

To the Bag

ABOUT THOSE FINE PEOPLE WHO LIVE
NORTH OF NEW BRUNSWICK AND NEW ENGLAND,
SOUTH OF THE HUDSON STRAIT,
EAST OF ONTARIO AND HUDSON BAY, AND
WEST OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

To the *Bag*:

Thank you for the wonderful 2016 *Almanac and Reader*.

But I must say that I am shocked – shocked! – to find that Bryan Garner’s word usage betrays his politics. On page 26, he refers to the 10% of “Quebecers” who report that English is the primary language at home. My initial reaction was twofold: First, as a one-time Vermonter, I was taught that residents of Quebec are properly called “Quebecois.” Second, if Garner’s variation has any legitimacy as an English translation of the French “Quebecois” it ought to have a ‘k’ after the ‘c’ to avoid pronouncing the ‘c’ as an ‘s’.

So I did what every good law professor does: I turned to Google. Merriam-Webster (here: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Quebecois) seems to support the use of “Quebecois” even in English, defining it as “a native or inhabitant of Quebec; specifically: a French-speaking native or inhabitant of Quebec.” And it has no entry at all for Garner’s choice, with or without the ‘k.’ Both appear only within the entry for “Quebec.” This leaves some confusion – Do English-speaking natives of Quebec count? Are all three terms acceptable but “Quebecois” preferable? – but, all in all, a point in my favor.

I should have left well enough alone. Much to my surprise I found that, according to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (here: www.britannica.com/topic/Quebecers-or-Quebecois-1370721): “the meaning of [the two terms] can be dependent not only on the language in which they are spoken but also on the political agenda of the speaker.” It turns out that at least according to this source, “Quebecers” and “Quebecois” are, respectively, the (British? Canadian? American?) English and French terms for all residents of Quebec. But many of those who “support the independence of Quebec,” regardless of their language or their location, use “Quebecois” to refer to all inhabitants of Quebec. Or (still according to *Britannica*) maybe just the

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French inhabitants. Or maybe just the French ones descended from the original settlers. Or maybe all French-speaking Canadians regardless of whether they live in Quebec.

The bottom line: It's complicated. But by referring to Quebecers, Bryan might be asserting either that he opposes independence for Quebec or that he prefers to use an awkward English word instead of a lovely French one. Of course, if he had used "Quebecois," someone would have written in to accuse him of separatist leanings. And either usage slights the original inhabitants, including the Algonquins (who refer to themselves as Anishinaabeg, raising yet another politico-linguistic question).

Chaqu'un a son gout, as they say.

Suzanna Sherry
Vanderbilt Law School
Nashville, TN

