

We's jus' so different anymore: Describing the English dialect of Southwestern Ontario
Iannozzi, Michael; Kelly, Stephanie; Heap, David
Western University

Despite a widespread perception that Canadian English is homogenous, except an 'East Coast Accent' (Barber, 2007), research by Canadian sociolinguists has shown a great deal of lexical, phonetic, and syntactic variation. There have been studies in the West (D'Arcy, 2015), in the Prairies (Rosen & Skriver, 2007), in the Maritimes (Clarke, 2015), Québec (Boberg, 2005), and, of course, Ontario (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2010; Brook, 2014; inter alia). One large area that linguists have not yet studied for dialect differences is Southwestern Ontario, except for De Decker (2002), who looked at a single small town. There are lots of small towns, potential for contact effects with the American border, and the perception among participants that there's a unique identity in Southwestern Ontario.

The SWORE (SouthWestern Ontario Rural English) Corpus is a fieldwork project currently underway to document and describe the English of the area west of London, Ontario to the US border. The SWORE corpus collects 120 semi-guided sociolinguistic interviews: 12 men and 12 women, grouped by age, from each of the region's five counties. These counties have populations that shrank by 1% to 5% in the last census period (2006-2011), and are each over 95% Anglophone and white (StatsCan, 2011). The cities of Windsor and London are excluded due to the likelihood of dialect levelling having taken place (Chambers & Trudgill, 1998).

Studies done on rural areas need to consider factors of variation that may not apply in urban areas, such as extraversion or indigeneity (Chambers, 2001; Hazen, 2002). The SWORE Corpus shows that dialectal variation often reflects an urban/rural divide: in rural communities, lawyers may eat supper at diners with sugarbeet farmers, and researchers need to find novel ways to account for that.

This paper describes dialect features found among 50 of the older SWORE speakers, including some more often associated with other regions of North America (Wolfram & Schilling, 2015; Labov, Ash, & Boberg, 2005) rather than Canadian English:

Intrusive t: "I got mum sittin' accrosst from me".

Unstressed Initial Syllable Loss: "She was _'round, but I _'spect somethin' come up"

Regularized Past Participles: "He'd ate everthin' from what we seen"

Weren't / Was Levelling: "You weren't never there, but we was always hearin' it"

Multiple Negation: "Nobody didn't have no place to go".

'Bare' Verbs: "we come in the door, and we was pretty near froze"

Although statistical analysis is ongoing, the results show that far from being a homogenous dialect in Ontario, let alone Canada, vernacular features from across the English-speaking world combine to make a unique Southwestern Ontario dialect.

We's jus' so different anymore: Describing the English dialect of Southwestern Ontario
Iannozzi, Michael; Kelly, Stephanie; Heap, David
Western University

References

- Boberg, C. (2005). The Canadian shift in Montreal. *Language variation and change*, 17(02), 133-154.
- Marisa Brook (2014). A peripheral view of a change from above: Prestige forms over time in a medium-sized city. *NWAV 43* (Chicago, Illinois — 23-26 October).
- Chambers, J. K. (2001). Region and language variation. *English World-Wide*, 21(2), 169–199.
- Chambers, J. K., & Trudgill, P. (1998). *Dialectology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Clarke, S. (2015). Voices of Newfoundland and Labrador: Mobilizing Cultural Heritage for a Contemporary Audience. *Regional Language Studies... Newfoundland*, (26).
- D'Arcy, A. (2015). At the crossroads of change. *Grammatical Change in English World-Wide*, 67, 43.
- De Decker, P. M. (2002). Hangin'and retractin': Adolescent social practice and phonetic variation in an Ontario small town. *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics*, 8(3), 28.
- Hazen, K. (2002). Identity and language variation in a rural community. *Language*, 78(2), 240–257.
- Labov, W., Ash, S., & Boberg, C. (2005). *The atlas of North American English: Phonetics, phonology and sound change*. Walter de Gruyter.
- Rosen, N., & Skriver, C. (2015). Vowel patterning of Mormons in Southern Alberta, Canada. *Language & Communication*, 42, 104–115.
- Statistics Canada (Ed.). (2011). *Profile of census tracts in London, Sarnia and Windsor*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada = Statistique Canada.
- Tagliamonte, S. A., & Denis, D. (2010). The stuff of change: General extenders in Toronto, Canada. *Journal of English Linguistics*.
- Wolfram, W., & Schilling, N. (2015). *American English: dialects and variation*. John Wiley & Sons.