How to Ask for Wiper Fluid in Montreal: Struggling with the Terminology of Car Parts in Québecois
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How to ask for wiper fluid in Montreal: struggling with the terminology of car parts in québecois

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The lexical domain of car parts in Montréal French represents the fusion of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and sociopolitical factors in a process of lexical change. The context of the domain includes several different factors:
1) English, here perhaps more than in other lexical domains or in other aspects of language use, represents the standard terminology, because of the fact that economically Québec is part of the North American market. All the linguistic paraphernalia (shop manuals, owners' manuals, labelled boxes of parts, etc.) accompanying American artifacts is, then, of course, in English.
2) Not all people who talk about cars speak English and/or have access to the source of terminology.
3) There has been some contact with the French car industry, but it has been limited and recent.
4) The present government of the province of Québec has a policy of encouraging the use of a standardized French terminology in all domains where the source language has always been English.

This is a particularly interesting domain, then, not only because it shows what may happen to a terminology when it is used by speakers of a language other than that of the terminology, but also because a) it is used by the populace at large as well as by technicians in the domain, and b) because it is presently the focus of a conscious attempt to change and standardize it by an official language planning organization. It is therefore subject to influences not felt either by domains in which only technicians may be involved (i.e. that are not part of the general vocabulary) or by domains that are generally known and standardized.

L'Office de la Langue Française, the Québec government organization responsible for language matters (as relaté to Bill 101, a law prescribing certain changes in the use of languages in the province, into the details of which I will not enter) has a terminology department which has recently published its recommended terminology of car parts.[1] This lexicon was developed in coöperation with representatives of various American and European automobile companies, and teachers from several Québec automobile technology training institutes. The Office was then faced with the following dilemma: to what extent was this to be considered a recommendation, and, on the basis of that, what sort of programme should be designed to help the dissemination of that lexicon? Two things, then, were not clear: 1) Whether or not the Office had legitimacy as an agent of change, and 2) What sort of actual use was going on out there that would have to be taken into account in the designing of the implementation programme (the term used in French by the Office is " programme d'implantation")?

The second question was the motivation for fieldwork I carried out as a stagiaire in the sociolinguistic research section of the Office from September to December, 1978 (the first question will only be answered indirectly, if at all).[2] The research was designed to get an idea of a) the distribution and variation in use of the terms used by speakers of French in Montréal, and b) the sorts of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and sociological factors that might be influencing that distribution and variation.

In order to net the widest range of factors possible I chose to investigate only the terms that would be most widely used in spoken and written French, that is, the terms for parts of the car body and for parts of the passenger compartment. Using two diagrammes, I interviewed 35 francophone Montréalers, varying in age, sex, profession, level of education, degree of acquaintanceship with the vocabulary (through degree of acquaintanceship with the domain in general), place of birth, the area of the city they lived in, and other languages used. I asked them to tell me what names they used for each indicated part (there were 13 for the body and 12 for the passenger compartment), when they would tend to use them (especially if they used more than one), where they learned them, whether they recognized certain terms other than the ones they gave, and to what degree they were acquainted with cars. I also asked them general questions related to their acceptanc of attempts on the part of the government to change language use, and particularly use of these terms. This group included a group[3] of students and professors at l'Ecole des métiers de l'automobile in Montréal[3], several garage mechanics, an administrator at a driving school, several truck and taxi drivers, and a few non-drivers. I also spoke to a translator at an insurance company and a representative of the public relations department of the General Motors plant at Ste-Thérèse about problems of "frenchification" ("francisation" in French) of terminology. As well, 19 undergraduates in the Faculté des Sciences de l'Education at l'Université de Montréal[4] filled the diagramme out in writing and gave some sociological information.

The result was that there was overwhelming variation in the terms used, not only in that most people had more than one term for each part of the car, but also in that no two subjects had the same set of terms.[5] Rather than discuss the entire set of terms I would like to look at a few which best exemplify the sorts of linguistic processes and sociolinguistic factors involved. I will then mention briefly some possible sociological factors and the implications of all this for the sort of "corpus-planning"[6] activity the Office has in mind.

