

THE IMPACT OF ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT ON CANADIAN ENGLISH

Alison Borden, Alexandra Erath, and Julie Yang

Introduction

In the turbulent 1960s, the United States' controversial involvement in the Vietnam War brought about heightened feelings of anti-Americanism among Canadians (Thompson & Randal, 2002). While there was some support of United States' involvement in Vietnam on the part of the Canadian government (and some Canadian citizens), a vast number of Canadians were strongly opposed to the actions of the U.S. government (Thompson & Randall, 2002).

Within Canadian English, there is conflict between the American and British variants of words, especially in regard to spellings (Pratt, 1993). For example, although the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* lists the British spelling of "colour" as the preferred Canadian variant, there is no "correct" variant in Canada (J. McAlpine, personal communication, October 15, 2008). However, social circumstances could have an effect on which variant of a word Canadian citizens prefer. We argue that during the Vietnam War, when anti-American sentiment ran much higher than usual, Canadians would be more likely to use the British spelling variant of words as a method of distinguishing themselves from Americans. For the purpose of this paper, we examined words which typically vary between an *-or* spelling (the American variant), and an *-our* spelling (the British variant), such as *color* versus *colour*.

Many Canadian newspapers utilize a style guide in order to maintain consistency within the publication (J. McAlpine, personal communication, October 15, 2008). For that reason, the preference among Canadians to use the British variant may not have been seen immediately within such Canadian publications. We further argue that the period of anti-Americanism seen during the Vietnam War was not long enough or intense enough to warrant changing the Canadian style guides. As a result, the spelling variant used by major Canadian publications, such as *The Toronto Star* newspaper, would not necessarily reflect the spelling variant preferred by Canadian citizens at that time. On the other hand, some less "formal" publications, which do not follow a style guide (a university's student newspaper, for example), would reflect the prevailing preference for the British spelling variants over American spelling variants.

This paper is divided into four parts. The first part will take a detailed look at the feelings resonating among Canadian citizens at the time and will examine whether, or the extent to which, there was a feeling of anti-Americanism. After establishing the

mood within the era, we will in the second part of the paper discuss the methodology of our research and how we examined these spelling variants within the two types of publications. In the third part of the paper we will compile the results of our research and in the final part sum up the findings and present our analysis.

1. *Analyzing the Times – Canadian Anti-American Sentiment in the Vietnam Era*

In order to argue that there was a change in the preferred spelling of words in Canada due to feelings of anti-Americanism, we first examine the relationship between the two countries during the Vietnam War era.

In the early years of the war, Canada seems very similar to the U.S. in opinion towards war as well as other matters; however, the support of the Vietnam War by many Canadians was only tentative. The Vietnam War, especially the United States' involvement in it, became a highly controversial topic in the 1960s among Canadians (Granatstein, 1996). While there was certainly some ongoing Canadian support for the actions of the U.S. government by Canadians, there was also a tremendous amount of loudly voiced criticism, especially on the part of young Canadians (Owram, 1996). Protests of the war in Canada drew large crowds, including many teenagers (Granatstein, 1996:180). Referring to what had been a strong friendship between neighbouring countries, one historian said "the 1960s soon brought painful division to the U.S.–Canada relationship" (Thompson & Randall, 2002:229). In the 1960s and 1970s there was a "burgeoning nationalism and anti-Americanism" (Granatstein, 1996:171): "the anti-war and the anti-American anger in Canada continued to grow slowly and to reinforce each other" (Granatstein, 1996:177).

The era saw the rise of popular Canadian musicians such as Neil Young, Bruce Cockburn and Joni Mitchell, all of whom preached an anti-war message in their lyrics (Granatstein, 1996:177). These lyrics helped to enforce a degree of anti-Americanism among Canadians. For Canadians, their consciousness of the Vietnam War, and their deep desire to not be involved in it, made them feel their separateness from the U.S. more than they had felt it at any time since the Second World War (Granatstein, 1996:191). And we argue that, due to these feelings of separateness, Canadians may have wanted to further distinguish themselves through preferences in spelling, such as in *-our/-or* variants. If the two spelling variants, *-our* and *-or*, represent a British preference and American preference, respectively, Canadians might steer away from the American preference as a way of demonstrating the strength of their anti-American sentiment.

2. *Methodology*

Our paper looks at two different types of publications: those that we call "formal," which follow a style guide and those that do not. The research examines *The Toronto Star*, a well-known national Canadian news publication, which follows a style guide, and

The Gateway, the student newspaper from the University of Alberta. For both papers, we looked at articles from three separate years, in order to examine which spelling variant was preferred before (1955), during (1965), and after (1986) the Vietnam War. (Regular U.S. combat units fought in Vietnam from 1965 to 1973.)

