that are inherent to the act of translation in general, as well as the appropriative work on which this activity is based."

²⁹ A famous example of the translation from one vernacular to another and of its role as a form of activism can be found in the translation of Michel Tremblay's plays into Scots. See Findlay, 1995; and Simon, 2000.

difference, has oscillated, as Sherry Simon points out, between ethnography and assimilation. According to Simon:

English-Canadian translators have all had to give answers to questions like: how different are French-Canadians or Québécois from other Canadians? To what extent can and should their particular speech patterns be reproduced in English? How aware should the English-speaking reader be of the distinctive social, historical and linguistic realities of [French Canada] when they are reading its literature? (1997, pp. 194-195).

An ethnographic conception of cultural difference means that the answer to these questions lies in reflecting, even emphasizing, “the distinctive linguistic and cultural differences which prevail between people” (Simon, 1997, pp. 198-199). An assimilationist conception of cultural difference, on the other hand, insists on creating a bridge between the two cultural groups brought together by translation. While French Canadian authors have often used language (and particularly English) as a political tool, their translators, in promoting these authors’ work, have sometimes downplayed both the conflict with English and the language hybridization at the basis of these works. This was the case, Simon remarks, of the translation of Joulal in the 1960s and 1970s. Caught between these two tendencies, the translation of Chiac follows the traditional oscillation orienting the translation of French Canadian and Québécois literature into English.³⁰

Between ethnography and assimilation: looking for the right distance

Both Jo-Anne Elder, in her translation of *Moncton Mantra*, and Robert Majzels, in his translation of *Petites difficultés d’existence*, have to find a balance between ethnography and assimilation. These two translators both seek “the right distance,” and although they use very different strategies, both are able to navigate between these two pitfalls. In *Petites difficultés d’existence*, for example, Terry and Carmen read a poem by Gérald Leblanc:

³⁰ In this respect, it should be noted that, unlike the translation of Tremblay into Scots, English Canadian translations of French Canadian vernacular, including the work of Elder and Majzels discussed here, are examples of “vertical,” not “lateral” exchange (See Simon, 1997, p. 201; and 2000, p. 28).

Carmen, allongée sur le divan, plongée dans le dernier recueil de poésie de Gérard Leblanc (p. 104) [...], lisait maintenant des poèmes à voix haute. [...]

– Lis ouère *back* ça.

– *Décembre. Sous l'effet du mois de décembre/ au rythme plus lent en face du blanc/ l'attente enclenche l'attente/une toupie karmique/débobine le lieu/je rapaille tous les décembre de ma vie/et je tourne autour lentement.*

– Mmm... C'est beau. (p. 107)

As expected, the poem offered in Majzels' *Life's Little Difficulties* is in English. Such loss of internal coherence is inherent to translation. Unfortunately, the result is that Leblanc's own words are lost in the English version:

Carmen, who was stretched out on the sofa, immersed in Gérard Leblanc's latest book of poems (p. 81) [...], had begun to read him [Terry] poems aloud. [...]

'Read that again, will you?'

December. Under December's spell/in the slow pace face to face with white

waiting engenders waiting

a karmic top

unwinds across the land

I patch together all the Decembers of my life

and circle them slowly. (p. 84)

This also applies to the Acadian conjugation of certain verbs, for instance, “Y squattiont” (Daigle, p. 33) in place of “Y squattaient.” In Majzels' rendition, the oral character of the original remains, but lacks the original's specific locality, its striking distance from the standard and its linguistic hybridization: “Matter of fact, they were squatting” (trans. Majzels, p. 23). Similarly, in the excerpt cited above, what, in the original, is a colloquial hybridization (“Lis *ouère back* ça,” italics in original, emphasis added) simply becomes informal English in translation (“Read that again, will you?”). To compensate for the expressivity of the French non standard and bilingual lexical choices, the English version needs to resort to repetition.

The same tendencies can be found in Elder's translation. In Leblanc's *Moncton Mantra*, the protagonist ridicules Quebec French, and his narration graphically records his perception of it: “Chez nous, on a de la neige le treize. Ici, vous avez de la naÿge le traÿze. Tu sais, une variante sur la même toune. C'est un accent” (Leblanc, 1997, p. 111).