Two aspects of the analysis must first be distinguished: one has to do with discussion of factors related to a term in particular; the other has to do with the nature of competition between terms (and this competition is nearly always present in the community, though not as often in any given speaker's use; this then is the distinction between synchronic variation on the level of the community and in the use of an individual speaker). It should be kept in mind, however, that competition is in some sense always present, if only between an English term and the absence of a French term.

There are, then, English terms which have been adopted into the French vocabulary, with greater and lesser degrees of adaptation to French phonology and morphology, depending on the form of the English word. All such words have at least been adapted to the French stress pattern. Thus, for example, tire becomes /ta'jɐr/, bumper, /bʌm'pɐr/. There has been alteration in some vowels; ex. clutch becomes /klɔtʃ/, and initial /h/ is dropped, ex., hood becomes /ʊd/. Consonant clusters that do not occur in French are simplified, ex., windshield becomes /wɛ nʃil/. (The final consonant cluster simplification is typical of québecois in any case, ex., table, /tæb/). In other more receptive cases the phonologization is more advanced, ex., speedometer becomes /spɪdomɛt/, /spɪdomɛtr'/, or /spɪdomaɹt/, with the first /ɹ/ often /ɐ/, and is realized orthographically as speedomètre or spedomètre.

Another way in which English words get used in French is their use in an otherwise French nominal compound; thus hubcap becomes cap de roue (literally, cap of the wheel). The extent to which speakers think of these words as English or French is not clear; it is naturally partly dependent on the extent

to which the speaker knows English, but also has to do with his/ her knowledge of any other term in French for that term, the circumstances under which the term is learned and used, and the shape of the term. Certainly explicit reference was made to such loanwords being English, but there were also instances of, for example, clutch, as being French, certainly acceptance of cap de roue as French, and at least one of real confusion as to whether clutch had originally been an English word or not. An interesting related question which I have not explored in any depth is the way in which gender is assigned to such loanwords; offhand, it seems that all terms are masculine except for la clutch (which is also spelled la clotch). One explanation that has been offerred is that this is a shortening of la pédale de clutch, although I hasten to point out that brake is still masculine although the term la pédale de brake is probably used as often as la pédale de clutch. There is another more interesting process by which terms are borrowed, slightly phonologized, but whose shape has changed. The shape used is still an English one, but does not correspond to the one actually used in English. Thus, steering-wheel would be either that or simply wheel in English; in québecois it is le steering.The gear-shift (or stick-shift, or shift) is le shifter.

Although English elements may be incorporated into nominal compounds, it is more frequent to find either straight compounds or calques with entirely French elements. The other major compound incorporating an English element is brake à bras (handbrake), which has a certain pleasing alliteration, especially when considered with its major competition frein à main, whose prime artillery consists of rhyme. Regrettably, brake à bras is weakening under the onslaught of hypercorrection to frein à bras; I even caught one informant red-handed as he gave the term as "brake à, uh, ah, frein à bras". I will deal with calques later as at least one of them has to do with the introduction of European terms in recent years, and is a somewhat more complicated case. The most illuminating case of nominal compounding is that for hubcap, for which I was given seven different nominal compounds (cap de roue, chapeau de roue, disque de roue, flasque de roue, flaque de roue, garde-roue, and couvre-roue) along with the English hubcap and standard French enjoliveur (de roue). It should be noted a) that the English term is assimilated with difficulty into French, and b) that the standard French term is usually rejected as being opaque and pretentious, although one teacher of automobile mechanics made a case for its technical precision. The proliferation of compounds then appears to be the result of the absence of a norm. Cap de roue appears to be the term most widely known and used; I would predict then a storm of controversy between the upholders of cap de roue and its québecois connotations on the one hand and those of the standard enjoliveur (literally, "embellisher"), which is held preferable for reasons of possibilities of wider communication as well as of prestige and "correctness" of linguistic form. This situation is analogo to the recent stop-sign controversy in which backers of arrêt are fighting it out with those of stop on exactly those grounds. (The score on that: arrêt: 1, stop:0)