Within both *The Toronto Star* and *The Gateway*, we looked through selected issues to find each example of a word that could vary between the 'or' and 'our' spelling. For each occurrence (or token) of the word within the paper, we marked down how the paper spelled it and whether it was the American or British variant of the word. In *The Toronto Star*, we examined approximately ten tokens per year. In *The Gateway*, we examined approximately thirty tokens per year. **Appendix A** and **Appendix B** list all of the words that we used in our research.

3. Results

3.1. Results of Analysis of The Toronto Star

Within *The Toronto Star*, we saw very consistent results which showed a clear preference in all three years for the American spelling of the words (see **Figure 1**). In 1955, 62.5% of the variable words in the papers were spelled using the American spelling. The year 1965 showed a slight increase to 75% of the words using the American spelling. Lastly, 1986 showed complete dominance on the part of the American spelling, with 100% of the variable words spelled using the American spelling. The results show a clear preference by the publication for the American as opposed to the British spelling. In addition, especially as the years go on, the results show a great deal of consistency. This uniformity is consistent with the publication's use of a style guide, at least in 1986.

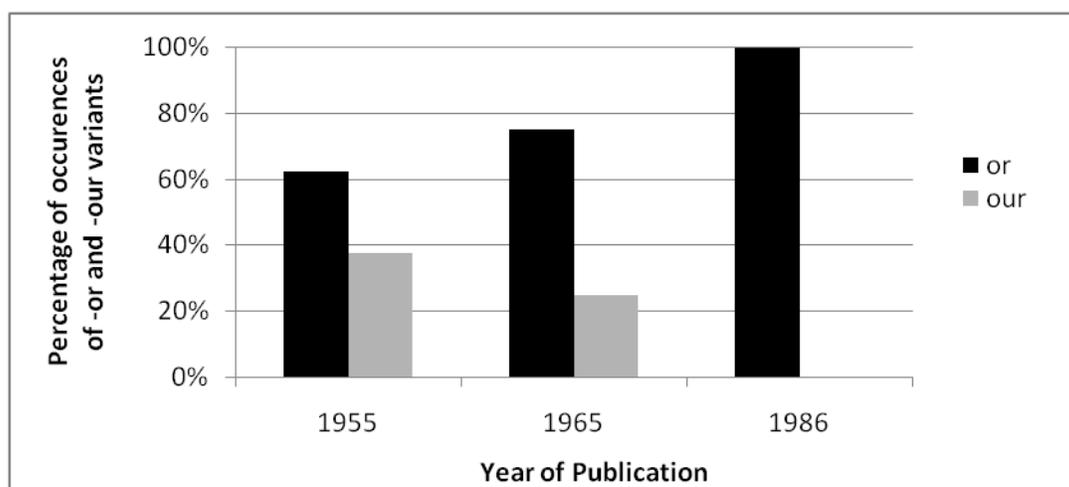


Figure 1: A comparison of the percentage of *-our* and *-or* variants occurring in *The Toronto Star*.

3.2 Results of Analysis of The Gateway

While the results of our research within *The Toronto Star* showed a consistent preference in the three different years, our research in *The Gateway* showed a tremendous change throughout the time period that we examined.

First of all, our results proved that *The Gateway* did not follow any guidelines set forth by a style guide. The tokens that we found within the articles in all three years, (although especially in 1955 and 1965) showed inconsistency. In more than one case, there was even inconsistency within an article. For example, in a 1955 article titled "Education Opportunities Should Be Equalized" (see **Figure 2**), the author used the British spelling for *labour* with the American spelling for the related word *laborer*.

Education Opportunities Should Be Equalized

By Marg Boutillier

"The next great step in education is the equalization of educational opportunities for children across the nation," said Dr. M. E. LaZerte at the opening banquet of the NFCUS conference, held in Athabasca hall Monday evening. Dr. LaZerte is the Research director of the Canadian School Trustees' association, and former dean of education of the University of Alberta.

In a study conducted by Dr. LaZerte for NFCUS on scholarships and bursaries, he found that from 15 to 20 per cent of grade XII students capable of carrying on their studies in university need financial aid.

He also found that children from homes where parents are professional people have 14 times the chance to get to university as the children of unskilled laborers.

"THERE IS FREE secondary education if you are wealthy enough to take advantage of it", he said, after stating that only 21 per cent of children in Grade XI are from unskilled labour homes.

He said that as Canada is a growing industrial nation more trained people are needed, and consequently more universities will be needed. Business and industry help to provide scholarships to fill their needs, but the fields of social sciences and languages are neglected.

