

Sociolinguistics

Introduction to Language

Derek Denis

University of Toronto
derek.denis@mail.utoronto.ca

Lecture 9: Nov 19 2013

©Derek Denis, unauthorized use or distribution strictly prohibited.

Sociolinguistics investigates

- ▶ The relationship between language and its context of use.
- ▶ Those properties of language which require reference to both internal (linguistic) factors and external (social) factors.
 - e.g., Language Variation
- ▶ The interplay between language variation, social meaning and the evolution and development of linguistic systems
 - Language Change.

1. Why do we have multiple options for saying the same thing?
2. What does it mean to use one over another?
3. What are the features of Canadian English?

2

Sociolinguistics and Dialects

Idiolects:

The characteristics of the language of an individual speaker.

Dialect:

Mutually intelligible forms of a single language that differ, or vary, in systematic ways.

Regional Dialects

Often called different "accents".

- ▶ Arise through gradual changes in the grammar of different speech communities.
- ▶ Differences increase as a function of the amount of communicative isolation between groups.

Social Dialects

Dialects that are used by particular social groups or in particular social situations.

- ▶ Socio-Economic Class
- ▶ Gender
- ▶ Ethnicity
- ▶ Age
- ▶ Formality

3

Sociolinguistics

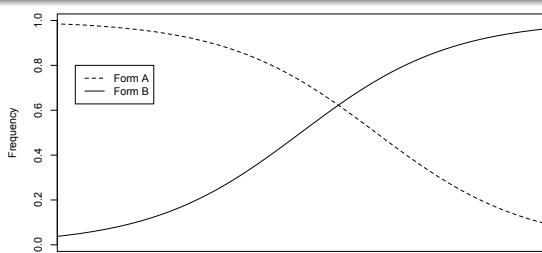
Sociolinguists are constantly concerned with three facts about language:

1. Language's change.
2. Language's vary.
3. Language's transmit more than semantic meaning.

4

Language Change

- ▶ Languages are in a constant state of flux.
- ▶ Language Variation is a prerequisite for Language Change.
 - Language change doesn't happen overnight.
 - To change from form A to form B, there must necessarily be a stage in which both form A and form B are possible options.



5

Language Change

- ▶ A lot of sociolinguistics involves examining **linguistic changes in progress** because this guarantees variation.
- ▶ Other sociolinguistic variables are **stable variables**.

"Not all variability in language structure involves change; but all change involves variability."
Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968)

- ▶ Linguistic change interacts with society!
 - Young, middle-class, women tend to lead changes.

6

Language Variation

Language varies in two ways:

1. **Cross-linguistic variation:**

- Different ways of doing the same thing in different languages.

2. **Sociolinguistic variation**

- Different ways of doing the same thing in the same language, which alternate with one another in the speech of individuals.

7

8

Language Variation

Cross-linguistic variation: Variation in position of the negative marker in Scandinavian languages.

(1) Icelandic:

Ég spurði af hverju Pétur **hafði ekki** lesið hana.
I asked why Peter had not read it.

(2) Danish:

Jeg spurgte hvorfor Peter **ikke havde** læst den.
I asked why Peter not had read it.

Language Variation

Sociolinguistic variation: Variation in the future tense and quotative verbs in English

- (3) Music's **gonna** evolve and change, so language **will** evolve and change too.
- (4) When my mom **goes**, "Oh, that's cool!", I'm **like**, "Oh, don't say that."

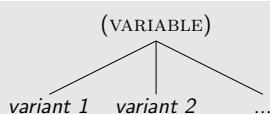
9

10

Language Variation

Sociolinguistic variation involves **linguistic variables**: "two or more ways of saying the **same thing**."

- Linguistic variables exist in all domains of language
 - (e.g., phonology, syntax).
- The set of choices among which speakers **alternate** in the expression of a given meaning or function are called **variants**.
- (Variables) are formally notated with parentheses on analogy to /phonemes/ and [phones]



Linguistic Variables

Whichever variant is used, **the same thing** is said:

- Phonetic/Phonological/Morphological:
 - Same word/meaning, different morpho-phonological form.
- Syntactic:
 - Same meaning, different structure.
- Pragmatic:
 - Same function, different form.