Another process whereby a lexical gap may be filled is through the use of a term already existing in the language in another domain, often a general term for a specific car part that in standard French tends to have a specific name. So, for example, vitre, the general term for any kind of window glass, is used for all car windows, where standard French has three different terms: pare-brise (windshield), lunette (the back window), and glace (the others). Similarly, lumière (light) is used for all car lights, where standard French has phare (for lighting) and feu (for signaling). Miroir (mirror) is used for both exterior and interior rear-view mirrors, although they may be qualified with intérieur, extérieur, or de côté, or by a phrase such as " pour voir en arrière" (to look behind). However since both terms were given in an interview context the informants may have felt that disambiguation was necessary. Furthermore,

the standard French rétroviseur has recently been introduced, but is rarely used in exactly that form. Rather, the term most frequently given is miroir rétroviseur, which appears to be a calque on the English rear-view mirror. Occasionally, a form such as rétroviseur arrière was given: in such cases I would claim that rétroviseur is semantically opaque and is used as a direct substitute for miroir. Also some informants gave miroir for one of the mirrors (usually the exterior) and rétroviseur for the other, thus achieving instant disambiguation through differentiation of field of reference.

This brings up the general question of what happens when new terms are acquired, usually through exposure to booklets like owners' manuals, teaching (at a driver education or automobile mechanics school), or advertising, all of which have begun using terms in French, often the European French terms, as a result, again, of the provincial language policy. In this regard I would like to discuss the terms for lights, the dashboard, and the windshield wipers, as well as a poster produced by the Gulf Oil Company.

As I mentioned previously, the term most often given for lights is the general term lumière. Signal lights are sometimes qualified as lumières de côté (side lights), lumières de parking, or simply les parking (which, along with le steering seems to conform to a widespread form of English loanwords in -ing, as in le building, le parking used for parking lot, le smoking for a dinner jacket, etc.), or clignotant(e)s or its equivalent English forms, flasher and flicker. However, phare seems to have been acquired by many informants, and feu by some, but rarely both. The result is that either phare is used to replace lumière, and is used for both phare and feu , or else phare is used for for just the headlight, with lumière or the informant's previous term for feu, in the same way that miroir and rétroviseur are used to disambiguate the inner and outer rear-view mirrors. Similarly, brake and frein may be used by some informants to distinguish between the foot-brake and the emergency brake; one informant, however, explained her use of this distinction on the grounds that in her car the emergency brake had "BRAKE" written on it, which is what happens when you drive an English-speaking car. (Beginning a discussion of another example is like opening Pandora's box, but if I may permit myself yet another digression I would like to point out that the students at l'Université de Montréal often spelled brake as break. The whole question of orthography as reflection of oral vs. written sources of terms will be brought up again briefly in the discussion of the terms for windshield wipers.). To return, then, to shifts in field of reference, here is one more example: le dash is the term most often used for dashboard. The French term, which is fairly widely known, is tableau de bord. One young informant, however, used tableau de bord for the dashboard, and le dash as the term for the glove compartment. This appears to be a special case of the phare-miroir phenomenon, in which the term for the whole is restricted to a part when a new term for the whole is acquired.+

The case of the windshield wipers represents a processes of analogy, association, and folk etymology. The existence of a lexical gap in French (the use of the English wiper being fairly widespread) opens the way for acceptance of the standard essuie-glace (because the speaker knows no English, perhaps, or has a particularly raised consciousness as far as preservation of québecois culture goes). This compound is transparent in standard French, as glace is used for car windows (and, in European French can also mean ice or ice cream). This is not the case in Québec, however, where vitre is the general term. Several things have happened, then:

1) several informants used essuie-vitre, thus fitting the term into the québecois system;

2) several interpreted glace in its sense of ice (which is in fact the only sense in which the word exists in québecois: window glass is vitre, and ice cream is crème glacée or crème à la glace, both calques on the English). An essuie-glace, then, is something you use to wipe the ice off your windshield. This does seem to me to be rather a provincial folk etymology, since cars in the tropics undoubtedly have these things despite the fact that there is no ice to deal with there.

