

A corpus-based investigation of dialect levelling in Laurentian French

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Two major dialectal areas have been historically established within the domain of Laurentian French (aka Canadian or Québec French): East, around the city of Québec, and West, around Montréal (Dulong & Bergeron 1980). On the one hand, the evidence for this division has been essentially lexical, and variations in the sound system, despite their salience in the characterization of dialectal distinctions, have not been systematically investigated, (Dolbec & Ouellon 1999). On the other hand, analyses of particular sound processes have suggested that sound distinctions are subject to dialect levelling (Larochelle 1989; Dolbec & Ouellon 1999; Friesner 2010), but the direction of the change (symmetrical influence between east and west or unidirectional diffusion from west to east) and the role of the local and international norms of French remain unclear.

We present here the results of the first corpus-based study of variation in the sound system of Laurentian French. The corpus is part of the international project "Phonologie du français contemporain" (Durand et al. 2009) and currently includes 200 hours of speech from more than 125 speakers, 3 generations and 10 different areas in Quebec. The corpus has been automatically segmented using a forced aligner (Milne to appear), which allows quick analyses of massive volumes of data. Having confirmed that the sound system is subject to dialect levelling, we address the issue of the source and direction of the levelling. Ongoing investigations of several distinct sound processes support a unidirectional diffusion of western features to the rest of the territory and subtle interactions between local and international norms of the pronunciation of French.