How is this distance between Quebec and Acadian French to be perceived in English? Elder subtly evokes the difference between the two, but she chooses not to exhibit it graphically: “Down home, we get snow on the fifteen, here it snows hard in the middle of the month. Six of one, half a dozen of another, whatever accent you have” (trans. Elder, p. 96). There are several instances in *Moncton Mantra*’s English version where the hybridity of Chiac is alluded to, but is not directly present:

– *I’m just trying to see if I can land something I like.*
– Continue comme ça, pis tu va voir mon poing te *lander* sur la gueule...
[...] Certaines de ses phrases, tantôt en français tantôt en anglais, me reviennent. (Leblanc, 1997, pp. 77-78)

“I’m just trying to see if I can land something I like.”
“Don’t do it that way, or you’ll see my fist land on your mouth...”
[...] Certain phrases he used, some in French and some in English, came back to me. (trans. Elder, pp. 67-68)

When differences do remain, when the linguistic specificity of the local community depicted in these novels finds its way in the translation, the resulting asperities often need to be explained. This is where ethnography is most prevalent. Both Majzels and Elder choose to keep the Acadian term “*fricot*,” but both feel the need to add an explanation. In *Life’s Little Difficulties*, the term is handled in the following manner:

There followed a few moments in which nothing could be heard other than the sounds produced by diners gathered around Acadian chicken soup.
“There’s a whole lot more *fricot*...” (trans. Majzels, p. 16)

It is to be noted that Daigle’s original text, although it does not go as far as describing what *fricot* is, still makes an effort to contextualise the term:

Pendant les secondes qui suivirent, on n’entendit plus que les bruits habituels d’une tablée acadienne autour d’un *fricot*.
– Y en reste en masse... (Daigle, 2002, p. 25)

Elder’s approach to “*fricot*” is also ethnographic. “À un moment donné, ça va faire tout un *fricot*!” Leblanc writes in *Moncton Mantra* (p. 108). Elder, while keeping the original term, supplies an elucidation: “At some point we’re going to make a great *fricot*, a fine menu!” (p. 93).

Often, Elder's translation is as much a comment on the original as it is an English rendition:

Mon *pusher* avait décidé de faire des recherches sur l'Acadie avec quelques amis. Ils fouillaient dans les Archives acadiennes et dans les encyclopédies, n'y allant pas de main morte pour faire des projections personnelles. [...] Après une heure d'explications particulièrement hallucinantes, où il est question d'aboiteaux, de chiac, de langue codée et de chanvre indien, mon *pusher* me demande si je trouve ça *groovy*. (Leblanc, 1997, p. 55)

My *pusher* had decided to do some research on Acadie with some friends. He was rooting through the Acadian Archives and the encyclopedia, and he didn't mind adding some personal speculations. After an hour of particularly hallucinogenic explanations, where he put into perspective the *aboiteaux* (the dams typical of early Acadian settlements), *chiac* (Acadian slang), secret codes and Indian hemp, my *pusher* asked me what I thought of all of this, wasn't it *groovy*? (trans. Elder, p. 48)

Here, Elder's ethnographic work somewhat ironically supplements what is already an "autoethnographic text," that is, according to Mary Louise Pratt, "a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" (1999 [1991], n.-p.). Pratt specifies:

Thus if ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), autoethnographic texts are representations that the so-defined others construct *in response to* or in dialogue with those texts." (n.-p.)

In Elder's case, her in-depth knowledge of Leblanc's community, as well as her desire to share this knowledge, must account for her interventions. Thoughtfully distributed explanations do help to fill in cultural blanks; however, they also underline the distance between the text and its new context. Due to the change in context and readership occasioned by translation, what in Leblanc's work *is* an "organic" relationship between the writer and his community³¹ is no longer so

³¹ "En lisant, je me sens transporté par le rythme de notre langue, conscient que chaque paire d'oreilles comprend exactement, de façon organique, ce que je dis. L'expérience m'exalte" (p. 137); "When I read, I felt transported by the rhythm of our language, conscious that each pair of ears understood exactly, organically,

organic. Therefore, certain elements that seemed natural in Leblanc's text suddenly need to be decoded, scrutinized and summarized by an "expert," whereas others (Indian hemp, for instance) are spared this special treatment. How such serious ethnography (a representation of another culture) can meet Leblanc's parody of ethnography (autoethnography in the sense of Pratt) as seen in the passage quoted above, and to what effects, is a problem left for the reader of the translation to solve.

