

Hollywood, Florida: a Seasonal, French-speaking Community

by Peter A. Machonis

Francophone locales in close proximity to US universities and colleges present remarkable opportunities for students to use French in real-life situations, while often simultaneously exposing them to other varieties of French. Hollywood, Florida, which has a large Quebecois population in the winter months, has been utilized for student learning in a Global Learning-designated French linguistics course at Florida International University. After a short account of the origins of this vibrant, albeit seasonal, French-speaking community in South Florida, we show how it can be explored using active or experiential learning techniques. We will see that this methodology heightens students' multicultural awareness and is appropriate for exploring other French-speaking communities and is particularly applicable to study abroad programs.

ORIGINS OF A LINGUISTIC ISOLATE

As opposed to the New England Francophone communities of the mid-19th and early 20th centuries which were based on factory work or exploitation of natural resources, the present-day Quebecois community in South Florida is strictly touristic and concentrated in the winter months. Tremblay (17) identifies a first wave of Quebecois retiree migrants and visitors from the 1940s to the 1960s who settled mainly in Surfside and Sunny Isles, closer to Miami Beach. Then with the *Révolution tranquille*, came a second wave of migrants and visitors – often driving to Florida – that tended to prefer more affordable destinations in the Hollywood area, closer to Fort Lauderdale. According to Pierre Vigneault, former editor of *Le Soleil de la Floride*, "there's nowhere else that people can come so easily and find a place where the cost of living is similar to Quebec's," with the only downside being health care, which is very expensive in Florida and often only partly reimbursable outside of Canada (Grescoe 228). The northward movement toward Hollywood and away from Miami Beach was reinforced by a high crime wave in Miami during the 1980s (the "Miami Vice" period), and then by the upscale redevelopment of Miami Beach with the restoration of the Art Deco district and the construction of luxury hotels during the 1990s, which increased rent and living expenses.

Tremblay claims that the Quebecois community of Hollywood reached its zenith in the 1990s. Dubbed "Floribec," this geographic sector of South Florida can be classified as a contemporary French-speaking linguistic isolate in the US. It is centered in Hollywood Beach, with its nucleus around Johnson Street and the "Broadwalk" – the broad concrete walkway along the beach paralleling the ocean. Today, it consists of a small permanent Francophone community of about 3,000 inhabitants, with a large seasonal community of over 400,000 visitors. Although the Quebecois community has its highest concentration of both businesses and visitors at the Johnson and Broadwalk hub, the French-speaking community extends inland in a semicircle gradually declining in concentration as the arc extends north, south and west away from the beach to Dania Beach Boulevard, Hallandale Beach Boulevard and Federal Highway, respectively. Today, the community extends further west into the suburbs of Coral Springs, but not at the concentration observed in Hollywood (Tremblay 30, 39).

In addition to the previously mentioned drawbacks of obtaining health care in the US, Quebecois visitors lose their right to Canadian health care if they stay in Florida more than 183 days (Grescoe 228). This French-speaking community is thus only conspicuous from October to April when the many "snowbirds" flee the harsh Quebec winter for four to six months. They recreate a French-speaking locality with their friends and neighbors in Hollywood, Florida, while maintaining contact and residences in their native Quebec.

FLORIBEC TODAY

It should be mentioned that the majority of Hollywood Quebecois, both resident and seasonal, are retirees. In addition, many of the permanent Quebecois residents are business owners who first came to Florida in the 1990s as tourists, and who cater to seasonal Quebecois vacationers today. Consequently, one can easily spend four to six months in Florida while using mainly French on a daily basis. Near Johnson and the Broadwalk, there are numerous signs in French – *Nous parlons français* – restaurants such as *La Gaspésienne* and *Le Pôle nord* serving *poutine* and *pâté chinois*, modest motels advertising Quebec TV channels, and *dépanneurs* that carry hard-to-find Canadian products, as well as newspapers, such as *Le Journal de Montréal*, *La Presse*, and *Le Soleil*. In addition, most shops carry *Le Soleil de la Floride* – a free, monthly newspaper in existence since 1983, that advertises many of the local French-speaking businesses and services found in the Hollywood area. Further from the French-speaking hub along the beach, one can even find Canadian banks, such as la *Caisse populaire Desjardins*, or the "Desjardins Federal Savings Bank," on East Hallandale Beach Boulevard, which caters to Quebecois visitors, allowing them to tend to banking matters in French as well.