3) In the written forms filled out by the students glace was often written glass or glasses (plural) by association, no doubt, with the English glass. This is probably another case where the terms were learned orally. The plural form glasses brings up an interesting problem with respect not only to the homonymous terms glace and glass(es) but also with respect to the other English sense of glasses, that is eye-glasses, and to the French equivalent of that, that is, lunettes. Lunette (singular) is, of course, also the word for the back window of a car. One informant has already succumbed to the confusion: he gave me the English term for the small unopenable window in the rear side of large recent-model cars (this was a young man well-versed in the details of the world of cars, both in English and in French) as opera glasses. In fact, the term in English is opera window, and the French term is glace d'opéra. However, on the whole, lunette as a car-window term is not widely enough known yet to have really gotten into the fray, but it will be interesting to see what happens.

Finally, the case of the Gulf Oil poster. This poster, giving pointers concerning the preparation of the motor for the winter, was posted on the wall of a service station, and used standard French terms not generally used in Québec. I asked the mechanic if he used and/or understood those terms: yes, he understood them, but as for using them, well, no, he never did, "...mais quand tu fais une annonce de meme, il faut que ce soit en bon français!" ("...when you make a poster like that, it has to be in good French!"). Evidently, in many cases, certain terms are judged appropriate for use in certain situations and others for other situations. For example, upon entering a garage, I overheard one man call out to another: "Va chercher les tires!" ("Go look for the tires!"). Later, when I interviewed him, he gave me pneu as his word for tire, and swore that he never used any other term. A used-car saleswoman, who had several terms for almost every part of the car, seemed to feel that they were socially stratified in some way; that is, certain terms were appropriate for use with people interested in cheap cars, and others for use with people who were well-dressed with a little money on hand. However, she said, she usually tried not to commit herself to using one term or another: she would wait until the client made his choice. Once s/he did, of course, she was obligated to use the same forms.

I would claim, then, that when an individual uses more than one term, they may be semantically equivalent in that they have the same referent, but have different social and probably stylistic significance. This is true whether it is the terms the mechanic has that differ in degree of specificity, or whether it is some pair or all of the English (even British and American), québecois, and standard French terms. It is also possible, however, for the reference of a term in an individual's repertoire to change over time, and certainly for a term at any given time to have different referents on the level of the community; that is, within a community, different speakers will use the same term in different ways. This has partly to do with the nature of the social network and social situations in which terms are diffused and used, partly with the nature of the process that involves lexical change (such as language contact, and the particular characteristics of any particular case), and partly to do with the nature of the relationship among competing or co-existing lexical items.

In this particular case, the most important variables appear to be degree and kind of contact with atuomobiles, and to a certain extent, political attitudes which define one's attitude towards certain aspects of language which are symbolic of those sentiments. Age, sex, level of education, all enter into play, but more in the way that they constrain one's contact with English and with cars than in any direct way. On the whole, then, younger speakers tended to use more French terms and have less competing terms than older speakers, and those whose jobs brought them into contact with English and with cars had a better knowledge of English terms than those whose did not (whether or nor they ever spoke English for any other reason). Another important factor is the nature of the competition among terms, both on the level of the community and on the level of the individual speaker's use. Where there is competition between an English term and a French one, the French term seems to be winning out. Thus, le bumper is giving way to le pare-chocs, le hood to le capot, etc. Again, interestingly, judging by the students' written forms, these are learned orally, as pare-chocs is written as pare-choc or par-choc, and capot as capôt or capeau (probably by analogy with chapeau 'hat/cover'). The stiffest competition is between terms of québécois origin and terms of European origin, especially where one québecois terms has become widely accepted, unless that form belongs to the category of generalized terms, in which case a more specific terms is readily acceptable. Thus phare is accepted as a substitute for lumière (although the whole phare/feu distinction probably less so), volant is accepted as a substitute for roue (wheel, steering wheel), rétroviseur for miroir (again, not necessarily in that direct way, or in the way in which it was originally used at the source) and so on. Vitre seems to be holding ground against glace (which is at the same level of generality as vitre), but not against pare-brise 'windshield' (which is a more specific term and is semantically transparent in a way that, say essuie-glace, is not). In any case, the complexity of that situation makes predictions very difficult. The competition, however, between non-general quebecois terms and European terms is rough terms is rough indeed. There is, for example, the case of valise (québecois) vs. coffre (standard French). As I understand it, both are archaic terms once referring to the trunk-like thing that used to get strapped onto the backs of carts or carriages, and subsequently, to early-model cars; when that became part of the body, Quebec and France happened to pick different words, whereas in each case either term might have done just as well. Valise and coffre are, then, both quite French words, distinguished only by their social and political connotations. The same is true of cap de roue and enjoliveur, pédale à gaz and accélérateur, boite or coffre à gants and vide-poches (literally, 'empty-the-pockets' the glove compartment), although the purists would say that in each case the quebécois terms has been heavily influenced by English.