11

12

Language Variation

Facts about sociolinguistic variation

1. Variation is pervasive.
 - Language is in a constant state of flux.
 - There are dozens of **linguistic variables** in every language.
2. Variation is systematic.
 - We don't use different variants of a variable randomly.
 - There is a system of rules that underlies the realization of all linguistic variables.

13

Pervasive Variables

Variable (ing) or 'g'-dropping.

- (5) She said "what are you **doi[n]**", so I said, "I'm **havi[n]** a beer!"
- (6) So she said, "Well I want **somethi[n]** on my desk by five-o-clock." So I said, "Don't worry, there'll be **somethi[n]** on your desk..."

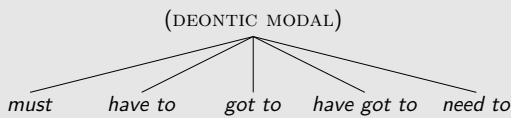


14

Pervasive Variables

Deontic Modals

- (7) I said, "You **have to** come up." I said, "You **must** come up." And um [...] I said, "I've **gotta** go."

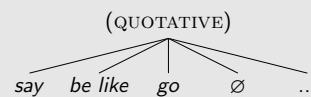


15

Pervasive Variables

Quotative Verbs

- (8) He **said**, "Are you insane?" and I **was like**, "what does insane mean?"
- (9) She's **all**, "Dude, you're not helping."
- (10) He **goes**, "Come on, come on!"
 ∅ "Pow!"
 ∅ "oh no."



16

What is not a linguistic variable?

Categorical alternations

- There are things in language that vary, but this variation is dependent entirely on the linguistic context in which it is embedded
 - e.g., linguistic rules
 - **deterministic/categorical** — the output of a rule is categorical, given a context

15

What is a linguistic variable?

Linguistic variables are not **deterministic**!

- A variable can be realized as different variants in *identical* contexts!

- (11) Hanging out and being loud.
 [hæŋɪŋ əwt ðənd bɪŋ lawd]
- (12) Hanging out and being loud.
 [hæŋɪŋ əwt ðənd bɪŋ lawd]
- (13) Hanging out and being loud.
 [hæŋɪŋ əwt ðənd bɪŋ lawd]
- (14) Hanging out and being loud.
 [hæŋɪŋ *awt ðənd bɪŋ lawd]
- (15) Hanging out and being loud.
 [hæŋɪŋ əwt ðənd bɪŋ *lawd]

17

18

The myth of free variation

Before linguists thought too much about this kind of inter-speaker variation, it was often referred to as 'free variation' because it wasn't categorical.

- 'Free' variation in language is a myth.

The heart of sociolinguistics is to identify the social, stylistic, and linguistic factors that correlate with the realization of sociolinguistic variables.

Variationist Sociolinguistics

Although sociolinguistic variables are not deterministic/categorical, they also are not free or random!

- They are **probabilistic**.
- There is **order** amid **heterogeneity**.
 - Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968)
- The realization of a variable is **subject to probabilities**, given a huge array of possible conditioning factors.
 - Social
 - Stylistic
 - Linguistic
- Different **variants** are favoured/disfavoured in particular social/stylistic/linguistic contexts.

19

20

More than semantic meaning

Social Meaning

Imagine you receive a phone call from a stranger. How quickly can you determine:

- whether the speaker is young or old?
- male or female?
- a native speaker?
- the formality of conversation?

21

22

More than semantic meaning

Language conveys more than just the semantic meaning of what's expressed.

When someone speaks, they reveal all kinds of information:

1. Personal Characteristics
2. Sociological Factors
3. **Social Characteristics**
4. **Linguistic Style**

Personal Characteristics

Language reveals idiosyncratic characteristics of a speaker's voice and speaking ability.

Quality of Voice:

- Nasal
- High-pitched
- Fast/slow tempo
- Monotone
- Lisp
- Stutter

These personal qualities are all associated with culture-driven judgements:

- Nasally = Annoying
- Monotone = Boring
- Fluent + Vague = Evasive
- Articulate + Hesitant = Pensive

Speaking Ability:

- Fluent or hesitant?
- Articulate or vague?

23

24

Sociological Factors

Language reveals social structure.