The number of scholarship and bursaries made available should be governed by the number of undergraduates needing financial aid. Students working in the summer can only earn about half enough money to pay for winter sessions, so both scholarships and bursaries are needed.

DR. LAZERTE EXPLAINED several plans for the distribution of the scholarship money on the national level. One plan was for the provinces to pay a certain percentage of educational costs, with the dominion making up the rest. The federal grant would be based on the

ability of the province to raise the money itself. This would be a policy of 'tax wealth where it is found.'

By equalization of the cost of education across the dominion national standards in technical and cultural fields can be maintained.

The Honorable J. J. Bowlen welcomed the NFCUS delegates on behalf of the Province of Alberta, and the Honorable A. O. Aalborg, minister of education spoke on behalf of the government.

PRESIDENT A. STEWART welcoming delegates to the University of Alberta said that there should be more exchange of students between provinces in Canada and NFCUS was contributing to this with their conference.

Mr. G. L. Harold, first vice president of the Alberta Wheat pool spoke briefly and invited the delegates to a banquet on Friday sponsored by his organization.

Following the banquet an informal reception was held at the Delta Upsilon fraternity house.

He also found that children from homes where parents are professional people have 14 times the chance to get to university as the children of unskilled laborers.

"THERE IS FREE secondary education if you are wealthy enough to take advantage of it", he said, after stating that only 21 per cent of children in Grade XI are from unskilled labour homes.

He said that as Canada is a growing industrial nation more trained people are needed, and consequently more universities will be needed.

Figure 2: "Education Opportunities Should Be Equalized" from *The Gateway*, October 14, 1955, Page 3, Item Ar00301.

Second, our research showed a definite change in the preferred variant following the Vietnam War. In 1955, our results showed that just over 60% of the variable words seen in the articles we scanned used the American spelling variant. In 1965, there were slight changes, but still almost 60% of the tokens we saw used the American spelling

variant (see **Figure 3**). While the British variant was certainly used, the American variant was clearly the preferred variant. In 1986, however, the data was quite different from the previous years. Following the Vietnam War, the British spelling variants were heavily favoured in *The Gateway*. For 1986, 80% of the tokens we examined in the research used the British *-our* rather than the American *-or*.

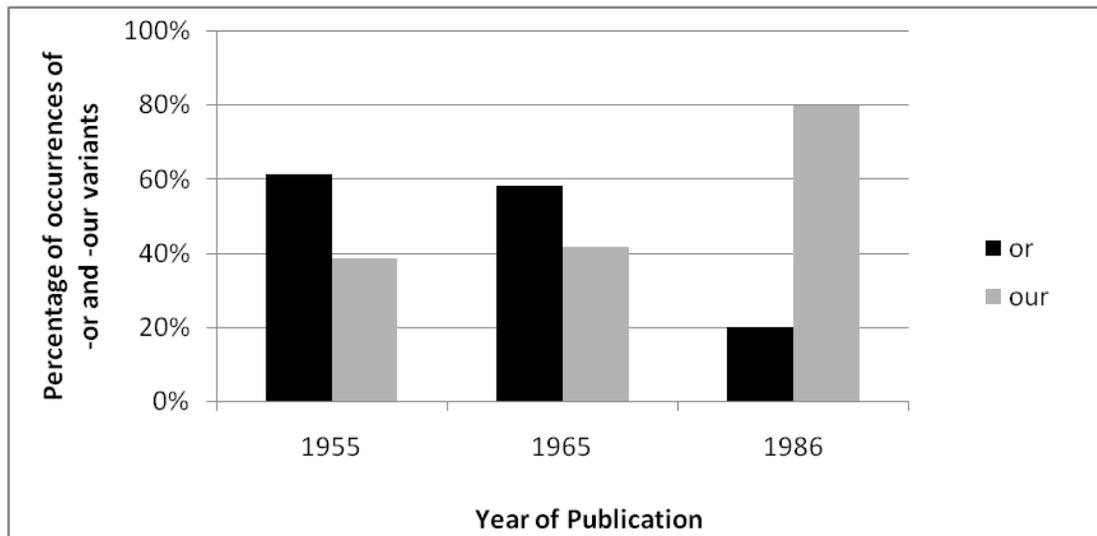


Figure 3: A comparison of the percentage of *-or* and *-our* variants occurring in informal Publications (*The Gateway*).

