

UDC 811.111'282.4 (71)

MATTHEW FERGUSON
Faculty of Philology, Belgrade

C A N A D I A N E N G L I S H

0. Introduction

Canadians are proud people, and as any proud people, they like to imagine themselves as different. One way of differentiating yourself from people that more or less resemble you is through language. If you cannot look different, then you can at least sound different. This has been the case for Canadians vis-à-vis Americans. Many have felt the need to differentiate themselves in the shadow of the overbearing cultural and economic sphere of the United States.

Therefore, this paper will serve as a guide to the current similarities as well as the dissimilarities Canadian English has with American English and to a lesser extent British English.

0.1 Background

Home to 31,593,000¹ people, it is the third-largest Anglophone nation in the world with 17,100,000² English Mother Tongue speakers (EMTs), after the United States and the United Kingdom. The nation has two official languages, English and French. EMTs make up about 60% of Canada's population, and Francophones make up about 24%.

0.2 Working Definition

For the purposes of this paper, I will adopt the view of Chambers (1998) and speak about Canadian English (CE) as the common standardized dialect spoken (in general) by urban middle-class Anglophone Canadians who have met these criteria for two generations or more. This definition may seem simplistic, abstract and exclusive - to socially conscious Canadians, at least - but without abstraction and simplification we cannot account for what is relevant, and therefore there can be no understanding. However, this definition does exclude Newfoundland, where a distinct dialect is recognized and another standard is in place³. Regardless, I will give no attention to any social differentiation, unless where otherwise needed.

Following Chambers (1998) - a few key points must be brought up about standardized languages in New World societies. "Linguistically", Chambers points out, "colonies and former colonies are famously conservative; they have less regional variety than the mother country and undergo fewer innovations as time goes by"

...

1. Established July 2001, according to the Central Intelligence Agency.
2. Established 1998, according to StatsCan.
3. Furthered in the section of geographical distribution.

(Chambers 1998: 253). Not only is this the empirical generalization in the New Anglophone World of North America, and of Oceania but in the New Francophone World too, particularly in Québec.

1. Historical Development

The first English-language contact with Canada came when John Cabot, sailing for England, reached Newfoundland in 1497. His discoveries in what we now know as Atlantic Canada, did not inspire en masse British migration, but rather British fishing fleets to the codfish-rich waters. However, British development along the Atlantic coast did not occur until over a century later, when the prosperous farming, fishing, and fur-trading industries attracted English-speaking settlers. Further inland exploration is attributed to the French thanks to Jacques Cartier, who discovered the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1534. At the beginning of the 17th century, the French established the first European settlements in Canada and the region was officially recognized as *Nouvelle-France* in 1663. However, there was nearly constant conflict with the English in the New World, and the English - being the more ambitious of the two in this conflict - gradually made greater territorial gains. In 1716, they seized Acadia, banished its French-speaking inhabitants in the 1750s, and replaced them with settlers from New England. A century after the foundation of *Nouvelle-France*, and following a severe loss to the English, the French conceded complete sovereignty over their territory to the British at the Treaty of Paris (1763). This opened the door to the first major wave of immigration from the British Isles.

The next major wave of English-speaking immigrants came from the United States after the American Revolution in 1776, in the form of British Loyalists. Various waves of peoples mainly from the British Isles immigrating for social or political reasons (notably the Irish Potato Famine in the 1840s) followed after that.

2. Geographical Distribution

Perhaps the most striking feature of CE is its relative homogeneity from coast to coast (excluding Newfoundland)⁴. This is certainly surprising given Canada's geographical vastness, and the great distance separating Anglophone speech communities in say, Prince Edward Island from those on Victoria Island. Canada is considered to be linguistically more conservative than the United States and Australia (Chambers 1998: 253). It has nothing comparable to American Northern and Southern, and - to some degree - Midland dialects (Chambers 1998: 253). Australian English exhibits widespread linguistic homogeneity as well (Chambers 1998: 254), but sociolinguists there have distinguished another accent⁵ that exists alongside General Australian. It is called Broad Australian. There are no such distinctions in Canada, a country considerably larger than the United States and Australia (Chambers 1998: 254).