- ▶ Forms of address reflect social rank
 - Mr., sir, ma'm buddy
 - ***tu/vous*** in French; *du/Sie* in German

"I encountered racism with the police every time I went out at night. They controlled our identity with tommy guns, speaking with lots of racial insults, and using *tu* instead of *vous*. I understand now why young people hate the police, because those controls are very degrading."

-D. Tazdait

on growing up in France as an Algerian immigrant
(from Olson 2002:177)

25

Social Factors

Language reveals traits that we share with the **social cohorts** to which we belong.

As we do with fashion, manners, and material possessions, we express our social identity through our speech.

- ▶ Social class
- ▶ Sex and gender
- ▶ Age
- ▶ Ethnicity
- ▶ Place
- ▶ Local social networks and communities of practice

26

Linguistic Styles

Language reveals the familiarity of two speakers with one another and the formality of the conversation.

Imagine a conversation between two women from the same neighbourhood who meet in a dentist office waiting room.

- ▶ Imagine the two women are both 30.
- ▶ Now imagine that one woman is 30 and the other is 70.

What would be the difference?

Why?

27

28

Linguistic Styles

A Sociolinguistic Correlate: Formality tends to increase in direct proportion to the number of social differences between the participants.

- ▶ Conversations between friends who share common experiences
= causal
- ▶ Conversations between strangers of unequal social rank with no common ground
= highly formal
- ▶ Two extremes on a continuum.

Linguistic Styles

What do we mean when we talk about formal/casual speech?

- ▶ An artifact of linguistic cues!

Casual

-rapid speech, syntactic ellipses, contractions, phonological assimilations/coalescence, **non-standard variants** (e.g., [-ɪn])

Formal

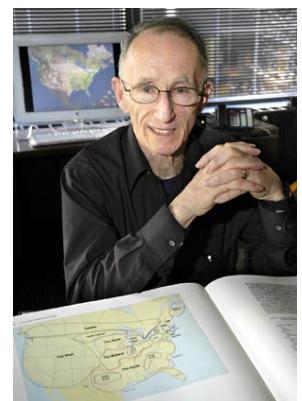
-stilted syntax, breathy voice, hyper-corrections (e.g., 'a' [ej] not [æ] or [ə]), **standard variants** (e.g., [-ɪŋ])

29

Linguistic Styles

In 1966, William Labov, the founder of modern sociolinguistics made explicit use of **style** as an independent variable in the study of linguistic variation.

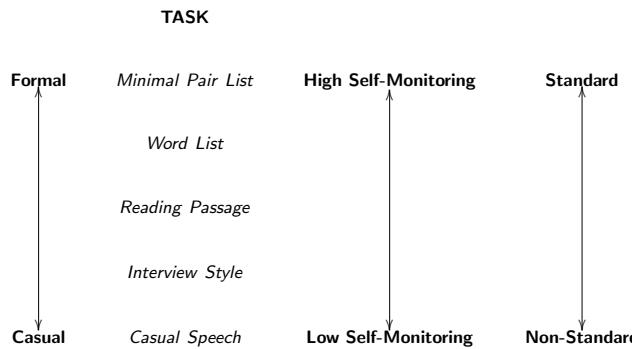
In his survey of New York City English, he elicited several different styles that ranged from formal to casual using five different tasks in a **sociolinguistic interview**.



30

The Sociolinguistic Interview

Five tasks within the sociolinguistic interview



31

The Sociolinguistic Interview

1. Minimal Pair List (MP)

- Read a list of words organized into minimal pairs, differing with respect to some sociolinguistic variable.
 - "god", "guard"
 - "bag", "beg"

2. Word List (WL)

- Read a list of words, randomly ordered.
 - "guard", "bag", "cat", "dog", "class" etc.

People concentrate almost completely on pronunciation, especially when being recorded by a linguist.

- * Even more so with MP because **minimal pairs prescriptively should be different**.
 - People attempt to differentiate.

32

The Sociolinguistic Interview

3. Reading passage (RP)

- Read a paragraph of connected speech.
- *The big dog was on guard in front of the junkyard. Suddenly a cat bolted out in front of the gate...*

Also highly self-monitored speech but the requirement of reading coherently deflects some focus from pronunciation to the content of the passage.