Despite its usefulness and benevolence, Elder's ethnographic intrusion in Leblanc's text is all the more troubling when aspects of the English text that go beyond her work as a translator are taken into account. Let us remember that at the core of Leblanc's *Moncton Mantra* lies the project of creating a modern and urban Acadie that would supplant the folkloric images often associated with Acadianness. Moncton plays a crucial role in this project, and the French edition by Perce-Neige emphasizes this importance by using a map of the city as a cover for the book. In addition to the Moncton setting, one of the strategies used by Leblanc to convey modernity is to write his narrative in the present tense, as if events were always in the process of happening. This choice is an important one, because it stands in firm opposition to the perception of an Acadian culture rooted in the past. As described in this excerpt from Herménégilde Chiasson's work: "On dira que ces gens-là n'ont pas de langage précis, qu'ils jargonent dans un dialecte étrange dont tous les verbes sont au passé [...]" (1996, p. 120).³² Her desire not to trivialize Leblanc's novel leads Elder not to follow him in this use of the present tense.³³ Indeed, in English, the simple present is more often used for informal than for literary narratives. The simple past, on the other hand, does not have the elitist connotation of the French *passé simple*. Moreover, the simple past is the preferred tense for story-telling, and comparative stylistics recommends its use to translate

what I was saying. The experience was exalting for me" (Leblanc, trans. Elder, p. 119).

³² "It will be said that these people don't have a specific language, that they talk gibberish in a strange dialect where all verbs are in the past tense."

³³ This information was provided by Elder during a conference that I gave at Université de Moncton on April 5, 2005 (Moncton acadien en traduction: Jo-Anne Elder traductrice de Gérald Leblanc, Robert Majzels traducteur de France Daigle). I would like to thank her for this useful explanation. See also Elder, 2006.

the narrative present in French (*présent de narration*) (Valentine and Aubin, 2004, p. 184).

In light of the stylistic differences between English and French, Elder's choice of a past tense narrative does not seem particularly problematic. The problem lies with the cover illustration chosen by Guernica Editions for *Moncton Mantra*'s English version. This illustration, by artist Hono Lulu, is that of a young man posing in front of a white picket fence, with a few fishing boats, a white country house with blue shutters, and the sea behind him. Of course, this perfect pastoral image, approved by neither Elder nor Leblanc, evokes an Acadie of the past, neither urban nor modern—in short, the opposite of what *Moncton Mantra* tries to depict. “[J]e parle pas du vieux pêcheur sur le quai avec ses bottes pis [...] son homard, moi je suis après parler [...] de la ville, du rock [...], des éclatements des contradictions [...]. Je suis en train de parler du vingt-et-unième siècle [...],” explains Leblanc (in Boudreau and Boudreau, 2004, p. 174).³⁴ Alongside this image on the cover of the English translation, Elder's past tense contributes to distancing the English narrative from the sense of urgency created by the French text. In translation, Leblanc's immediate “En arrivant à l'aréna où se tient l'inscription, je rentre dans une fourmilière” (p. 128) is transformed into a more distant “Arriving in the arena where registration was going on, I felt like I was walking into an anthill” (trans. Elder, p. 110). More importantly, his programmatic “Je fais partie d'une société en changement” (p. 130) becomes “I belonged to a society that *was* in the midst of change” (trans. Elder, p. 112, emphasis added). Combined with the cover illustration of the book, the divide between Leblanc's narrative and traditional representations of Acadie is less abrupt when the distant past is used than in a present tense narrative.

Of megaphones and experimentation: different translation strategies

From these instances of ethnography and assimilation in the translation of literary texts using Chiac, we could conclude that the illegitimacy of Chiac as a hybridized language spoken by a minority group limits the possibilities for its translation into English. After all, Chiac seems to require a translation even into French. And both Leblanc's and Daigle's

³⁴ “I'm not talking about the old fisherman on the quay with his boots and his lobster, I'm talking about the city, rock music, explosions, contradictions. I'm talking about the 21st century.”

novels show the difficulty to produce such a French translation. Ironically, if Chiac can therefore barely be considered French, due to the prevalence of English, then its existence in English—a language now more accustomed to absorbing other languages than to being heavily influenced by them—is all the more threatened. Translation problems from Chiac to French, however, did not stop Daigle, Leblanc and others from attempting to legitimize the literary use of Chiac, even if their attempts had to be restrained in order to be deemed intelligible. Similarly, for the translators, the questions raised by Chiac are also grounds for intervention.