In light of this, dialectologists have long struggled to separate Canada into linguistically distinct regions, and naturally there is disagreement. The traditional

...

4. Virtually all the literature on Canadian English that I have consulted has made mention of this. As well, the evidence is anecdotal.

5. For the purposes of this paper, 'Accent' refers to features of pronunciation which convey a speaker's geographical origin. 'Dialect' will refer to grammatical and lexical features which convey a speaker's geographical origin.

view is that there are no dialects in Canada - that it is impossible for Canadians to tell where other Canadians are from just by listening to them (Crystal, 343⁶; Chambers 1998: 253). A more liberal view divides English Canada into no less than eight major linguistically distinguishable regions (Crystal 1995). However, this claim is based in large on lexical divergence, and some prosodic differences, rather than syntactic or morphological variation (save Newfoundland). Regardless, the claim here is that CE-speakers can at least regionally distinguish (through lexical, prosodic, and perhaps onomatopoeic features) group members from non-group members⁷. These linguistic regions are - in order from east to west - as follows: Newfoundland; the Atlantic Provinces of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick; Quebec; the Ottawa Valley; Southern Ontario; the Prairies; the Arctic North; the West.

2.1 Newfoundland English

Newfoundland English (NfIE) - on account of substantial syntactic, morphological, phonological and lexical variation from CE - is considered to be the only true dialect of CE (Ethnologue 2001; Gramley & Pätzold 1992; Crystal 1995). Newfoundland's history, both linguistically and nonlinguistically differs considerably from the rest of Anglophone-Canada's. Unlike other parts of Canada, it was not settled by British Loyalists fleeing the American Revolution after 1776. Rather, the bulk of its settlers immigrated from Ireland and southwest England in the first half of the 19th century. The island's geographical isolation from the mainland helped to preserve many dialectic features from the British Isles.

Several Hiberno-English morphosyntactic features show up in NfIE, such as *yiz*, *youse*, (Crystal 1995: 343) and *ye* for the second person plural. *To be* is inflected when it serves a functional purpose as in, *I bees here*, and *she bees here*, but remains irregularly inflected in cases of the true present, *I am tired today* and in the NfIE common perfective form *I'm after losing it* (Crystal 1995: 343).

Strong phonological examples include the collapsing of interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, into their stop counterparts /t/ and /d/, so words like 'think' and 'then' are rendered /tɪŋk/ and /dɛn/.

Furthermore, like the other regions, there is a deal of lexical divergence. Such 'Newfoundlandisms' include "screech" (a type of rum), "praties" (potatoes), "outport" (fishing settlement) and "bayman" (inhabitant of a fishing settlement), (Crystal 1995: 343).

However, these features are more or less typical of older Newfoundlanders (Gramley & Pätzold 1992: 373) and as contact with mainland Canada and the US becomes more routine through the media (Crystal 1995: 343) and the displacement of young Newfoundlanders, it is likely that considerable change towards a CE model is taking place in NfIE.

2.2 French lexical influence on Quebec English

Because of its long history as an established minority language in Quebec, Quebec English has inevitably borrowed numerous words and expressions from Québécois French. Briefly, here are a few examples: 'Tuque' (rimless, form-fitting ...

6. Crystal is addressing this but by no means is he endorsing it.

7. The claim being made here, is also supported by the proposal of a vocal stimuli 'Human group recognition system', advanced in (Kaye 1997).

10

winter hat), 'Dépanneur' (convenience store), 'CEGEP' (college), 'S.A.Q.' ('liquor commission'), 'Metro' (subway) 'Guichet' (ATM), 'Calèche' (horse-drawn carriage) and 'Régie' (political 'board' or 'bureau'). In general, young Anglophone Quebecers are more apt to use Francacisms than their older counterparts. For example, in pronouncing the word 'Quebec,' older Anglos generally prefer [k^wəbək], while younger ones favour [kəbək].