33

The Sociolinguistic Interview

4. Interview style

- An interviewer asks a range of directed questions to the speaker. The speaker provides answers.

Much more focus on content than with the Reading Passage. Some self-monitoring in the framing of answers.

34

The Sociolinguistic Interview

5. Casual Speech

- Unmonitored speech. The data sine qua non in sociolinguistics!
- Taps into **vernacular speech**.

There is no fool-proof way to elicit casual, vernacular speech but sociolinguists use a variety of techniques.

- Certain questions that elicit excited responses causing speakers to forget their self-consciousness (e.g., danger of death).
- "Let me show you to the [dəʊ]."

35

Case study

Let's consider a case study in how **linguistic variables correlate with social and stylistic factors**

Labov's Survey of New York City and the social stratification of (r).

(r)
 [ɹ] [ø]/[ə]

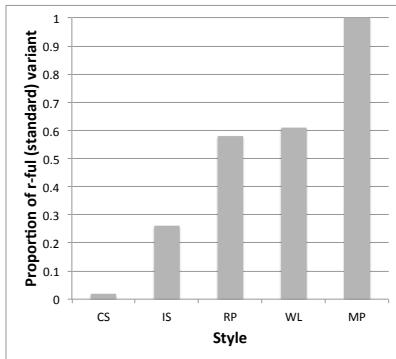
- (16) a. *guard: [gɑrd]~[gɔ:d]*
 b. *ear: [ɪɹ]~[ɪə]*

Once every **token** of (r), both r-less and r-ful was extracted, proportions were calculated.

36

One speaker's results

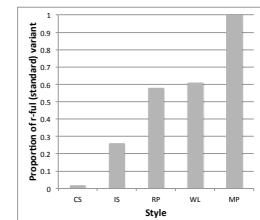
Style	%
MP	100
WL	61
RP	58
IS	26
CS	2



37

One speaker's results

- When not self-monitoring, this speaker tends to use the non-standard, r-less variant.
 - In CS she almost never uses an r-ful token.
 - We see that as the formality of the tasks increases and the speaker self-monitors more, the use of r-ful tokens goes up gradiently.
 - Each subsequent task is more r-ful than the previous one.
 - MP task is 100% standard.
 - This is called **style shifting**.
- Def.** Adjusting the frequency of non-standard variants of sociolinguistic variables in different social/stylistic contexts.



38

One speaker's results

Maybe what we are seeing is random fluctuations. Maybe this speaker is weird.

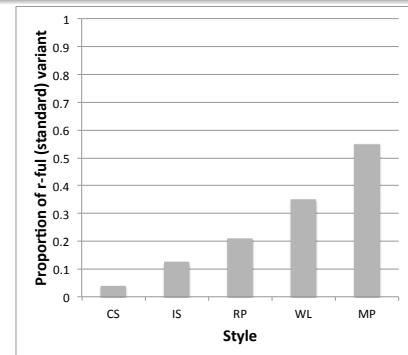
What kind of evidence would we need to say that this is not random and not idiosyncratic?

1. The same result from more speakers like this speaker.
2. The same result from speakers not like this speaker.

More speakers like this speaker

This speaker happens to be working class. When we look at all of the working class speakers in aggregate we see the same pattern!

Style	%
MP	55
WL	35
RP	21
IS	12.5
CS	4

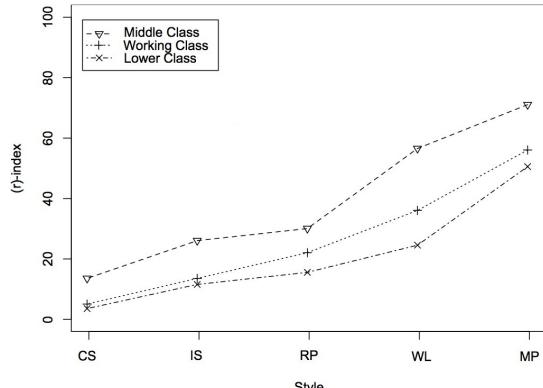


40

39

More speakers not like this speaker

When we look at the whole community, the result is undeniable!



41

A Classic Case of Stylistic and Social Stratification

(r) varies systematically with two independent variables: class and style.

