

## **On dialect contact between vernaculars: levelling and shifting in North American French**

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French in North America is broadly divided in two linguistic subgroups, Laurentian and Acadian, based on the origin of the first settlers. The present study focuses on Iles-de-la-Madeleine, an Acadian enclave within the Laurentian French speaking province of Québec. Making use of archival recordings for 24 speakers born at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we were able to locate when the local Acadian variety began to shift towards the supralocal Laurentian variety, thus reporting on a rare case of shift between vernaculars.

We present the variationist analysis of three morphosyntactic variables to illustrate the linguistic changes involved. In question formation, new variants are added to the system of Y/N questions while old variants still prevail in WH-questions. For future temporal reference, we find an underlying grammar which combines old and new constraints on the surface variation. The results for the last variable, 3<sup>rd</sup> person verbal morphology, reveal an instance of dialect levelling (Kerswill & Williams 2002): Use of traditional and salient Acadian forms in the speech of older speakers is almost categorical while the reverse is found for younger ones who use the Laurentian forms. The detailed analyses also reveal how the new variants progress from one context to the other.

Documentation of the sociolinguistic history of the community allows us to put the relationship between change, prestige and contact (Trudgill 1986, 2008) in perspective. Acadian French has been shaped by population movements (Britain & Trudgill 1999) and unique patterns of settlement following the Expulsion from the homeland (1755-1763). In some areas, the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought about more sustained interaction with speakers of Laurentian French, and the standard, through the development of tourism, education, job markets, etc. The local variety has receded gradually and today, salient variants survive only as social identity indices (Silverstein 2003, Johnstone et al. 2006).