3. Phonology

CE phonology - frankly speaking - is a mess. Historically, because Canadians have encountered both dialects, some features can be identified with American English, and some can be identified with British English (Crystal 1995: 340). But this is not where CE phonology is messy. For the most part, the features do not vary from region to region but rather from person to person, thus the distribution is sporadic (Crystal 1995: 341). Social attitudes appear to play a part in this, where some individuals prefer BrE forms and others favour AmE forms. Yet, individual CE-speakers may produce both phonological forms, such is the case with 'either,' where the typically AmE form /ɪjðər/ and the typically BrE /əjðər/, often co-occur in a CE-speaker's speech.

In general, CE speakers follow the trends of AmE in such examples as the pronunciation of final /r/ after vowels (ex. AmE 'car' [kɑr] vs. BrE [kɑː]); deletion of /t/ after /n/ in such words as 'twenty' [twɛni], 'antidote' [ænədɒt], and the often colloquial pronunciation of 'Toronto' [trɔwnɑ], (Crystal 1995: 341); the flapped /d/-like articulation of /t/ in such words as 'Ottawa' (Crystal 1995: 341); the use of /əl/ in such words as 'fertile,' 'missile,' and 'hostile' (Crystal 1995: 341)⁸ and; the use of a strong syllable '-ary,' '-ory' in such words as 'secretary' and 'laboratory' (Crystal 1995: 341).

On the other hand, strong BrE influences show up in /anti/ for 'anti-' instead of AmE /antaj/ (Crystal 1995: 341). Such words as 'Tuesday' are pronounced with an initial /tʃuː/ vs. AmE /tuː/, as well as /stʃupɪd/ for 'stupid' instead of AmE /stupɪd/; BrE /zɛd/ instead of AmE /ziː/; the first syllable of 'lieutenant' being BrE /leɪf/ not AmE /luː-/ (Crystal 1995: 341)⁹.

Distinctly Canadian, is how words such as 'cot' & 'caught,' 'collar' & 'caller' and 'ball' & 'doll' are homophonous in CE speech (Crystal 1995: 342).

3.1 'Canadian Raising'

Perhaps the most unique phonological feature of CE is the so-called 'Canadian Raising' rule which states that /aj/ raises to [əj], and /aʊ/ raises to [əʊ], before voiceless consonants. This rule is responsible for alternations such as 'ride' [raɪd] vs. 'write' [raɪt]; 'fly' [flaɪ] vs. 'flight' [flaɪt] and; 'bout' [baʊt] vs. 'bowed' [baʊd]. However, Canadian Raising seems to be gradually decreasing among young Canadians in favour of the AmE standard (Gramley & Pätzold 1992: 371).

...

8. However, this distribution may even be sporadic in the individual. For example, I myself am a speaker of "CE" and I would say

BrE [φɛptaφɔl], [ɪnoʊstɑφɔl], but AmE [mɪtɔː λ].

9. Although these last two may be token lexical examples, because they do not follow any systematic pattern.

4. Morphology & Syntax

CE morphology and syntax is virtually indistinguishable from that of AmE, and is probably the reason behind why CE is treated as a regional variation of AmE (ex. Gramley & Pätzold 1992: 369), but there are some - albeit a few - unique features. For example, with the verb 'to drink' CE speakers regularly use the simple past 'drank' for the past participle form - instead of the prescriptive form 'drunk' - as in perfect phrases such as "(he) /has/had *drank* (a cold beer)," (Scargill 1977: 53)¹⁰.

Grammatical confusion arises in the language faculties of CE speakers when quizzed on the simple past form of the verb 'to dive.' In a survey on this, 53% of respondents answered the typically British form 'dived,' while 47% answered typically American 'dove' (Chambers 1979: 175; cf. Scargill & Warkentyre 1972).