This "microcosm of lower-middle-class Quebec" (Grescoe 227) is not always appreciated by locals, who have traditionally complained about everything from slow drivers during the winter months to retirees wearing skimpy bathing suits on Hollywood Beach. Even French-speaking business owners are sometimes annoyed by their clientele's style of dress (e.g., wearing bathing suits in restaurants) or meager tips (Tremblay 88). According to some, this Floridian coastal strip had "become a de facto, low-rent suburb of urban Quebec" (Grescoe 228). In an effort to combat negative images of the city, the Hollywood mayor pushed to demolish the very popular *Frenchie's Café* and adjacent retail shops near the Johnson and the Broadwalk nucleus in the early 2000's. According to Tremblay (xii), that's when "Floribec a perdu son âme."

Destruction of the Floribec hub continues currently with the official groundbreaking of the Margaritaville Hollywood Beach resort – "an 845,000-square-foot island-themed paradise with a 349-room hotel, seven bars and restaurants, retail space and a surf ride" (Teproff, "Coming Soon") – which took place in August 2013. Although construction is already causing parking difficulties in the area (Teproff, "Beach"), local residents seem divided in their opinion of this new resort. While some look forward to the change, others prefer the old-fashioned charm of the way it is now, "a town of yesteryear," according to local historian Paul George (Teproff, "Margaritaville"). Although some fear that Margaritaville Hollywood Beach resort will mean the end of one of Florida's great nostalgic beach promenades, and as a result the demise of Floribec, city leaders maintain that they intend to keep the charm of Hollywood's Broadwalk:

The beloved bandshell where people gather nightly to dance or just listen to the music will stay. It will also get a complete makeover. The bleachers will be replaced with Adirondack chairs, and the hotel agreed to maintain the stage and provide music five nights a week. The Broadwalk, where hundreds of people jog, bike and walk daily, will not be touched (Teproff, "Margaritaville").

Although Tremblay's socio-geographic study concludes that the community was already in a downswing in the 2000s, the question remains if Quebecois, initially attracted by the laid-back, inexpensive beach resort of Hollywood Beach of the late 20th century, will continue to visit for months at a time if their community hub is replaced by a \$147 million upscale resort. Or will the community shift elsewhere, as has happened in the past?

CANADAFEST

While changes over the past 15 years have attempted to diminish the Quebecois flavor of the region, there is still one prime period of the year when the Hollywood Broadwalk pulsates with Quebecois visitors: the annual street festival known as CanadaFest. Since 1994, and at the height of the tourist season (often the last weekend of January), CanadaFest has billed itself as "la plus grande fête francophone aux États-Unis," and has aimed to "divertir les résidents et les voyageurs canadiens en Floride, de faire connaître la culture québécoise aux Floridiens et aux touristes étrangers et de faire découvrir les produits et services de la région offerts aux francophones" (CanadaFest). During this weekend event where French is spoken by just about everyone, approximately 150,000 tourists gravitate to the Johnson and Broadwalk heart of Floribec, where some 100 kiosks, located along a mile stretch of the beach walkway, advertise businesses and services (e.g., banks, Canadian consulate, insurance companies, newspapers, restaurants, travel companies, etc.). Many stands sell food and drink, and many CanadaFest participants come to listen to the free concerts by Quebecois singers while enjoying a day at the beach. This is when students from Florida International University's upper-division French course, *La Francophonie*, explore Hollywood, Florida.

LA FRANCOPHONIE

La Francophonie is an advanced French linguistics course where students learn about different varieties of French spoken in countries around the world. In addition to studying phonetic, grammatical, and lexical characteristics that distinguish these varieties from Metropolitan French, students discover the origins of these diverse forms, and examine language contact situations where French interfaces with other languages (e.g., English, Haitian Creole, Wolof). Among the various learning outcomes for this course are several Global Learning-based ones:

(1) Global Perspective: Students will be able to analyze a complicated multilingual situation where French is spoken alongside other languages in terms of multiple cultural perspectives.

(2) Global Awareness: Students will be able to analyze the interconnections between historical events, political regimes, and linguistic changes that have led to the creation of different varieties of French around the world.

(3) Global Engagement: Students will be able to demonstrate an openness (and an ability to convince others to be open) to the cultural significance of language varieties other than standard metropolitan French (e.g., Quebecois French, Haitian Creole).

