

Tonal variation in Ontario French (Canada)

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The French language is spoken in all the provinces of Canada. However, in all of them other than Quebec, French has the status of a minority language coexisting with English. Given this situation of language contact, the influence of English on the use of French (and its grammar) seems inevitable. With respect to Ontario French, cases of such grammar interactions with English are well accounted for in previous morpho-syntactic and morphophonological studies (Mougeon and Beniak 1991, Tennant 1995, Mougeon 2004, Nadasdi 2005, Mougeon *et al.* 2005), but the prosodic system of this variety of French remains insufficiently studied (Cichocki and Lepetit 1986). This analysis is based on text readings from the database of the Phonology of Contemporary French Project (*Phonologie du français contemporain, PFC* (Durand *et al.* 2002)). It intends to study Ontario French intonation in order to identify its characteristics and to compare these with data from European and Québécois French varieties described in Ménard (1998), Poiré and Kaminskaia (2004), and Kaminskaia (2005). Among the questions asked are the following: is Ontario French intonation similar to that of other varieties of French previously described in the literature? If differences are revealed, is the variation phonetic (surface realizations) or phonological (grammar internal)? Does Ontario French intonation demonstrate features also found in English, a characteristic that would suggest the possibility of the interaction of their grammars?

For this analysis, we adopt the autosegmental-metrical approach (Pierrehumbert 1980, Jun and Fougeron 1995, 2002, Ladd 1996) and focus particularly on the intonation patterns that are categorically distinct (Alvord 2007) in French and English (for example, continuity contours) and on the following intonation features that may be susceptible to change under contact: inventory of pitch patterns (Poiré and Tremblay 2007), their phonetic realization (see Gilles and Peters 2004, Jun 2006, and Riad and Gussenhoven 2007 for a selection of publications by leading authors in the domain), and tonal alignment (Welby 2006, Miller 2008, Ladd *et al.* 2009). Data from speakers of two age groups and with different language fluency (language restriction, Mougeon and Beniak 1991) were analyzed. The results show that Ontario French shares most of the tonal grammar with other varieties of French but differs in the distribution of tonal patterns, their phonetic realization and function. Thus, in this variety younger and restricted speakers use falling contours in the middle of an utterance more frequently, while in general French these are usually reserved to mark the end. Also, the language restriction plays a role in the alignment of the final rise of a stress group, and less fluent speakers achieve the peak significantly later in the vowel.

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