Social dimensions of diphthongization and monophthongization in Montreal French

Long vowels in French have two sources: one class is inherently long as the result of an historical process of compensatory lengthening subsequent to the loss of /s/; the second class consists of allophones conditioned by the following *consonnes allongeantes* (lengthening consonants). Dumas (1981) presented convincing evidence that ALL long vowels, irrespective of their source, are subject to diphthongization in Québecois French. In the same year, Cedergren et al (1981) examined variable diphthongization in the speech of a sample of 52 Montrealers born between 1886 and 1956, all recorded in 1971. Analyzing the results according to speaker age, an apparent time interpretation indicated ongoing change for two of the vowels: (eur), as in *fleur, soeur*; and (o:), as in *rose, hôte*. These changes were led by Working Class and Lower Middle Class speakers: among Upper Middle Class speakers, only those younger than 30 appeared to be participating in the change. In recent work on long vowels in Montreal French (conducted jointly with Laurel MacKenzie), we have taken advantage of subsequent data collection that makes it possible to study changes in the community in real time, across three time periods: 1971, 1984 and 1995. Our acoustically-based research also contrasts with previous studies that relied on aurally-based coding. Assessing the dynamic tendencies in the system by contrasting speaker samples in a trend comparison, we observe change in most of the long oral vowels. For many of them, vowel nuclei appear to have been backed and/or lowered, resulting in the diphthongization observed in the first phase of the change prior to the 1970s. In a subsequent phase, we find considerable lowering/backing of offglides as well, with the result being lowered/backed monophthongs. Additionally, we trace the personal trajectories of a panel sample, following six speakers across the same time span. All but one provide evidence of participating to varying degrees in the community change.