

Contrasting constraints in future temporal reference

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The expression of future temporal reference (FTR) has been widely studied across spoken French varieties. For centuries, grammarians (Maupas 1607, Antonini 1753) described the choice between the two main variants—the periphrastic future (*ça va être cette année* ‘it’s going to be this year’) and the inflected future (*ça sera au mois d’octobre* ‘it’ll in October’)—as influenced by temporal distance; specifically, periphrasis was argued to signal proximity (i.e., *le futur proche*). Empirical studies of varieties of Acadian (King & Nadasdi 2003) and Martinique (Roberts 2013) French support this description. By contrast, the strongest predictor in Laurentian (Poplack & Turpin 1999, Wagner & Sankoff 2011) and Continental French (Roberts 2012) is sentential polarity: negative clauses strongly favour the inflected future. Thus, varieties of spoken French, both within Canada (Laurentian vs. Acadian) and globally, appear to be divided between two types of systems with respect to the linguistic constraints operating on future temporal reference.

In this talk, we examine FTR in a recent corpus of 24 French interviews collected in a rural area of northern France where Picard, a Gallo-Romance language in which the inflected future is overwhelmingly preferred, still enjoys a relative vitality. By analyzing this contact variety, we also tap into the role that Picard may play in FTR variation in the area. To determine the factors that condition variant choice, we analyze spoken French data from Picard–French bilinguals and French monolinguals and consider a number of social (sex, age, education level and bilingualism status) and linguistic (temporal distance, sentential polarity, adverbial specification, etc.) factors proposed in the literature.

Our results show that the periphrastic future is used at a rate of 62% in Picardie French, much lower than in Laurentian varieties, but nearly on par with Acadian and Continental French. Results from multivariate analyses reveal that bilingualism status plays no role on this variable. Instead, education level was the only statistically significant social factor group: speakers with a higher education level—French *baccalauréat* or higher—had lower rates of the periphrastic future variant (60%, N=75 and 50%, N=84) than speakers without the *bac* (73%, N=108). Results from multivariate analyses of linguistic constraints show that temporal distance is the only significant linguistic factor group constraining variant choice in Picardie French, with proximate events (within the hour or sooner) favouring periphrasis. Further statistical analyses uncover the fact that the periphrastic future is even more strongly favoured with imminent events, expected to occur within the minute (e.g., *On va couper?* ‘We are going to stop the recording?’). The lack of a significant polarity effect, in contrast to Laurentian and Continental French studies, closely mirrors the pattern reported for conservative Acadian French and Martinique French.

Our study contributes to the understanding of morphosyntactic variation in French by showing that, like their Canadian counterparts, varieties of French spoken in Continental France can fall along either type of systems of linguistic constraints with respect to FTR. Hence, our results provide evidence for regional variation in Continental French, not only in the phonology and lexicon, but also in morphosyntax.

References

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