In a major effort to pursue these outcomes, the class meets in Hollywood during CanadaFest, and later in the semester in Little Haiti. Students must travel to the locations on their own for these off-campus classes which take place on Saturdays and replace a regular three-hour weekly class. Both excursions use learning strategies adapted from the National Collegiate Honors Council's (NCHC) City as Text™ methodology.

CITY AS TEXT™

City as Text™ methodology, designed by Bernice Braid and first implemented in the 1976 NCHC Honors Semester in Washington D.C., is based on the concept of integrated, experiential learning. Over the past thirty-five years, members of the NCHC Semesters Committee have further developed and refined the methodology and adapted it to locations other than cities, often using the term "Place as Text" (Braid & Long 2010). The trademark and copyrights are held by the National Collegiate Honors Council, which should be acknowledged by those using the City as Text title and design concept.

In Table 1, we give detailed instructions on how to organize an experiential learning activity. These are appropriate for exploring French-speaking communities in the US or for developing activities in which students themselves use French to explore a city during the course of a study abroad program. Briefly, City as Text entails small group, student-led, rather than professor-led, investigations of an area. Students are split up into small groups with an assigned area of the city or place to explore in a few hours. They report back for a general discussion at the end of their walkabout and exchange their insights with the other student groups who have explored other areas of the same city or place. Each small group chooses a leader who reports to the entire group on what they saw, how they interacted with locals, and when possible, what they ate, smelled, heard, felt, or otherwise experienced. The idea is that the sum of all the groups' experiences gives the individual student a more complete idea of the place being investigated.

Since similar students tend to look at their environment in a similar fashion, it is advisable to split up friends, to ensure groups with varied interests, and to have a mix of majors, genders and nationalities or ethnicities in each small group. It works best if the groups are limited to three or four students who are assigned to those groups, rather than having self-chosen groups. Ideally, each small group is given a specific quarter or neighborhood of the larger geographic area (city or town) to investigate. Students are given only the four basic learning strategies listed in Table 2: mapping, observing, listening, and reflecting. Students should discuss the flow of pedestrian traffic and note where people gather; observe expected as well as unexpected details of social gatherings, clothing, and signage; and most importantly, talk and listen to as many individuals as possible to get a feel for the community. Students are encouraged to enter stores, buy a small item, and strike up a conversation with the owner, and to seek out local newspapers, such as *Le Soleil de la Floride*, to see what's important to the community. In their reflections, students

should discuss among themselves what they feel and try to identify their own cultural and linguistic biases.

The objective is that students discover something relevant about the area themselves, or in the case of Hollywood, about the Quebecois community in Florida and the language variety they hear during CanadaFest. Students in small groups thus have the freedom to learn on their own and from each other, but they also become educators when they report to the larger group. Students return from their small-group investigations full of excitement, ready to interrupt the small group reporters, claiming that what *their group* experienced was even better. Furthermore, students may come back with observations and experiences the professor perhaps never considered. Professors have to think on their feet with this methodology. "Ils ont massacré le français," said one student during a Hollywood debriefing, which led to the question of aesthetics and values, which authority figures sometimes associate with language varieties, and a debate on why one particular variety of French might be mistakenly considered "superior" or "inferior" based on non-linguistic factors. During the debriefing, other students asked *why* Quebecois French was so different from Metropolitan French – in reality, curiosity-driven questions about the original sources of, and the historical reasons for this particular variety – student-driven questions which were then pursued in the following classes.

Professors should be warned that this method involves a fair amount of advance planning. They should first link the exploration site to a theme and personally investigate the sub-areas they plan to assign before attempting this with a class. They should also consider some grounding material to give the students beforehand, a short introductory reading or film, for example. This should be just enough so that students do not feel lost, but not so much that they already think they know everything about the locale ahead of time.

HOLLYWOOD QUESTIONNAIRE

The Hollywood explorations done in the *Francophonie* course are somewhat differently organized from a traditional City as Text, in that during CanadaFest everything is taking place along the Boardwalk, so students are not assigned a specific area, but are just given a direction (north or south) to take from the central meeting point near Johnson Street. However, the crowds are so large that the small groups of students do not meet up with other groups, and in some cases they have a difficult time staying together due to the crowds.

Larger crowds can make it difficult to strike up conversations with strangers, so along with the four strategies (Table 2), students were also given a set of study questions for the day and a brief linguistic questionnaire, or *enquête* (Table 3), that they had to administer to five Quebecois that they met on the Boardwalk during the festival. Having a questionnaire gave the students a reason to approach visitors and engage in conversation, thus giving them practice in speaking and listening to a different variety of French. Most Quebecois strolling on the Boardwalk were eager to talk with the young university students, although sometimes students noted that they had to specify that they were doing a class project and not trying to sell something to get a passerby's attention. Many Quebecois were also interested in the students and would ask them questions about their background. A shy, near-native French-speaking Haitian student, initially reticent about doing this exercise, came back proudly saying, "Ils voulaient me parler."