- As style becomes **less casual, standard** r-ful tokens become **more frequent** for all speakers, despite class.
 - **Stylistic Stratification**
- As one goes **up the social hierarchy**, the **standard** variant become **more frequent** in all styles.
 - **Social Stratification**

These are the kinds of socially-significant correlations that sociolinguists are interested in.

- These correlations show that language variation is linguistically interesting and socially revealing.

42

The Department Store Survey

Perhaps the most unique and creative sample design in sociolinguistics was Labov's **Department Store Survey**

- ▶ "Rapid and Anonymous" Survey

- Observe people's everyday use of language in context, apart from an interview.
- Variable (*r*)
- ▶ Unlike previous studies, Labov's speakers all had the same occupation.
- Sales people in large department stores in Manhattan.

43

- ▶ The **prestige/status** of the store can be a diagnostic of social class.

- Stores can be stratified by a location, price and fashion scales.

Mills (1956), a sociologist, observes that sales people, although generally lower middle class "borrow prestige from their contact with customers" — "a girl who works on 34th Street cannot successfully claim as much prestige as the one who works on Fifth Avenue."

44

The Department Store Survey



Labov targeted three big department stores:

- ▶ Saks Fifth Ave.
 - In the center of high fashion shopping district
- ▶ Macy's
 - Near Garment District
- ▶ S. Klein
 - Near Lower East Side

45

The Department Store Survey

Labov further observed that advertising and price policies were stratified.

	No. of pages of advertising, Oct. 24–27, 1962		Price of advertised goods		
	NY	Daily Times	Saks	Macy's	S. Klein
Saks	2	0	Women's coat	\$90.00	79.97
Macy's	6	15	Dresses	n/a	14.95
S. Klein	1/4	10	Girls' Coats	n/a	16.99
			Stockings	n/a	12.00
			Men's Suits	n/a	0.89
				50–65	0.45
				50–65	26–66

Macy's: "You get more low prices."

S. Klein: "... marked down from ..."

Saks: "if you have to ask the price, you can't afford it."

46

The Department Store Survey

Method: The Rapid and Anonymous Survey Method

- ▶ Interview approaches speaker in the role of a customer asking for directions to a department on the fourth floor.



Reenactment

47

The Department Store Survey

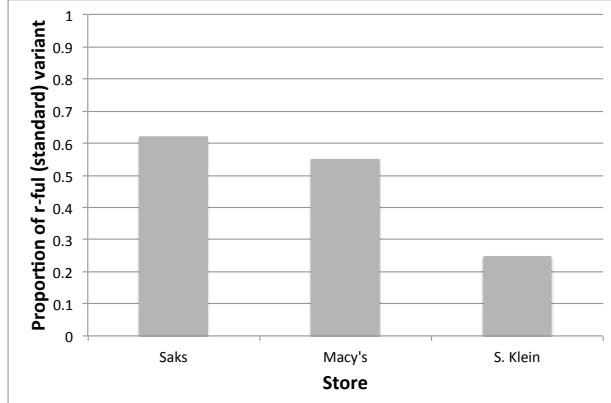
Method: The Rapid and Anonymous Survey

- ▶ Each interaction results in **four** tokens:
 - Two tokens preceding a consonant (*fourth*) and two word-finally (*floor*)
 - Two casually spoken tokens, two spoken with emphasis
- ▶ 264 speakers in total
 - 68 speakers from Saks
 - 125 speakers from Macy's
 - 71 speakers from Kleins
- ▶ Took note of age, sex, race, any trace of ESL/regional accent

48

The Department Store Survey

Results:



49

Hypercorrection and language change

In New York City in 1966, (r) was in a **process of change** toward increased usage of the standard variant.

But the highest socioeconomic class wasn't leading the change toward the standard variant...

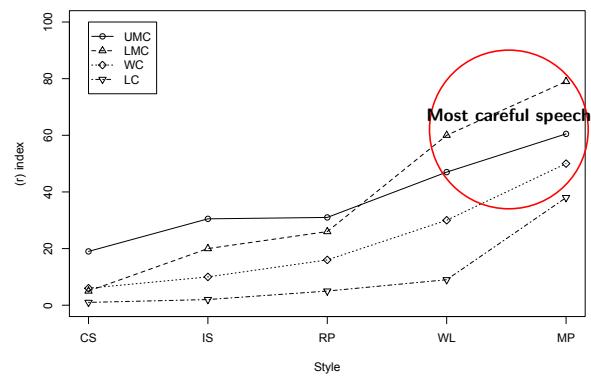
Lower-middle class speakers went beyond the highest status group in using the standard form in formal styles.

