

Canadian English in the Pacific Northwest: A phonetic comparison of Vancouver, B.C. and Seattle, WA

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Despite the geographic proximity and cultural similarities of Vancouver, B.C. and Seattle, WA, few studies have directly compared their speech (Sadler-Brown 2012). Prior research in B.C. has focused on the region's participation in features of the Canadian Shift such as /æ/ retraction and its questionable participation in raising of /aɪ/ and /aʊ/ (Chambers 1973, Esling and Warkentyne 1993, Hall 2000, Sadler-Brown and Tamminga 2008, Boberg 2008, Pappas and Jeffrey 2013). In Seattle, on the other hand, research primarily documents pre-velar raising of /æ/ before /g/ (Wassink 2009, Freeman 2013, Riebold 2012, 2014 & 2015). No large-scale studies have compared these features between Vancouver and Seattle speakers.

With 29,372 tokens collected via a word list reading task from 20 Seattle and 19 Vancouver speakers and a sociocultural identity survey, the current study analyzes and compares speakers' participation in five key dialectal features of Pacific Northwest English and Canadian English: pre-velar /æ/ raising, pre-nasal /æ/ raising, /æ/ retraction, and the "Canadian" raising of diphthongs /aɪ/ and /aʊ/. Unlike previous studies, which have focused on formant data extracted at a single time-point over the vowel's duration (usually mid-point or point of inflection), measurements for the current study were extracted at five duration-proportional points and comparisons of formant trajectories were included in the mixed-effects linear regression models for each dialect feature.

The results suggest that Vancouver speakers are participating in processes identified as part of the Canadian Shift and are also participating in patterns characteristic of U.S. Pacific Northwest English. Vancouver speakers have a more retracted /æ/ variant across all phonetic contexts than Seattle speakers, as evidence of their participation in the Canadian Shift. Canadian Raising /aɪ/ and /aʊ/ is quite robust among Vancouver speakers, involving significant changes on both the F1 and F2 dimensions. At the same time, Vancouver speakers, like their neighbors to the South, engage in pre-velar raising of /æɪg/, suggesting a regional similarity and solidarity of features. Furthermore, the variation within the Vancouver sample suggests that both traits characteristic of the Canadian Shift and those characteristic of the Pacific Northwest are positively socially evaluated and being increasingly adopted by groups commonly thought to lead linguistic changes: younger adult speakers and women. Rather than pitting Canadian patterns vs. American patterns, these findings suggest that the linguistic and socio-cultural identity of Vancouver residents nests a regional identity shared with Seattle within Canadian national identity and effectively integrates elements of both with pride.

While Vancouver and Seattle speakers participate in many of the same allophonic processes (on the basis of statistically significant differences between allophonic environments in within city analyses), there remain significant and substantial differences in the extent of their participation in these processes, not to mention different variation by speaker age and sex sub-group. To summarize, both Seattle and Vancouver speakers are participating in raising of /æ/ before /g/, but Vancouver speakers show a comparatively greater degree of raising for /æɪg/ (relative to /æɪk/) than Seattle speakers. The same is true for the raising of diphthongs /aɪ/ and /aʊ/ before voiceless consonants. Seattle speakers

show /æ/ retraction before laterals, but Vancouver speakers retract /æ/ before both laterals and fricatives, as compared to stops. This research sheds light on the variation within a dialect region divided by a national border and offers a realistically complex view of the simultaneous solidarity and differentiation of identity embodied by its inhabitants.

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