For many students, this is their first real contact with the Quebecois accent and lexicon. So in addition to general questions about where the interviewees were from and why they were at CanadaFest (questions 1-4 in Table 3), the questionnaire also had multiple choice questions on vocabulary and idiomatic expressions (questions 5-7 in Table 3). Thus in addition to hearing a different French accent, students started to become aware of the Quebecois lexicon: interviewees confirmed that most Quebecois said *pinotte* or *arachide*, but almost never *cacahuète*. Likewise, *cuillère à thé* was preferred over *cuillère à café*. Perceptive students started to make the connection that speakers from the Montreal area tended to say *aiguisoir*, while those from Quebec City preferred *aiguise-crayon*, while hardly any one used *taille-crayon*. Preference for Quebecois idioms such as *prendre une marche*, *manquer le bateau*, and *on n'est pas sorti du bois* in place of *faire une promenade*, *rater le coche*, and *on n'est pas sorti de l'auberge* helped to stimulate thinking about language contact with English in the course of the history of Quebecois French.

The initial, on-site debriefing triggered not only questions on language aesthetics and origins, but also the influence of English on Quebecois French, archaisms that remain and innovations introduced in the Quebecois lexicon, and dialectal and individual variation within Quebec Province. But most important was that the reactions and questions were coming from the students right after visiting a street festival, rather than coming during a class PowerPoint presentation on Quebecois French. Speaking of the CanadaFest experience, one student commented:

La chose la plus étonnante de cette célébration était la similarité entre tous les participants. Ils étaient tous de la même génération. Mais après avoir parlé aux différents participants, on a découvert beaucoup de différence entre eux, surtout au niveau du langage. Les expressions qu'ils utilisent varient d'une région à une autre (dépend de leur humeur). Leur français est parfois difficile à comprendre et varie de l'un à l'autre.

CONCLUSION

The City as Text methodology involves a bottom-up approach to learning in which the students are inquisitive, active learners, who notice details and return with questions and ideas, instead of an exhausting, traditional, top-down group excursion, led by a professional tour guide *telling* students what they *should* notice. This pedagogical technique is highly appropriate for exploring other French-speaking communities, and especially applicable to study abroad programs. We hope that the seasonal, French-speaking community described here will remain intact for future classes and research in spite of the most recent changes to the community hub. Fortunately the continued enthusiasm for the annual CanadaFest street festival and the continued publication of *Le Soleil de la Floride*, both in print and online, seem to defy Tremblay's 2006 pessimistic views on the inevitable demise of Floribec.

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Table 1: How to Organize City as Text™

- (1) Decide on **site and theme**. The theme and site should be linked in some intellectual way. What specific issues will the group investigate?
- (2) Provide some **introductory material** to read before meeting to ground the issues in some way. These resources should relate to the theme to be explored but should not include too much information. Introductory materials could include articles, book chapters, or movies.
- (3) Divide the exploratory area into **separate locations** – various neighborhoods of a city, different parts of a museum, etc. These can be simple geographic boundaries, depending on the theme, but dividing the area into diverse neighborhoods each relating to the theme in a different way typically produces more interesting intellectual results. The areas should be clearly delineated and should not overlap so that the small groups do not run into each other and form larger groups.
- (4) Divide participants into **sub-groups**. Three or four students – who do not know each other very well and who are from different disciplines – per group works best. Each group is assigned to **investigate one or two areas**. The most important thing to do is not to tell them what to do other than to provide them with the four City as Text strategies in Table 2: Mapping, Observing, Listening, and Reflecting.
- (5) Each group has a certain amount of **time to investigate**. People from different disciplines notice different details, and this sharing of the experience helps all the participants notice their own blinders or filters through which they see the world. They **discuss and reflect in their small group**, and one or two members prepare a short oral report to give to the larger group.
- (6) Meet for **large group discussion** or **debriefing** with **each sub-group** giving its **report**. This should create a layered discussion showing an understanding of the theme explored. One or two relevant **experts** may be brought in for the larger group discussion. But rather than giving a lecture, the expert(s) should listen attentively to the groups' reports and briefly react to what the participants saw and answer their curiosity-driven questions.
- (7) Individuals prepare **written reflections**. Participants should reflect on the day's experience as self-conscious observers and connect their thoughts to the themes explored and discussed.
- (8) A final component of this methodology is the **recursive element** of learning. Essentially, a true City as Text experience is never complete with just one round of exploration and essays; it continues throughout the semester or study abroad experience. Over time, students might share written reflections out loud, exploratory groups might be redistributed, areas of exploration can be expanded or focused in other ways, and more experts might be brought in for class interactions. The idea is that learning is bottom up, not top down. Individuals and small groups gather information themselves and have many questions.