- ▶ Feel the most social pressure from above.
- ▶ Hypersensitive to stigmatized features.
- ▶ We call this **hypercorrection**.
- ▶ A well established phenomenon in sociolinguistics now.

50

Hypercorrection and language change

Class stratification for (r)



51

Sociolinguistic Awareness

Indicator: Stratified by some social category but does not vary with respect to style.

- ▶ Speakers are not aware of variation.
- ▶ 'Defined as a function of group membership' (Labov 1972)

Marker: Stratified by a social category **and** style.

- ▶ Speakers are more consciously aware of the variation.
- ▶ Use of one variant over another is socially meaningful.
- ▶ (r) in New York City.

52

Sociolinguistic Awareness

Stereotypes: Features of a dialect that are overtly-recognized and objects of discussion/metalanguage commentary in their communities of use.

- ▶ Canadian English: ???



Stereotypes

What variable of Newfoundland English is being stereotyped here?



Photo courtesy of Memorial University of Newfoundland Sociolinguistics Lab

53

54

Stereotypes

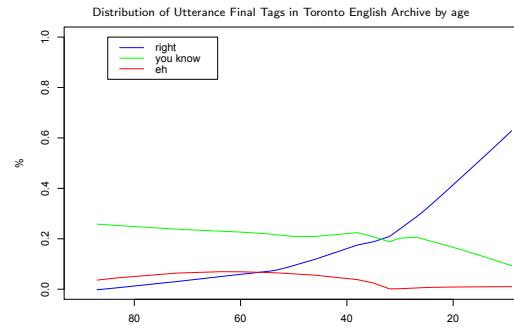
Here's the cab company's office:



55

Stereotypes

Ironically, the meta-linguistic discussion of stereotypes may become increasingly divorced from forms that are actually used; may eventually disappear from vernacular speech. (Labov 1972)



56

Canadian English

57

Regional English Dialects of North America



58

Canadian English

Canadian English: a homogenous dialect.

- It's been observed that Canadian English is pretty much the same from the Ontario-Quebec border to Vancouver Island.
 - At least for the urban, middle class.
- This homogeneity is the result of the settlement history of Canada.

Canadian English

Brief History

- In 1763, England defeated France on the Plains of Abraham in Québec City and this ended France's colonial claims in what is now Canada.
- At this time, most of Ontario was complete wilderness.
- Beginning in 1776, the British began to populate Ontario along the shores of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario.
 - The **United Empire Loyalists** were given land by the British Crown.
 - Americans who remained loyal to the British during the American Revolution.
 - The Loyalists are the **founding population** of Ontario and brought with them **an American dialect that developed into Canadian English**.

59

60

Canadian English

Brief History (cont.)

- ▶ During the War of 1812, when America invaded Canada, the British government feared that the (previously American) Loyalist population of Ontario might turn on Britain.
- ▶ They brought in hundreds of thousands of English, Scottish and later Irish immigrants beginning around 1815.
- ▶ More immigration through to World War 2 from all over Europe.
- ▶ After WW2, to 1960, Asian and more diverse European immigration.
- ▶ Since 1960, immigration from all over the world.
 - Canada as a cultural-mosaic.

61

Canadian English

- ▶ All this immigration had little effect on **Canadian English**.