“As seems to happen so often to translators, she had adopted my cause as her own,” writes Majzels in his own work of fiction, about a character who is a translator (1993, p. 389). Elder’s approach seems to follow this understanding of the translator’s role. She adopts Leblanc’s cause, joins her voice to his in support, and tries to speak on his behalf. One important question raised by her translation can be summarized by the title of a presentation she gave in Halifax in 2003: “Comment dire ‘Acadie’ en anglais?” (“How do you say ‘Acadie’ in English?”). The English language does have a word for “Acadie”: Acadia. But this word does not satisfy Elder because it is often used to refer to a dead culture—a sensitive issue among Acadians. *Bloupe*, a novel by Acadian writer Jean Babineau, shows this through a transcription of an English definition for the term “Acadia”:

ACADIA. 1. A former name for a French colony of eastern Canada, that included Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. 2. A parish in southern Louisiana settled by Acadian exiles. (Babineau, 1993, p. 135)

To this dictionary heading, the narrator adds: “Ici, il faut noter que selon cette définition, Acadia n’est désormais même plus un nom, sauf pour dénommer une paroisse dans le sud des Zétats” (“Here, it is worth noting that according to this definition, Acadia is not even a name anymore, except to name a parish in the South of the States”). By choosing the French term “Acadie” in her English text, Elder shows solidarity with the Acadian people and their struggle for recognition (Elder, 2006).³⁵

Elder keeps *Moncton Mantra*’s English version at a respectful distance from Leblanc’s original. However, as the choice of the term

³⁵ Longfellow, the author of *Evangeline*, also used “Acadie” in the 19th century.

“Acadie” indicates, she also distances her translation from the habits of her Anglophone readers.³⁶ Following Lawrence Venuti’s terminology, one could not accuse Elder of translating Leblanc’s work in accordance with a fluent strategy.³⁷ The reader of Elder’s *Moncton Mantra* is constantly made aware that s/he does not belong to the “us” outlined by Leblanc, and Elder’s distancing strategies actively encourage this awareness. Such a distance seems to work as a megaphone for Leblanc’s text: while it certainly blurs the author’s voice, it makes his intentions clearer and significantly louder. For instance, Elder makes sure her reader does not miss the extent of Leblanc’s attachment to his community. When *Moncton Mantra* mentions this attachment, she emphasizes it by expanding on it. In the following excerpts, Gautreau discovers from a visit to a Francophone friend in Boston that he is not meant to live in the United States: “[...] un sentiment d’ambivalence m’envahit. Ça dit oui pour aller vers ce qui vient, mais non, ce ne sera pas ici que je vivrai ces changements. Et je suis un peu triste à cette pensée. Je pourrais sans doute recommencer une vie ici” (p. 20). With empathy, Elder insists on the narrator’s deep connection with his Franco-American friends, on his regrets to be leaving them: “[...] I felt torn. Yes, I said to what I saw ahead, but no, I wouldn’t be living these changes here, in this place. This made me sad; *I had a particular sense of nostalgia, attachment, something*. I could have easily begun a new life here” (trans. Elder, p. 15, emphasis added). When Leblanc mentions Gautreau’s attachment to Moncton, Elder also strengthens it:

Je sens l’appel de Moncton s’intensifier. (p. 121)

I could hear the call of Moncton getting *louder and* more intense.
(trans. Elder, p. 105, emphasis added)

In breaking down the text’s arguments and clarifying its distance from the target culture, Elder also allows her reader to come to grips with it.

³⁶ Several people have confided to me that they find Elder’s prose in *Moncton Mantra* unnecessarily “opaque” and “heavy.” In editing drafts of this article, Jones and Summerley often inadvertently corrected Elder’s translation, making it more fluent in English.

³⁷ “Fluency can be seen as a discursive strategy ideally suited to domesticating translation, capable not only of executing the ethnocentric violence of domestication, but also of concealing this violence by producing the effect of transparency, the illusion that this is not a translation, but the foreign text, in fact the living thoughts of the foreign author [...]” (Venuti, 1995, p. 61).