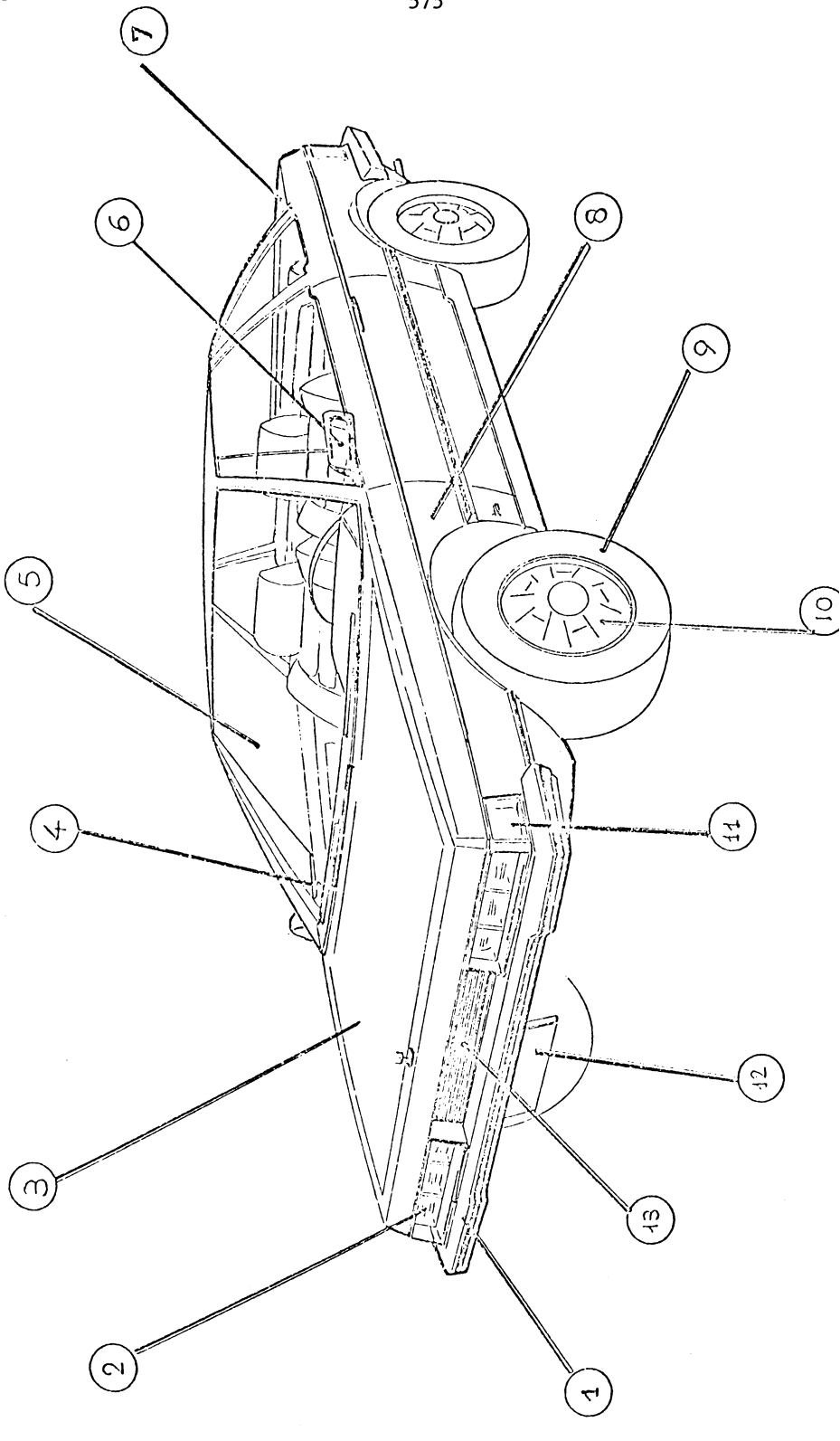
The result of this competition appears, then, to be a differentiation in domain of use, where the quebécois is used for informal spoken language and the standard French for formal spoken and/or written language, except for those with strong political feelings in either direction who choose consciously to use whatever they consider to be the "right" forms in all situations. Within the above distinction there are no doubt other salient aspects of interpersonal relationships and speech situations that enter into play, but it would be necessary to do on-site observation to discover what these are. Most individuals' terminological systems, then, seem to be in a state of change in this domain. The conditions of contact of English and French in Montréal, especailly as regards the atuomobile industry, have created space for the use of English/French pairs and for the use of several processes of word formation and naming, especially in those cases where access to English was restricted. The introduction of European terms is an additional factor; the upshot seems to be a trend towards social and stylistic differentiation, possibly referential differentiation for some terms, and possibly also social and stylistic stratification, partly determined by the conditions under which terms are learned. This is, then, an ideal situation in which to study the linguistic and sociolinguistic processes involved in lexical change, and a case where attempts at standardization have at best led to the use of new terms in new referential and socially significant ways.

