

The Presence and Progress of the Canadian Shift in Halifax and Vancouver

Clarke et al. (1995) identified the Canadian Shift (CS) as a change in progress in Ontario involving /æ/ retraction and /i/ and /e/ lowering. Later studies have found the CS in other Canadian locations but have not agreed on its phonetic direction, with Boberg (2005) describing a change characterized by parallel retraction in Montreal. The geographic extent of the CS is also uncertain; Labov, Ash and Boberg (2006) did not find that it was present in the Maritimes. This study compares data from Halifax and Vancouver to further investigate these issues.

We recorded interviews with 26 speakers native to Halifax and Vancouver. Word list tokens of the relevant vowels were analysed acoustically using CSL and then compared statistically across age groups and cities.

The CS is shown to be present in Halifax speech, indicating that Labov et al.'s (2006) isogloss defining the Canadian dialect region may need to be extended to include the Maritimes. Although the CS is not following identical phonetic paths in Vancouver and Halifax (suggesting a possible role for regional variation), both cities clearly demonstrate chain shift behavior rather than parallel retraction. We also observe that the older Halifax speakers maintain an additional low central vowel, /ah/, which contrary to expectation has not inhibited their adoption of the shift. We therefore propose that the CS should be discussed as a change restricted to the lax vowel subsystem (Labov, 1994), operating independently of other subsystems. Overall, the CS appears to be a uniting feature of Canadian English.

References

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