

SEX, GENDER AND THE PHONETICS OF CANADIAN ENGLISH

Abstract for 20-minute paper submitted to NWAV 35, Columbus, OH.

The *Atlas of North American English* (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006) identified several phonetic variants that are unique to, or characteristic of, Canadian English. Particular attention was paid to the Canadian Shift, first identified by Clarke et al (1995); to Canadian Raising, first studied in depth by Chambers (1973); and to the spatial relations of the allophones of /æ/, especially before nasals, as in *band*, and before /g/, as in *bag*. While the *Atlas* successfully quantified these variables in relation to its main goal of distinguishing Canadian from neighboring American varieties of North American English, the small number of Canadian subjects available to the *Atlas* authors made it difficult to study the more precise regional and social dimensions of these variables within Canada.

The present paper reports on a new acoustic phonetic study of 84 young speakers of Canadian English from across the country, including 50 women and 34 men. This is more than twice as many acoustic analyses as were included in the *Atlas* treatment of Canada, permitting a more detailed and reliable analysis of regional and social phonetic variation within Canada. Some variables, like Canadian Raising and the allophonic structure of /æ/, show clear regional cleavages, while others, like the Canadian Shift and the fronting of /uw/ in *too* and *food*, exhibit primarily sex-based variation. Another variable, the centralized articulation of /ahr/ in *bar* or *start*, displays both regional and sex-based patterns. This paper focuses on the effect of sex on the phonetics of Canadian English.

A uniform set of data from each subject was obtained by the reading of word lists. These data were subjected to acoustic analysis using Kay Elemetrics' CSL program. MANCOVA tests were then performed in SPSS, examining the effect of sex on the phonetic measures, with region and city size controlled for. The results lend strong support to the theory of sex-based sociolinguistic variation developed in Labov (1990). Women are more advanced than men in the two major changes in progress in Canadian English identified by the *Atlas*, the Canadian Shift and the fronting of /uw/. By contrast, women show less advanced forms than men in (ahr), a more traditional, local variable.

In an effort to expand the analysis beyond the usual categories of female and male, as urged by Eckert (1989), data from an opinion survey also administered to the subjects were adduced to examine the role of attitudinal factors in conditioning phonetic variation. Three of the survey questions dealt with gender roles. These were combined to create an index of gender role orientation, ranging from traditional to "progressive". While sex was generally a more powerful independent variable than gender attitudes, in the case of (ahr), a Pearson correlation test showed that, among women, those with less traditional views of gender tended to favor the more masculine, centralized variant, while those with more traditional views favored the feminine variant. It is hoped that these results will encourage the further incorporation of attitudinal data into sociophonetic analyses.

References:

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