Footnotes.

1. Le lexique de l'automobile, Office de la Langue Française, Gouvernement du Québec, 1978.
2. I would like to thank Pierre E. Laporte, directeur de la recherche et de l'évaluation, Office de la Langue Française, Montréal, for allowing me to carry out this research under the auspices of the Office, and for providing materials and comments. I would also like to thank Denise Daoust-Blais and André Martin of the service de la recherche sociolinguistique and Anne-Marie Baudoin of the service terminologique of the Office, as well as Michel Chrétien of the dept. d'anthropologie of l'Université de Montréal for helpful discussion and advice, and Bernard Beaujardin who designed and produced the diagrams used in the interviews.
3. I would like to thank M. Jacques Desnoyers, directeur de l'annexe de l'Ecole des métiers de l'automobile for arranging the interviews, and for his comments and discussion.
4. I would like to thank Alison d'Anglejan, of the Faculté des Sciences de l'Education, l'Université de Montréal, for allowing me to carry out this research with her students.
5. See appendix for a list of the most usual terms for each part.
6. I am indebted to Joan Rubin for the distinction between "status-planning" (policy directed towards changing the status of a language in a community, such as making a language official) and "corpus-planning" (directed towards changing linguistic forms already in use, or introducing new forms).

7. A similar case is that of the cigarette lighter; most Québecois use either the English lighter or the French briquet. The distinction maintained in France between a briquet (a lighter held in the hand) and an allume-cigarettes (a lighter in a car) is not maintained in Québec.

