

Longitudinal evidence for vowel change in Montreal French
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An apparent-time interpretation of data from sociolinguistic interviews in 1971 led previous researchers to conclude that vowel diphthongization had begun in Montreal French in the 1930s, initiated by working-class speakers (Santerre and Millo 1978, Yaeger 1979, Cedergren et al 1981). In this paper, we re-examine these inferences, using longitudinal data from 1984 and 1995, investigating both the trajectory of change and the relationship between historical change and change across individual speakers' lifespans.

Compensatory lengthening after the historical loss of following /s/ yielded one class of long oral vowels in French (Yaeger-Dror and Kemp 1992); vowels are also lengthened before *consonnes allongantes*: the voiced fricatives /v, z, ʒ/ and /ʁ/. Diphthongization may affect any stressed long vowel (Dumas 1981); we focus on the mid and low vowels /ɛ/ (*père, tête*), /œ/ (*soeur, oeuvre*), /ɔ/ (*corps*), and /ɑ/ (*âge*) previously identified as undergoing change toward diphthongization involving a lowering of the nucleus.

Impressionistic coding of the twelve speakers recorded across three decades revealed a pattern of increasing diphthongization. For example, these speakers' average /œr/ diphthongization rate increased from 41% in 1971 to 51% in 1984 to 61% in 1995 (impressionistic coding of 20 tokens per speaker sample). The current study verifies this finding with acoustic analysis. Using Praat and Plotnik, we tracked individuals' vowel trajectories across the 24-year span for a Panel of 2 working-class and 2 upper middle class speakers. Matched Trend samples from the 1984 and 1995 Montreal corpora allowed us to determine the trajectory of this change through the community. We measured each speaker's entire vowel system, focusing on the long vowels and their relation to the other mid and low vowels.

Our acoustically-based results have confirmed the impressionistic coding, indicating a general lowering and backing of long mid and low vowels across the lifespans of three of the four Panel speakers, with one upper middle class male speaker resisting the change. Further, the Trend comparison showed that the young 1984 speakers were farther advanced in these changes than the 1971 speakers. More surprising, however, was that the lowering and backing trend was accompanied by increased monophthongization: tokens that were merely lowered with no discernible offglide. We now interpret the general trend as having involved two stages: first, the nuclei of long mid vowels lowered, with an offglide maintained in roughly the position formerly occupied by the nucleus; second, monophthongization eliminated the offglide, with the nucleus remaining in the lowered position. Our comparison of individual lifespan changes with community level changes suggests that while individuals do change, they lag behind younger speakers in their own communities. Further research on participation in the change across the social spectrum should indicate whether the one upper middle class speaker who resists the change is anomalous, or part of a more general pattern.