4.1 Eh?

'Eh?' is arguably the most obvious and most token feature of CE grammar. It is predominately used as a tag question, as in "Nice weather, eh?" It may also be used as an affirmative when answering to someone else's call:

Speaker A: "Matthew!"

Speaker B: "Eh?"

It is also used by a speaker when he has not heard or understood a question and would like it repeated:

Speaker A: Can you turn down that music?

Speaker B: Eh?

Finally, it is also used for narrative purposes, such as checking that the speaker is sympathetically attending, or anticipating a point of special interest in the narrative (Crystal 1995: 342): "He finally gets to the garage, eh, and the car's gone..."

5. The Lexicon

The lexicon is the location for the majority of Canadianisms. Crystal reports that there are around 10,000 distinctive words and senses listed in the 'Dictionary of Canadianisms.' Quite a few have found their way into World Standard English (Crystal 1995: 340, 342). Many lexical entries originating in Canada, are often borrowings from Native American languages and French (Crystal 1995: 342). The word 'Canada' itself has such an origin: 'Canada' comes from Iroquoian 'Kanata' meaning 'village.' As well, 'Canuck' (colloquial for Canadian) comes from Iroquoian 'Kanuchsa' (resident of a 'Kanata'), (Scargill 1977: 22). Other words include, 'caribou,' 'moose,' 'chesterfield' (sofa), 'premier' (provincial Prime Minister), 'riding' (political constituency), 'kayak,' 'kerosene,' 'mukluk' (Inuit boot), 'parka,' 'reeve' (mayor), 'First Nations' (Aboriginals), and 'ski-doo' (Snowmobile), as well as numerous ice hockey terms such as 'icing.'

6. The Future of CE

One issue this paper has not really addressed so far is the current trends in CE. It has presented CE in its current frozen form instead. However, all linguistic systems are dynamic, and as such we can already see changes in CE occurring as we look at

...

10. Anecdotal evidence recovered by yours truly reveals that when asked why CE speakers prefer this form, they usually respond that the past participle "drunk" is synonymous with the state of inebriation.

12

the speech trends of young Canadians. 'Canadian Raising' is gradually decreasing in favour of the AmE standard, distinctly Canadian words are being replaced like 'Chesterfield' for 'Couch', phonological forms like [tu:zdej] for [tʃu:zdej], growing Francisms in Quebec, greater ethnic diversity in urban centres, and so on. This does not necessarily spell the death for CE as we know it, but perhaps, a new beginning. The future is forever uncertain, but my assumption is that despite fading cultural and economic Canada-US borders, Canadians will probably always feel the need to distinguish themselves from Americans, and will certainly find new linguistic means of doing so.

References

Chambers, J.K. 1998. English: Canadian Varieties. In J. Edwards (ed.), **Language in Canada**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 252-272.

Chambres, J. K. 1979. Canadian English. In J.K Chambers (ed.), **Languages of Canada**. Montréal: Didier, 168-203.

Central Intelligence Agency (2001). **World Factbook 2001**. Online resource. Washington: <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

Crystal, D. 1995. **Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 95, 340-343.

Ethnologue (2001). **Languages of Canada**. Online Resource. <http://www.ethnologue.com>

Gramley S. & Pätzold K-M. 1992. **Survey of Modern English**. New York: Routledge, 348-360, 367-373.

Kaye, J.D. 1997. "Why this Article is not about the Acquisition of Phonology." University of London.

Scargill, M.H. 1977. **Short History of Canadian English**. Victoria: Sono Nis Press
 Statistics Canada (1998) **Mother Tongue/Langue Maternelle**. Online Resource. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=Canada

Summary

The differences between the Canadian and American variations of English are not clearly perceptible to the un/trained ear, as the two exhibit a considerable degree of homogeneity. We can account for this phenomenon by discussing several criteria such as historical development, geographical distribution, morphosyntax, phonology and lexicon. This paper will serve as a guide to the current similarities as well as dissimilarities Canadian English has with American English and to a lesser extent British English.