I should also point out that the distinction between phare and lumière can work both ways, and that feu can replace phare and lumière. That is, lumière can be kept as the term for headlight, with feu or phare as the term for the signal lights.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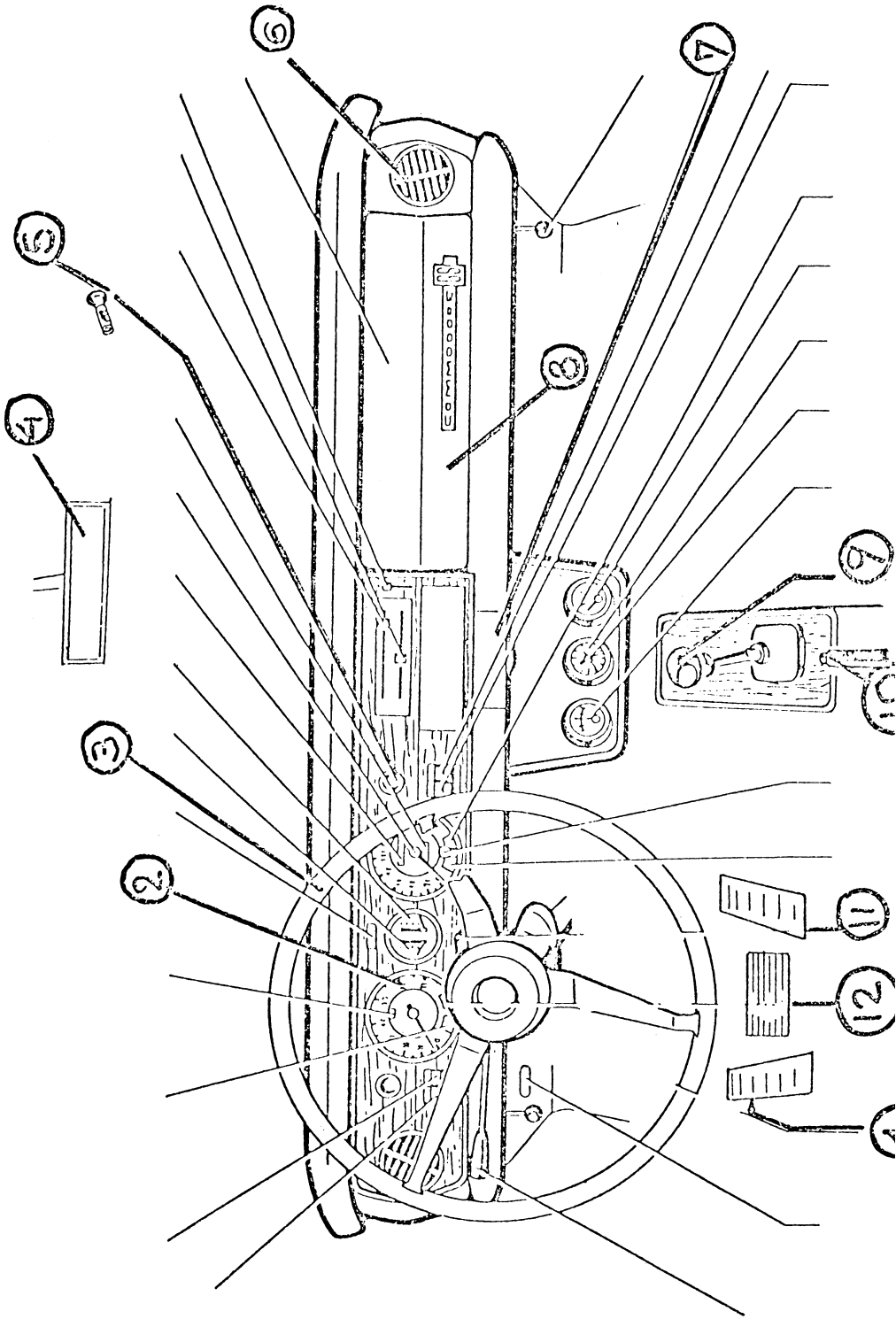
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Appendix 3. Glosses.

pare: against
chocs: shocks
lumière: light
phare: beacon
capot: lid, cover, hood
essuyer: to wipe
glace: window glass
vitre: window (glass)
de côté: of or on the side
coffre: trunk, box, container
aile: wing
roue: wheel
garder: to protect
couvrir: to cover
enjoliveur: embellisher
(joli : pretty)
feu: fire
clignotant: flashing
plaque: plate
immatriculation: registration, license
cadran: dial
compteur: counter
vitesse: speed, gear
direction: steering
arrière: behind
allumer: to light
bouche: mouth, opening
bras: arm
main: hand
stationnement: parking

Appendix 4. Terms.