Doctrine of First Effective Settlement

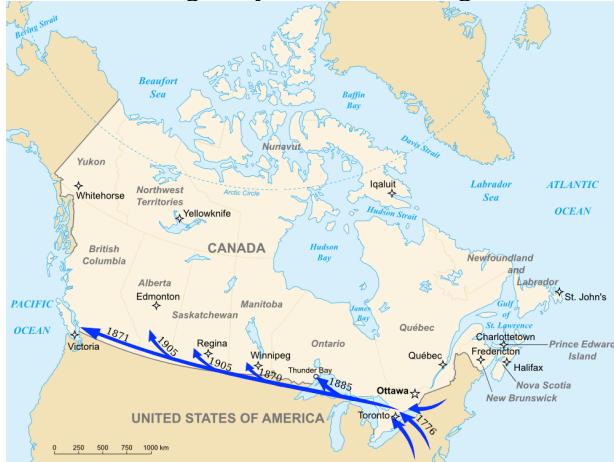
- "The founding population of any place exerts many subtle and largely unintentional dictates on those who succeed them" including the linguistic. (Chambers 1990).
- ▶ No matter where people are from, the children of immigrants will end up speaking the same way as those whose parents/grandparents/great-grandparents had arrived earlier.
 - "The sound of the speech was directly descended from [the] Loyalists" (Chambers 1990).

The only real effect of later British immigration was on Canadian English spelling and some specific pronunciations.

- ▶ *colour, neighbour, centre, metre*
- ▶ [lɛftənənt] (lieutenant), [zəd] ('Z'); [ajðər] (either)
 - Though we tolerate American versions as well.

62

Homogeneity of Canadian English



63

Features of Canadian English

- ▶ Lexical
- ▶ Phonological
- ▶ Morpho-syntactic
- ▶ Pragmatic

64

Lexical Features of Canadian English

From indigenous languages

- ▶ **Place names:** Canada, Toronto, Squamish etc.
- ▶ **Animals:** raccoon, beaver, skunk, grizzly, caribou
- ▶ kayak, moccasins

From French

- ▶ prairie, portage, concession (lines), tuque

Archaic British terms

- ▶ riding, reeve, acclamation, chesterfield

Innovations

- ▶ poutine, back bacon, loonie, toonie, bachelor (apartment), washroom, Hydro, pencil crayon, double-double, Two-Four, twenty-sixer, postal code, expiry date, Grade X, hoser

65

Lexical Features of Canadian English

Canadians use a mix of American and British vocabulary.

American	% Usage	British	% Usage
flashlight	100	torch	0
candy	98	sweets	2
store	98	shop	2
wrench	95	spanner	5
sidewalk	94	pavement	6
sweater	93	pull-over	7
apartment	88	flat	12
bug	70	insect	30
pitcher	61	jug	39
shades	15	blinds	84
wash-cloth	9	face-cloth	88
stairway	6	stairs	89
mortician	3	undertaker	97
letter-carrier	0	mailman	98

66

Phonological Features of Canadian English

Canadian Raising

Word	Canadian	American
right	[ɹʌjt]	[ju:t]
house	[h̚ws]	[haws]
ride	[rajd]	[rajd]
cows	[kʰawz]	[k̚awz]

[æ] over [ɑ]

Word	Canadian	American
pasta	/pæstə/	/pastə/
drama	/d̚æmə/	/dr̚amə/
Aunt	/ænt/	/ant/

Other Differences

Word	Canadian	American
anti	/ænti/	/æntaj/
asphalt	/æʃfalt/	/æsfolt/
been	/bin/	/bin/
decal	/d̚ekəl/	/dikəl/
err	/ɛr/	/ər/
shone	/ʃən/	/ʃən/
vase	/vejz/	/vejs/

67

Phonological Features of Canadian English

Vowel Mergers

- Barry, berry, bury, [b̚eɪi] and Mary, merry, marry, [m̚eɪi]
 - Not all parts of Canada (not in Maritimes, Montreal Anglophones)

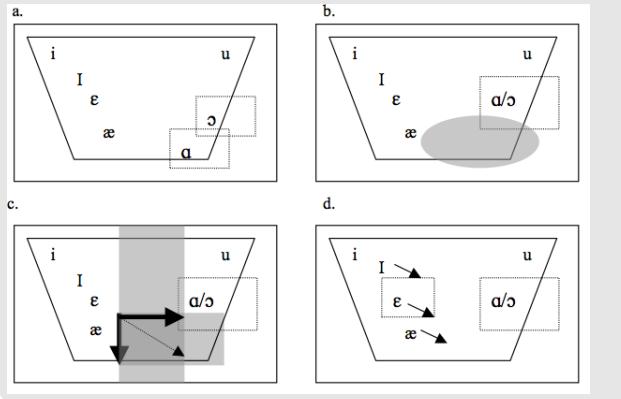
caught-cot:

