

## The Diffusion of Two Stereotypical Traits of Canadian French

One of the most debated topics in Canadian French linguistics is the origin of distinctly “Québécois” phonological traits. While some authors suggest that these are the direct reflexes of dialect traits of specific regions of France such as Normandy, others militate in favor of internal explanations that suggest more recent innovations.

This paper examines these possibilities using data from “ALEC” (*Atlas linguistique de l’Est du Canada*, 1980). I consider two variables in detail: the affrication of /t/ and /d/ before high front vowels and glides, and high vowel laxing in closed syllables. I examine the geographic distribution of these variables across several words in ALEC, as well as their reported history.

I conclude that both are later innovations of Canadian French, spread from the influential urban center of Montréal. While some aspects of the French that was brought to the New World may have favored these developments, their exact phonetic instantiations and present geographic distribution arose later, neither under the influence of regional dialects of France nor through contact with English.

This study reveals several additional facts about Canadian French. First, its apparently overwhelming uniformity is only partial: these traits were not constant across Canada at the time of ALEC (1969-1973). Second, the differential behavior of Acadian French (found in lexical studies and explainable by settlement history) remains evident with the phonological variables. Third, the dialect boundary between Eastern Québec (dominated by Québec City) and Western Québec (dominated by Montréal), suggested by lexical studies and not as clearly explainable in terms of settlement, does not hold for these variables. Rather, Montréal constitutes the primary pole of influence.

Two additional variables supplement the analysis: the replacement of apical [r] by posterior [R], described by Clermont and Cedergren (1979) and Sankoff, Blondeau, and Charity (2001), *inter alia*; and the diphthongization of earlier /ɛ:/ and /e:/, described by Morin (2002). The inclusion of these additional variables helps address questions raised by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2003) regarding the predictors of the nature of linguistic diffusion.

I propose that Labov’s (1994) notion of change from above vs. change from below is crucial in predicting diffusion type. Here, we must consider the level of consciousness of the change *both* in the community where it originates *and* in the community to which it diffuses. Two of the variables examined diffuse more or less according to a wave model (Bailey 1973), as can be expected for changes from below. Affrication seems to proceed according to a gravity model (Trudgill 1974), as expected for a change from below that becomes a change from above. The /r/ change, a change from above in all areas, proceeds according to a hierarchical model (Bailey et al. 1993).

Thus, my findings and model are relevant not only for the study of the origin and description of Canadian French, but also more broadly for the field of dialect geography, in reconciling Labov’s notions of the level of consciousness of change with the various theories of linguistic diffusion.

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