Majzels' method certainly is different. His approach is based on heterogeneity, proposing a variation on and a displacement of Daigle's Chiac. Due to its experimental nature, more room for Chiac's materiality is made possible. In fact, in *Life's Little Difficulties*, Majzels goes as far as to create an English equivalent of Chiac to match the one Daigle had produced. The following are a few examples:

– C'est *great!* C'est *just great!* [...] Worry pas, ma belle! Juste worry pas, tout' va *right* ben aller! Tu vas voir. (Daigle, 2002, p. 64)

“C'est *great!* C'est *just great!* [...] Don't you worry, Belle! Just worry pas, everything is going to turn out fine! You'll see.” (trans. Majzels, p. 48)

C'est *obvious* juste dans la manière que tu dances. (Daigle, p. 68)

It's *obvious* just à voir la way que tu dances. (trans. Majzels, p. 137)

– Ben, comment-ce tu veux que je pense comme toi si j'pense pas comme toi? (Daigle, p. 88)

“Well, tell me then, how am I supposed to agree si j'agree pas?” (trans. Majzels, p. 68)

It could be argued that Majzels' Chiac, abandoning italics, is more radical than Daigle's in its hybridization strategies. (Unlike Daigle with French, Majzels does not feel the need to protect English from the intrusion of another language. Therefore, the different strategies used by the author and her translator reflect the different contexts in which they operate.) In certain cases, Majzels' version of Chiac could pass for the real thing. Students in Moncton³⁸ remarked that “la way” and “j'agree pas” were more credible in Chiac than “la manière” and “je pense pas comme toi.”

³⁸ From Université de Moncton, graduate students in the seminars LITT 7350, “Les littératures francophones et les langues,” which I co-taught with Raoul Boudreau during the fall of 2004; and LIN 7870, “Représentations et sécurité/insécurité linguistique,” taught by Annette Boudreau, where I presented a conference entitled “Traduire le chiac” in November 2004, as well as undergraduate students in the course TRAD 3730, “Traduction littéraire,” taught by Denise Merkle, and where I also presented my work on the translation of Chiac during the same semester, shared their impressions in class.

The type of equivalence that Majzels' English rendition of chiac aims for is of a formal nature. Therefore, one of his strategies consists in reversing the proportion of French and English that can be found in Daigle's novel, while another involves gradually increasing the quantity of French as his reader grows more accustomed to it:

- Non ben, regarde, y'est *at least* aussi beau que John Cassavetes.
- *Well, ça sparkle icitte!*
- C'est Nouël. C'est normal que ça *sparkle*. (Daigle, 2002, p. 128)

“No, but look, he's au moins as handsome as John Cassavetes.”
“I tell you, ça sparkle big time à soir.”
“Well, c'est Noël, non? It's normal que ça sparkle.” (trans. Majzels, p. 103)

Of course, as is often the case in translation, a perfect formal equivalence does not guarantee similar effects. Indeed, Daigle's Chiac is colloquial, but Majzels' is far from it. On the contrary, the type of audience that it is likely to reach, with its formal play on words, makes it almost elitist, accentuating the vertical relationship between the two texts. Through her use of Chiac, Daigle attempts to give credence to a vernacular. Without being mimetic or being deprived of formal experimentation, her well-crafted strategy has representational value: she is essentially paving a path for Acadie and Chiac to gain increased literary recognition. Majzels' Chiac is a pure invention. It is bold, avant-garde art, not part of daily life. And it serves as a foreignizing translation strategy.³⁹ In other words, Majzels' own Chiac certainly is a contribution to the struggle for this code's legitimacy; but it is mostly an attempt to introduce internal dissidence to the international domination of English, and an attempt to revise the (English) Canadian literary canon. As Venuti explains:

On the one hand, foreignizing translation enacts an ethnocentric appropriation of the foreign text by enlisting it in a domestic cultural political agenda, like dissidence; on the other hand, it is precisely this dissident stance that enables foreignizing translation to signal the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text and perform a

³⁹ “Foreignizing translation is a dissident cultural practice, maintaining a refusal of the dominant by developing affiliations with marginal linguistic and literary values at home, including foreign cultures that have been excluded because of their own resistance to dominant values” (Venuti, 1995, p. 147).

work of cultural restoration, admitting the ethnodeviant and potentially revising domestic literary canons. (1995, p. 146)

