A peripheral view of a change from above:
Prestige forms over time in a medium-sized community

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Restrictive relative clauses in present-day vernacular Canadian English can be introduced by *that*, Ø, *who*, or *which*. The major variants are *who* and *that* for relativized human subjects, and *that* and Ø for relativized objects (D'Arcy and Tagliamonte 2010:391). For instance:

   (1) This is the girl (*who*/*that*) wants the book.
   (2) This is the girl (*that*/Ø) I saw asking for the book.

The use of *who* in either context is believed to have resulted from a centuries-old change from above (Romaine 1982), likely through imitation of French and Latin (Mustanoja 1960:199-200). Across urban dialects of English, *who* still acts as a prestige form; it is associated with well-educated and middle-class speakers (Romaine 1982, Ball 1996, Beal and Corrigan 2002, Tagliamonte et al. 2005, D'Arcy and Tagliamonte 2010). In "older, peripheral, and conservative varieties" (D'Arcy and Tagliamonte 2010:383-384), *who* has never caught on to the same extent (Tagliamonte et al. 2005).

The present study uses data from 37 speakers in the Directions of Change in Canadian English project (Tagliamonte 2007-2010, Tagliamonte and Denis 2014) to investigate the relativizers of Belleville, Ontario – a city of 50,000 located 175 kilometres northeast of Toronto. Although Belleville's dialect is not a central urban variety of Canadian English, the town's long history of emphasizing formal education (Boyce 2008) raises the possibility that the prestige form *who* has infiltrated the Belleville community more deeply than would be expected given the town's size and its distance from larger cities.

The results show that when it comes to human subject relativization as in (1), *who* is a lower-frequency variant in Belleville than it is in Toronto. Accounting for 23.1% of the Belleville tokens, *who* ranks far behind *that* (69.9%). Apparent-time results for speakers under 60 show a lopsided but stable division between *that* and *who*. However, local speakers over 60 have quite a different system for subject relativization: for them alone, *who* is more frequent than *that*. There is also a significant effect of increased education favoring more use of *who* overall, but this depends largely on the oldest cohort; the effect declines sharply with decreasing age. Meanwhile, variation with object relativization as in (2) shows stability in apparent time in both Belleville and Toronto, but only in Belleville is the paradigm simplifying. *Who* exists as a low-frequency variant in this context in Toronto (D'Arcy and Tagliamonte 2010:393), but in Belleville no one under 30 uses *who* to relativize objects.

These findings suggest that the relativizer *who* is prestigious for the oldest speakers in Belleville, but not for the younger cohorts; and that locally, the prestige has been wearing off in apparent time. It is unclear why this should have happened just over the last 40 to 50 years, but it may go hand-in-hand with the general decline of a staunchly proper British character to Canadian speech and society (Chambers 2004:238-240, Chambers 2010:19), which in smaller towns could mean that old prestige forms can no longer count on being part of strongly enforced norms.

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