4. Conclusion

By examining both “formal” and “informal” sources in our research, we were able to support both parts of our hypothesis. First, our study of the articles from *The Toronto Star* showed that within “formal” publications, there was considerably less use of the British spelling of these variant *-or/-our* words within any of the three years referenced. In fact, in the “formal” source, following the Vietnam War the *American* variant was the preferred variant in Canada. However, in our research we also discovered that the variant used in these wide circulation daily newspapers was not necessarily the choice of the citizens. At the same time as the “formal” sources were moving decisively toward use of American spellings, the “informal” sources were making more use of the British spelling of the same words. In addition, our research in *The Gateway* shows not only a shift towards the British spelling but a dramatic one. In just over twenty years, the paper went from strongly favouring the American variant to overwhelmingly use of the British spelling.

The research certainly suggests that the heightened tensions between the United States and Canada during the Vietnam War could be an underlying factor in the sudden Canadian shift towards Britishisms. However, our research is simply a starting point in explaining this linguistic change in Canada, and the project could well be expanded. For

example, it would be useful to look at more publications from all three time periods to gather data of a broader scope. Furthermore, additional linguistic environments could be examined, including other spelling choices (e.g., *centre* versus *center*) and lexical choices (e.g., *tap* versus *faucet*).

Our hypothesis could also be broadened. In other words, is it possible that in today's society, at another time when anti-Americanism runs high, due to the war in Iraq, Canadian English is again seeing a shift towards Britishisms? Our findings suggest that this is a possibility worth examining. As well, our research invites the broader question of the extent to which anti-American sentiment amongst Canadians during the Vietnam War affected not only Canadian English but Canadian culture as a whole.

References

- Barber, K. (Ed.). (2004). *Canadian Oxford dictionary* (2nd ed.). Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Boutillier, M. (1955, October 14). Education opportunities should be equalized. *The Gateway*, p. 3.
- Granatstein, J. (1996). *Yankee go home? Canadians and anti-Americanism*. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.
- Owram, D. (1996). *Born at the right time: A history of the baby-boom generation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Pratt, T. K. (1993). The hobgoblin of Canadian English spelling, in S. Clarke (Ed.), *Focus on Canada* (pp. 45–64). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Thompson, J. H., & Randall, S. J. (2002). *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent allies* (3rd ed.). Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Appendix A
Variants in Formal Publication: *The Toronto Star*

| Items | Article Title | Page Number | Date |
|--------------|--|--------------------|---------------|
| Labor | “Frost Government Makes Mockery Labor Act-CCF” | 21 | June 1, 1955 |
| Anti-labor | “Frost Government Makes Mockery Labor Act-CCF” | 23 | June 1, 1955 |
| Neighbour | “Retires is Given Cake by Neighbors” | 24 | June 1, 1955 |
| Favourite | “Huge Special purchase! The Business men’s Summer Favourite” | 47 | June 1, 1955 |
| Flavour | “Flavour plus filter” | 50 | June 4, 1955 |
| Harbour | “The Castle Harbor” | 14 | June 4, 1955 |
| Color | “A color”-Crossword | 5 | June 1, 1955 |
| Honor | “Society Highlights” | 18 | Jan 3, 1955 |
| Labourers | “300 laborers on strike, could delay new subway | 1 | June 1, 1965 |
| Favors | “A police chief favors hanging as controlling influence” | 22 | June 1, 1965 |
| Savour | “Savour it!” | 34 | June 2, 1965 |
| Humor | “ You have a fine sense of humor” | 34 | June 2, 1965 |
| Color | “How to get Rich without really trying” | 17-24, Section 2 | June 1, 1965 |
| Honor | “R.G Paynes celebrate golden anniversary” | 52 | June 4, 1965 |
| Neighbour | “Informers on ‘the union’ disappear” | 3 | June 5, 1965 |
| Harbour | “New Breed of Fishermen College Grads in Newfoundland” | 3 | June 4, 1965 |
| Labors | “It’s a girl” | F16 | June 13, 1986 |
| Neighbor | “North York grandmother dies in fire despite son’s frantic rescue efforts” | A4 | June 1, 1986 |
| Color | “Color Television” | A9 | June 1, 1986 |
| Honor | “Terry Fox, stars, springtime honored by kids with poetry” | A22 | June 1, 1986 |
| Harbor | “Assisting financially in an upgrading of the city’s harbor” | C10 | June 24, 1986 |
| Favor | “...As North’s ‘dear leader’ gets anything he wants” | B5 | June 1, 1986 |

Appendix B
Variants in Informal Publication: The Gateway

| 1955 | 1965 | 1986 |
|-----------|----------|------------|
| Labor | labor | labour |
| labour | labour | neighbor |
| favor | neighbor | favourite |
| favour | favor | favourably |
| color | favour | humor |
| colour | humor | humour |
| honor | color | color |
| honour | colour | colour |
| rumor | honor | honor |
| endeavor | honour | honour |
| endeavour | | behaviour |