

Sociophonetic Patterns in Laurentian French Vowel Fronting

Although the fronting of /ɔ/ in European French has received considerable attention in recent work (Armstrong and Low, 2008; Boula de Mareüil et al., 2010; Martinet, 1969), the phenomenon has gone largely unstudied in the Laurentian French context. As such, the present study examines acoustic data from the Laurentian sub-corpus of the *Phonologie du français contemporain* project (Côté, 2014; Durand et al., 2002, 2009; www.projet-pfc.net) to examine the process in apparent time in seven cities. The data, measured using Praat (Boersma and Weenink, 2014) and analysed using mixed-effects regression in R (R Core Team, 2014), reveal not only that /ɔ/ has fronted over the past three generations, but also that this is true of /o/ and /u/ as well (as suggested for /o/ in Hexagonal French by de Mareüil et al., 2010).

The vowels do not all show identical patterning with regards to predictors, however. For all three back vowels, fronting has increased in apparent time across the three generations sampled. Additionally, the fronting of /ɔ/, the focus of research in the European varieties, is sensitive to the pitch contour in the Laurentian varieties, with falling contours favouring fronting and raising contours instead disavouring the process. The places of articulation of surrounding segments were not significant predictors for this vowel, though they were for the fronting of /o/ and /u/, while the latter two vowels did not show pitch contour effects. Regional differences in the degree of fronting are also significant, as is the trend of men consistently favouring raising.

References

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