

Canadian Shift in time, or is it in space?

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Canadian Shift (CS), the lowering and retraction of the front lax vowels, has been shown to be active in a number of Canadian cities across the country, since Clarke et al (1995) first described the process (eg. Roeder 2012, Boberg 2008, Sadlier-Brown & Tamminga 2008, *inter alia*). This pull chain is posited to begin in reaction to the merger of /ɑ/ and /ɔ/, where the /æ/ is retracted to a more central position, and then in turn, /ɛ/ is lowered and/or retracted. There has been a lack of consensus on whether /ɪ/ gets pulled in turn however; though that shift would be the next step in the chain. This paper details the CS in progress in Southern Alberta, Canada, and provides key evidence that /ɪ/ is observably shifting to a more retracted and lowered position, but that this shift is not easily observable using the usual method of apparent time at a single location. Instead, observations of geographic diffusion are crucial to see that /ɪ/ is indeed being pulled along with /ɛ/ in Southern Alberta. The data come from a corpus of Southern Alberta speech, collected 2010-2012. These materials include 71 male and female speakers aged 18-84 from both urban and rural locations. The F1 and F2 of over 1500 tokens of /ɪ ɛ æ/ were measured at three points (20%, 50%, 80%). All vowels were all extracted from a word list. Mixed-effects model analyses in R: reveal a Canadian Shifting system in Southern Alberta which is nearly complete among certain groups, but with observable differences primarily between men and women, and in geographic diffusion. The lowering and retraction of /æ/ is nearly complete among urban speakers, with no significance between age, gender or SES within this group. However, this change is not quite complete in the rural locale, with older men still significantly different. The shifting of /ɛ/ is also nearly complete, with no significant differences among urban speakers along social lines of gender, age or SES for height (F1), though men are still different along the F2 (retraction) dimension. What is interesting here is that we observe that among rural speakers, the CS is still firmly in progress, with age and gender appearing as significantly different for both F1, and F2, signaling as well that women are further along in the change than men. It also tells us that the path is along the front/back dimension. The last vowel affected, /ɪ/, offers us particular insight into the roles of time, space and gender in the diffusion of a change in progress. While all urban women both retract and lower /ɪ/, rural women only retract, and only urban men have begun participation in this change. This means for this variable at least, gender and geography *together* are a better predictor of change even than age. Put another way, women in both the city and the country are faster to adapt to new changes than men in either location. The shifting of each CS vowel is diagrammed below, where red indicates rural and blue indicates urban. Our data contributes two important findings: one descriptive, adding a previously unstudied region to the growing list of Canadian regions which have been observed to participate in the CS, and one methodological regarding the observation of linguistic change; that is that apparent-time analyses will be greatly enriched by adding geographical points along an urban-rural continuum.

References

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