

The effect of geographical and linguistic isolation:
Stative possessives in Quebec City English

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Variability in the use of stative possessives (*have*, *have got*, and *got*) is a distinguishing feature in the varieties of English (Tagliamonte, 2003). *Have got* has been reported to be on the rise in British (Tagliamonte, 2003) and New Zealand (Quinn, 2004) English, but the factors conditioning these changes differ according to variety. For example, Tagliamonte (2003) found that the change to *have got* was mostly conditioned by grammatical constraints such as Type of subject, Polarity, Type of object, and Type of reference. Alternatively, Jankowski (2005) found that grammaticalization of the stative possessive in American English is undergoing the change differently; *have* is the favoured variant and is “specializing for negation” (p.39).

This paper is part of a larger project investigating participation in mainstream developments in a variety of English which is geographically and linguistically isolated, Quebec City English (QcE), where the surrounding community is overwhelmingly Francophone. Examples of the stative possessives in QcE, taken from the *Quebec English Corpus* (Poplack et al., 2007) are shown in (1).

- (1) a. We **have** family in Toronto and around there. (QEC/031:1003)
b. She’s **got** three sons. (QEC/037:452)
c. I still **got** my feet, don’t I? (QEC/065:899)

As linguistic isolation tends to impede convergence with surrounding varieties (Poplack and Tagliamonte, 2000), in this paper I investigate whether QcE is participating in or resisting mainstream development.

24 speakers were subsampled from the *Quebec English Corpus*, and stratified according to age and bilingual ability in French. As a control, data from 12 speakers of mainstream Canadian English, as instantiated by Oshawa-Whitby English (OWE) was used. A total of 1160 tokens were coded for six linguistic factors: Subject Type, Subject Reference, Object Type, Possession Type, Possession Relation and Sentence Type.

A variable rule analysis showed that choice of stative possessive is conditioned differently in QcE and OWE. The factor group Sentence Type (negative) has the strongest effect on *have got* in QcE, while the factor group Object Type (concrete) has the strongest effect in OWE. Surprisingly, a change in progress was found in both QcE as well as OWE, but the QcE change is not following the change in OWE. *Have got* in QcE for the younger speakers is conditioned by affirmative sentences. In contrast, the *have got* of the younger speakers in OWE is conditioned by a concrete object. A comparative analysis indicated that the younger and more bilingual speakers in QcE, who have more contact with French, share similar patterns of grammatical conditioning, and these patterns are quite different from those seen in OWE. This suggests that the difference between QcE and OWE results from the relative geographical and linguistic isolation of QcE, further supporting the claim that linguistic isolation impedes convergence with mainstream varieties.

References:

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