Word	Canadian	American
caught	/k̚at/	/kat/
cot	/k̚ɒt/	/kɒt/
dawn	/d̚ɒn/	/dən/
Don	/d̚ɒn/	/dən/
stalking	/stak̚ɪŋ/	/stakɪŋ/
stocking	/stak̚ɪŋ/	/stɔ:kɪŋ/

68

Phonological Features of Canadian English

The Canadian Vowel Shift

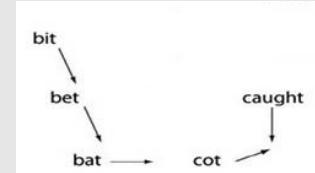


69

Phonological Features of Canadian English

The Canadian Vowel Shift

- Highly shifted individuals might say:
 - 'bat' with vowel pronounced further back in the mouth.
 - 'bet' as closer to [bæt]
 - 'bit' as closer to [b̚et]



70

Older Phonological Features

[j] after alveolar consonants and before [u]

- 'tune' [tjun], 'dune' [djun], 'new' [nju]

Voiceless w [ʍ]

- 'which' [ʍɪtʃ], 'what' [ʍat], 'whether' [ʍeðə]

Most Canadians under the age of 70 have lost these two features.

71

Morpho-Syntactic Features of Canadian English

Similar to General American English

- Requires *do-support* with *have*:
 - Do you have the time? vs. *Have you the time?
 - I don't have it. vs. I haven't it.
- High rate of *have to* modal (over *must*)

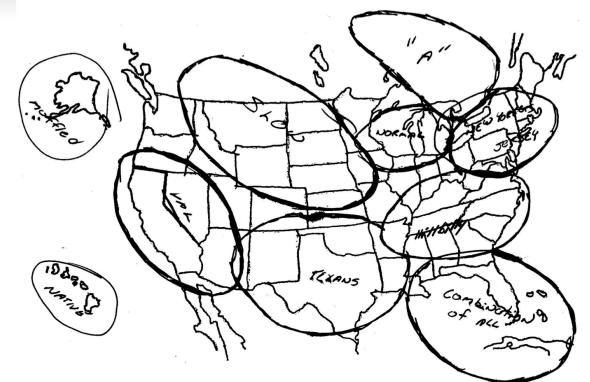
Some differences

- 'I'm done, I'm finished'

72



(Courtesy of Dennis Preston)

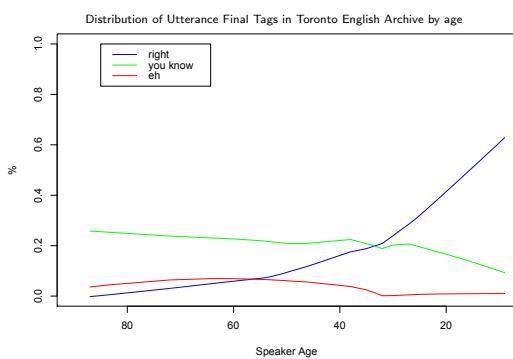


(Courtesy of Dennis Preston)

79

80

Eh!



81

Eh! The Great Canadian Stereotype



With a Canadian Flag

82

Eh! The Great Canadian Stereotype



With a Canadian Flag

83

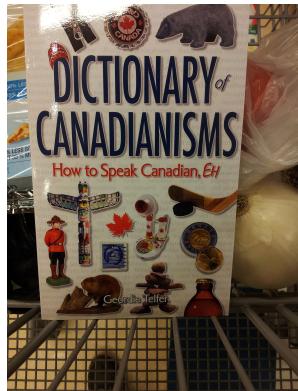
Eh! The Great Canadian Stereotype



With maple leafs

84

Eh! The Great Canadian Stereotype



With a variety of Canadian icons.

85

Eh! The Great Canadian Stereotype



With red and white colouring.

86

Eh! The Great Canadian Stereotype



Just on its own!

87

88

Eh! The Great Canadian Stereotype

As you might have guessed, I collect photos of *eh* being used as a commodity... so if you find some in the wild, take a picture and email me!!

For Next Week...

1. CHANGE from syllabus: read pages 213–220 on Language Death and Revitalization.

89