A. La carrosserie.

1. bumper
   pare-chocs
2. lumière
   phare
3. hood
   capot
4. essuie-glace
   essuie-vitre
   wiper
5. vitre
   pare-brise
   windshield
6. miroir (rétroviseur)
   (extérieur)
   (de côté)
   rétroviseur (extérieur)
   (de côté)
7. coffre
   valise
   trunk
8. aile
   fender
9. pneu
   roue
   tire
10. cap de roue
    chapeau de roue
    disque de roue
    flasque de roue
    flaque de roue
    garde-roue
    couvre-roue
    enjoliveur (de roue)
11. lumière (de cote)
    (de parking)
    (clignotantes)
    feu
    phare
    clignotant
    flasher
    flicker
12. plaque (d'immatriculation)
    (de la licence)
    licence
13. grill
    grille
    grillage

B. L'habitacle

1. clutch (clotch)
   embrayage (pédale d')
2. speedometer
   speedomètre
   spedomètre
   odomètre
   cadran de vitesse
   compteur de vitesse
3. volant
   roue (de direction)
   steering
4. miroir (rétroviseur)
   (intérieur)
   rétroviseur (intérieur)
   (arrière)
5. lighter
   briquet
   allume-cigarettes
6. trappe (d'air, d'aération, d
   ventilati
   bouche (" " "
   vent(ilateur)
7. cendrier
   ashtray
8. boite à gants
   coffre à gants
   compartiment à gants
9. shifter
   embrayage (bras d')
   bras de vitesse(s)
10. brake à bras
    frein à main
    frein (de securité)
    (de stationnement)
11. pedale à/de gaz
    accélérateur
    accélération
12. brake (pédale de)
    frein (pédale de)

Appendix 5. Loanwords.

-er	-ing	monosyllables
bumper	steering	dash
fender	parking.	vent
flasher		brake
flicker		clutch
lighter		hood
shifter		grill
mirror		cap?
tire		trap?

Appendix 6. Calques.

French:	English:
rétroviseur arrière miroir rétroviseur	rear-view mirror
plaque de la licence	license plate
cap de roue	hubcap
compartiment à gants	glove compartment
frein à main	handbrake
frein d'urgence	emergency brake

Appendix 7. Québecois vs. Standard French Terms.

Québec:	France:
valise	coffre
cap de roue	enjoliveur
pedale à gaz	accélérateur
frein à main	frein de securité
trappe à/d'air	bouche de ventilation
boîte/coffre à gants	vide-poches
bras de vitesse(s)	bras d'embrayage
vitre	glace
vitre arrière	lunette
essuie-vitre	essuie-glace
pédale de clutch	pedale d'embrayage
miroir	rétroviseur
briquet	allume-cigarettes
roue	volant
licence	plaque d'immatriculation
lumière	phare, feu
cadran de vitesse speedomètre	compteur de vitesse

Appendix 8. General vs. Specific Terms.

General:	Specific:
roue	steering, volant
vitre, glace	windshield, pare-brise, lunette , vitre X
miroir	rétroviseur, miroir X
lumière	phare, feu, lumière X

X = qualifying word or phrase

Appendix 9. Transphonologization.

speedomèter ----- /spɨdomɹt/ and variants
hood ------------ /ʉd/
trap (?) -------- /tʁæp/
brake ----------- /bʁɛk/
wiper ----------- /wɪpøɾ/
clutch ---------- /klɔtʃ/

Appendix 10. Compounds.

a. With English elements.

brake à bras
cap de roue
? trappe à/d'air
lumière de parking
pédale de clutch
pédale de brake

b. Without English elements.

frein à main
frein à bras
disque, flasque, flaque, chapeau de roue
garde-roue
couvre-roue
bouche d'air, d'aération, de ventilation
miroir rétroviseur (de côté, extérieur, etc.)