

“Oot and Aboot” in Hockey Talk

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Bray (2019) observes that U.S. American-born professional hockey players use phonetic variables of Canadian English indexically, a result that is consistent with observations from my attitudes pilot study showing an association in the perception of residents of London Ontario between playing Canada’s national sport and speaking a typically Canadian variety of English (Dallinges 2015). While awareness of “hockey talk” is manifested in popular culture on a lexical level, such as online glossaries¹, and speech of the characters on the TV show Letterkenny, less is known about what effect, if any, membership in a community of practice of hockey players, potentially possessing a set of shared norms (Labov 1972: 120–121), has on the realization of “typically Canadian” phonetic variants.

This paper investigates Canadian Raising (CR), that is, raising of the nuclei of the diphthongs /ai/ and /aw/ before voiceless obstruents, in the speech of hockey players. CR is often cited in popular culture, (e.g., the stereotypical phrase “oot and aboot” for “out and about”). Through the analysis of this variable, this paper addresses the following questions: (1) Do hockey players have a particularly high rate of CR use? (2) Do formant measurements reveal a particularly high degree of raising (i.e., lower F1 than expected) in hockey players’ speech?

Data for this study come from a corpus of sociolinguistic interviews, gathered in the fall of 2019 using the PAC-LVTI protocol (Carr et al. 2004), with 19 Canadian hockey players (9 women, 10 men) of varying age groups, all native speakers of English living in London Ontario. Speakers were classified according to a Hockey Involvement Index (HII) based on their responses to questions regarding frequency and level of play as well as degree of identification with the sport and the game’s importance for them.

For each speaker, values of the first two formants for tokens of /ai/ and /aw/ in the formal interview (11 to 23 minutes per speaker), once coded in a Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2017) TextGrid, are automatically extracted using the Praat script-based plug-in application Fast Track (Barreda 2021). Formant plots for tokens in typically raising contexts vs. typically non-raising contexts are examined for each speaker and statistical comparisons of normalized F1 values are made between speakers and groups according to demographic variables (gender, age, HII) using Jamovi (The Jamovi Project 2020). Preliminary results of an exploratory pilot study on four speakers (2 women and 2 men, each representing opposite ends of the HII scale; 270 tokens in total) show that, while a clear pattern of raising (along with fronting) for the /ai/ diphthong can be observed for the female speaker with a high HII (see Figure 1: lower F1 and higher F2 before voiceless obstruent than before voiced), considerable individual variation is found for the other three speakers, with no clear trend emerging for the patterning of CR in both diphthongs by HII and gender.

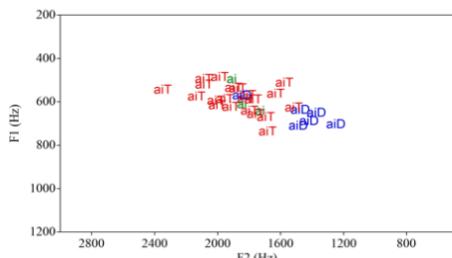


Figure 1: KG /ai/ diphthong. /aiT/: before voiceless obstruent; /aiD/: before voiced obstruent; /ai/: in open syllable.

The proposed study on the full corpus will allow for a thorough exploration of our research questions, thus shedding light, from the standpoint of “third wave” sociolinguistics (Eckert 2012), on the eventual role of this variable as an index of self-identification as a Canadian hockey player.

¹<https://www.flohockey.tv/articles/5060128-the-ultimate-guide-to-hockey-slang>
<https://thehockeywriters.com/how-to-talk-like-a-hockey-player/>

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