

Canada Research Chair in Language Variation and Change

Sali A. Tagliamonte
University of Toronto, Canada

How and why does language change? Canada's diverse communities offer unique opportunities for understanding language variation and change in linguistic systems. As English becomes a global language, unique local language features are under threat from urbanization and changing economies. By studying language phenomena across Ontario, in communities of various sizes, types and with diverse founders, economies and cultures, this project will gain insights into Canadian dialects. By engaging in comparative analyses with UK dialects, broader generalizations can be made.

Four intersecting theories of linguistic change situate this research program: Labov's principles of linguistic change (Labov, 1994; 2001; 2010), Labov's theory of transmission and diffusion of language change (Labov, 2007), Trudgill's theory of sociolinguistic typology (Trudgill, 2011) and theories of grammatical change (Heine, Claudi & Hünnemeyer, 1991; Hopper & Traugott, 1993; Joseph, 2001; Poplack, 2011). The goal is to synthesize their predictions and offer new interpretations.

On a broad societal level, the results will bring the richness of Canadian dialects into greater public awareness, including unique words and expressions. On a scientific level, the results will reshape our knowledge of linguistic and social impacts on language variation and change, stimulating interdisciplinary research in the social sciences and humanities. A dedicated website (<http://ontariodialects.chass.utoronto.ca/>) will enable the public to explore the linguistic landscape under study and offer their own observations and experiences for further study.

References:

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