

## **Canadian Raising in Newfoundland: Exploring Sociophonetic and Sociohistoric Explanations**

The process known as “Canadian Raising” – whereby the onsets of the diphthongs /aɪ/ and /aʊ/ exhibit mid rather than low vowel realizations before a tautosyllabic voiceless consonant (see e.g. Chambers 1973) – has existed in Canadian English since at least 1880 (Thomas 1991). Though /aɪ/-raising occurs in a number of English varieties, the Canadian-like raising pattern for /aʊ/ is fairly rare. In the US, it has been noted in the traditional speech of coastal Virginia and North Carolina, as well as Martha’s Vineyard (see e.g. Labov 1963). It also appears variably in several northern states (Kurath and McDavid 1961, Allen 1989), and in recent years appears to be advancing in parts of the US north (Dailey O’Cain 1997, Roberts 2006).

Despite the long-term presence and persistence of these patterns in Canada and in regions of the United States, the origins of Canadian Raising (or, alternatively, non-lowering -- see e.g. Trudgill 1986:155-6) have not been resolved. One putative source is Scots English: the Scots Vowel Length Rule (Aitken’s Law) involves a similar phenomenon, the lengthening of vowels before voiced fricatives and word-finally (see e.g. Chambers 2005). An alternative explanation (Trudgill 1984, echoed by Britain 1997) lies in dialect contact – specifically, in the allophonic reallocation that often accompanies the koineization process found in post-dialect-contact situations. In contrast to sociohistorical approaches, phonetic explanations (Thomas 1991, Moreton and Thomas *fc.*) have posited that Canadian Raising is the result of a “common phonetic motivation” (Moreton and Thomas *fc.*: 13), whereby diphthongs in pre-voiceless environment are governed by their offglides, yet in all other phonetic environments are governed by their nucleus.

This paper examines Canadian Raising in Newfoundland English (NE), a variety of Canadian English which is highly distinct from that of heartland Canada (see e.g. Clarke 2004). Data are derived from conversational interviews recorded with eight working-class Newfoundlanders born between 1898 and c. 1950. Speakers were selected from Newfoundland communities settled by each of the two principal European founder populations: the West Country English and the southeast Irish. Inclusion of a range of communities within each of these two general settlement regions enables investigation of the influence of donor dialects on a representative variety of sociolinguistically distinct locales within the province. To investigate the possible phonetic rationale motivating Canadian Raising, this study uses sociophonetic analyses of first and second formant frequencies, as well as duration, for the diphthongs /aɪ/ and /aʊ/, accounting for factors such as phonetic environment, glide trajectory, and nucleus position.

Since the historical source dialects of NE involved virtually no Scots input, and since dialect contact did not play a role in the formation of the NE varieties investigated, neither of the two sociohistorical explanations outlined above can account for the variable (and apparently long-term) presence in NE of Canadian Raising of both /aɪ/ and /aʊ/. This study therefore offers a testing ground for the exploration of phonetic patterns that underlie Canadian Raising in NE, and enables an evaluation of the relative contribution of sociohistorical approaches.

## References

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