Perhaps, then, Majzels' experimental translation method can be another megaphone for Chiac, another amplifying method for its transmission. According to Casanova, literary prestige is often achieved through artistic autonomy, stemming from a work's historical, social and political context. All the better if it comes from translation. Translation is, after all, "the foremost example of a particular type of consecration in the literary world" (Casanova, trans. DeBevoise, 2004, p. 133); it is a "weapon [...] in the struggle by and for literary capital" (*Ibid.*, p. 23).⁴⁰

It is too early, and the cases are too few, to tell what the translation of Chiac into English will do to Acadian literature, as well as to English Canadian literature. For now, writers, translators and scholars alike are still trying to figure out how Chiac can be written, and then how it can be translated. While there is a common, careful movement towards legitimization, the strategies used to reach this goal vary. Writers and translators borrow from one another. After reading Majzels' translation without italics separating English from French, Daigle expressed interest in this difference from her own practice. Following Elder, Majzels decided to replace the term "Acadia" he was using in *Just Fine* by "Acadie" in *Life's Little Difficulties*. With the progress of both the writing and the translation of Chiac as emerging phenomena, every strategy will constitute a new performance, which in turn will bring about consequences of its own. This collective act is not over yet. As Sonya Malaborza (2007, forthcoming), a translator not of Chiac but into Chiac, writes: "Wachez-nous ben prendre la go avec ça" ("Just watch us take that and run with it").

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⁴⁰ The French original is clearer: "La traduction est la plus grande instance de consécration spécifique de l'univers littéraire" (Casanova, 1999, p. 188); "la traduction est ainsi [une] arme [...] dans la lutte pour et par le capital littéraire" (p. 40).

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ABSTRACT: Between French and English, Between Ethnography and Assimilation: Strategies for Translating Moncton's Acadian Vernacular — Chiac, the hybrid vernacular spoken by Acadians in the Moncton region, is increasingly used in works of fiction. By placing it on a par with French, Acadian novelists attempt to legitimize it as the language of a modern and urban Acadie. Their task is a difficult one, to which they respond with ambivalence: Chiac inscribes a difference which marginalizes them, whereas its absence amounts to a disappearance into the French norm. As a consequence, writers using Chiac face the challenge of making room for hybridity without dissociating themselves from their francophone identity. In their encounter with Chiac, translators of Acadian literature into English face a challenge of their own. Both multilingualism and vernacular languages

have been deemed untranslatable, and Chiac happens to be at once multilingual and a vernacular. The dilemma faced by these translators is hence not too far from the dilemma of writers of Chiac: how much difference should they erase, how much should they insist on it at the risk of confirming stereotypes? How can they assist and pursue attempts at legitimization? How can they avoid assimilation into English on the one hand, and ethnography on the other? This article investigates the strategies brought into play by two translators who have tackled Chiac and its ambivalent use by Acadian novelists: Robert Majzels, translator of France Daigle, and Jo-Anne Elder, translator of Gérald Leblanc.

RÉSUMÉ : Entre le français et l'anglais, entre l'ethnographie et l'assimilation: le vernaculaire acadien de Moncton en traduction —

Le chiac, ce mélange de français et d'anglais qui sert de vernaculaire aux Acadiens de la région de Moncton, est de plus en plus utilisé dans l'écriture romanesque. Or ce vernaculaire présente à ses auteurs comme à ses traducteurs des difficultés particulières. Le parler local ayant peu de légitimité littéraire, les auteurs sont confrontés à la question de leur langue d'écriture : doivent-ils s'effacer devant la norme ou inscrire une différence qui risque de les marginaliser? Pour les traducteurs, la traduction des parlers vernaculaires comme celle du plurilinguisme représentent deux des défis les plus exigeants, de sorte que les œuvres qui ont recours à ces procédés sont régulièrement taxées d'intraduisibilité. Dans le travail de Robert Majzels et de Jo-Anne Elder, respectivement traducteurs de France Daigle et de Gérald Leblanc, cet article dépistera les stratégies utilisées afin que les parlers du Moncton acadien – et notamment le chiac – puissent être accueillis dans un texte de langue anglaise : quels moyens les traducteurs emploient-ils pour se préserver des deux principaux écueils qui menacent la traduction de la différence linguistique, soit l'assimilation et l'ethnographie?

Keywords: Chiac, Acadian literature, Acadian literature in translation, literary multilingualism, sociolects and vernaculars.

Mots-clés : chiac, littérature acadienne, littérature acadienne en traduction, plurilinguisme littéraire, sociolectes et vernaculaires.

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