

The Canadian Shift in Montreal
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Labov (1991) proposed a three-dialect model of North American English based on two key phonological variables and their consequent phonetic developments. In this model, Canadian English was classified with several other dialects that appeared to show relative phonetic stability, compared to the complex patterns of chain-shifting that characterized the Northern and Southern dialects. Shortly afterward, Clarke, Elms, and Youssef (1995) published a report on what they called the Canadian Shift, asserting that, far from being phonetically stable, Canadian English exhibits its own set of phonetic shifts, primarily affecting the short front vowels /I/, /E/, and /æ/ (the vowels of *bit*, *bet*, and *bat*), but also involving the back vowel /ʌ/ (the vowel of *but*) in a less integrated way. This initial analysis of the Canadian Shift was based on auditory analysis of the speech of university students from Ontario.

This paper presents new data on the Canadian Shift that improve our understanding of its internal mechanics and social and geographic diffusion. These come from an ongoing study of the English-speaking community of Montreal, involving acoustic rather than auditory analysis. The sample of 35 includes a broader range of participants than the previous study, including both sexes and a wide spectrum of ages and ethnic and social backgrounds. An apparent-time analysis was performed, using Pearson tests of correlation, to determine whether the Canadian Shift is in fact a change in progress in Montreal, and to examine its nature and direction. Age was found to be strongly correlated with the F2 of /æ/ (that is, with the retraction of /æ/), as predicted in Clarke et al's model of the Shift, but the strongest age correlations for /E/ and /I/ were found to be with F2, rather than with F1, suggesting that these vowels are shifting primarily inward, in parallel fashion, rather than downward in sequence (as in Clarke et al's model). No age correlation was found with /ʌ/, indicating that this vowel is not part of the Canadian Shift, at least in Montreal. A further set of correlation tests examined internal coordination among hypothetically related parts of the Shift. These provided evidence of both models of the shift: the inward movement of /I/ and /E/ are strongly correlated, as are the lowering of /E/ and the retraction of /æ/, suggesting that /E/ is moving into the low-front space vacated by the retraction of /æ/.

The Canadian Shift characterizes the Montreal English-speaking community as a whole: there were no significant differences among the ethnic groups studied. This is perhaps surprising, given the isolation of the community within a majority French-speaking province, and presents an explanatory challenge for current models of geolinguistic diffusion. A series of t-tests did, however, find that the core elements of the Shift have the typical social profile of a change in progress: participants with a university degree are more advanced than participants without a degree; and female participants are considerably ahead of males in the most salient aspect of the Shift, the retraction of /æ/.

Clarke, S., F. Elms and A. Youssef 1995. "The third dialect of English: Some Canadian evidence." *Language Variation and Change* 7:209-28.

Labov, W. (1991). "The three dialects of English". In P. Eckert (ed.), *New Ways of Analyzing Sound Change* (New York: Academic Press), pp. 1-44.