Source: Adapted from Machonis (147-8)

Table 2: City as Text™ Strategies

(1) **Mapping:** You will want to be able to construct, during and after your explorations, the primary kinds of buildings, points of interest, centers of activity, and transportation routes (by foot, vehicle, or other means). You will want to look for patterns of housing, traffic flow, and social activity that may not be apparent on any traditional map. Where do people go, how do they get there, and what do they do when they get there?

(2) **Observing:** You will want to look carefully for the unexpected as well as the expected, for the familiar as well as the new. You will want to notice details of architecture, landscaping, social gathering, clothing, possessions, decoration, signage, and advertising.

(3) **Listening:** You will want to talk to as many people as you can and to find out from them what matters to them in their daily lives, what they need, what they enjoy, what bothers them, and what they appreciate. Strike up conversations everywhere you go. Ask about such matters as how expensive it is to live there (dropping by a real estate agency could be enlightening), where to find a cheap meal (or a good one or an expensive one), what the local politics are (try to find a local newspaper), and what the history of the place is, what the population is like (age, race, class, profession, etc.), what people do to have a good time. In other words, imagine that you are moving to that location and try to find out everything you would need to learn to flourish there.

(4) **Reflecting:** Throughout your explorations, keep in mind that the people you meet, the buildings in which they live and work, the forms of their recreation, their modes of transportation – everything that they are and do – are important components of the environment. They are part of an ecological niche. You want to discover their particular roles in this ecology: how they use it, contribute to it, damage or improve it, and change it. You want to discover not only how but why they do what they do. Do not settle for easy answers. Do not assume you know the answers without doing serious research. Make sure you are conscious of your own biases and that you investigate them as thoroughly as you investigate the culture you are studying.

Source: Adapted from Machonis (149-50)

Table 3: General Questions and Sample Survey

Quelles langues entendez-vous autour de vous? Est-ce qu'il y a beaucoup de gens qui parlent français/anglais/espagnol sur le "broadwalk"? Entendez-vous d'autres langues?

Quels types de restaurants trouvez-vous dans votre parcours ? Quelle sorte de nourriture trouvez-vous dans les restaurants? Pouvez-vous acheter "une poutine," spécialité québécoise?

Y a-t-il des journaux en français? Décrivez-le(s). Quelle sorte d'articles trouve-t-on dans ce(s) journaux?

Décrivez le CanadaFest. Basé sur vos observations des kiosques et des festivités sur le Broadwalk, quel est le but du CanadaFest?

Décrivez la communauté autour de vous. Y a-t-il beaucoup de Québécois? De quelles régions viennent-ils? Pourquoi viennent-ils en Floride? Sont-ils aimables avec vous? Estimez l'âge moyen des gens. Est-il facile à trouver des francophones?

ENQUETE (to be given to five random French speakers):

(1) Le français est-il votre langue maternelle?

(2) Quel est votre lieu de naissance ? Région ou ville ?

(3) Combien de temps est-ce que vous passez en Floride ?

(4) Pourquoi/pour quelles raisons venez-vous à Hollywood en Floride ?

(5) Quel mot employez-vous plus souvent ?

peanut/ pinotte	arachide	cacahuète
cuillère à thé	cuillère à café	
aiguise-crayon	taille-crayon	aiguiseur
espadrilles souliers	running sneakeur	snike tennis shoe-claque

(6) Quel terme préférez-vous?

Canadiens français	Québécois	Franco-Canadiens	Québécois français
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(7) Quelle expression / mot employez-vous le plus souvent ?

prendre une marche	faire une promenade
placoter (placotage)	bavarder (comméragé)
manquer le bateau	rater le coche
on n'est pas sorti de l'auberge	on n'est pas sorti du bois

(8) Y a-t-il une autre expression typique de votre région, qui vient à l'esprit?

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