

Sisters under the skin?: Discourse-pragmatic variation and change in three varieties of French

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Transatlantic comparisons of variation in French exhibit a strong bias towards the study of phonetic and phonological features (e.g., Durand et al. 2002; Gess et al. 2012). Strikingly limited in number are large-scale comparative investigations of discourse variation (Pichler 2010, 2016), hindering any generalizations about patterns of discourse-pragmatic variation and change in New and Old World varieties of French.

The present study addresses this lacuna. Drawing on the infrastructure of comparative variationist sociolinguistics (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001; Tagliamonte 2013), we contribute new insights into discourse-pragmatic variation and change in spoken Hexagonal French (HF), Acadian French (AF) and Quebec French (QF). We exemplify with a study of variable quotative expressions, illustrated in (1)-(3), defined as all the strategies used to introduce ‘reported speech, sounds [...] and thought by self or other’ (Buchstaller 2006:5).

- (1) *il est comme*, "Viens juste vers une heure." *Je suis comme*, "OK" (QF)
- (2) *j’ai fait*, "Oups, je reste icitte" (AF)
- (3) *elle nous a dit*, "Ah je vous remercie et tout" (HF)

Widely acknowledged to be the locus of extensive variability and innovation, the quotative system affords ample opportunity to study change, particularly in relation to the grammaticalization of newly emergent quotative constructions (Deutscher 2011; Buchstaller 2014). We pursue this line of inquiry by systematically comparing quotative usage in vernacular compendia representing: (i) HF, recorded in Paris between 2005-2012 (Branca-Rosoff et al. 2012); (ii) AF, recorded in the predominantly Francophone area of north-east New Brunswick in 2013; and (iii) QF, recorded in the highly bilingual Ottawa-Gatineau Metropolitan Area in 2014. All three datasets contain an apparent-time component, offering a crucial window on any change in progress. 2400 tokens extracted from 81 speakers were coded for extra-linguistic predictors (variety, age, sex), as well as linguistic predictors hypothesized to condition variant selection (grammatical person, content of the quote, tense/aspect, and mimesis; see Buchstaller & D’Arcy 2009). We use this information to: (a) characterize patterns of quotative variation and change in the three comparison varieties; (b) compare trajectories of change by applying diagnostics of later-stage grammaticalization to innovative quotative variants (see e.g., Ferrara & Bell 1995; Tagliamonte & D’Arcy 2004).

The results turn up a number of key findings. All three comparison varieties contain innovative variants (e.g., QF/AF *être comme*; QF/AF/HF/ *être là*) incorporating markers of comparison/approximation as well as deictic elements, claimed to be common sources of new quotative constructions cross-linguistically (Buchstaller & van Alphen 2012: xiv-xv). Multivariate statistical models reveal that the innovative *être comme* variant, analogous to the English *be like* quotative (Tagliamonte & Hudson 1999), has progressed further along the pathway of grammaticalization in QF than AF, indicating that this innovation is differentially positioned on the cline of change in different varieties of the same language.

The results indicate that there are compelling parallels in patterns of quotative variation and change in the geographically non-contiguous QF and AF varieties, but there are fewer correspondences with the patterns instantiated in HF. We conclude by exploring how a focus on *probabilistic constraints* can be used to elaborate a nuanced variationist typology (Torres

Cacoullos & Travis *f.c.*) of quotative variation and change in transplanted and source varieties of French.

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