

GRAMMATICAL USAGE: REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN SYNTACTIC CHOICE IN CANADIAN ENGLISH*

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It is hypothesized that, of the social and regional factors considered important in language use, certain of these weigh more heavily than others. Thus, of all the variables influencing the nature of speech, age is said to be the most important (George 1986: 136). On the other hand, a generation ago Atwood (1953) noted that some of the more striking differences between cultivated and colloquial speech in English occurred in the conjugation of verb forms. More recently, McDavid and McDavid (1986: 366) concurred that syntactic distinctions reveal more of an informant's social and educational origins than of his or her regional background, while Lakoff (1975) has suggested the importance of gender. Which factors then are significant in the choice of grammatical variants and in the use of the traditional standard and non-standard forms?

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Warkentyne and Brett (1981: 197-199), the decline of grammatical studies in the school curriculum has left a growing uncertainty regarding a clearly defined usage, a problem intensified for Canadians facing the competing influences of both British and American models. In this context, varying viewpoints relevant to a standard in Canadian English have been expressed (Bähr 1976): the prestige view of educated speech (Avis 1973), and the preferred one of majority usage (Gregg 1973, 1984).

In recent questionnaires (Woods 1979, Gregg 1984), information has been sought concerning the choice and use of grammatical variants, and even notions of correctness (Gregg 1985: 180-182). With the data available¹ from two large-scale urban socio-dialectal studies: one in eastern Canada, of Ottawa, the capital city, with 100 informants (Woods 1979), and the other on the Pacific Coast with 240 informants, Gregg's (1984) survey of Greater Vancouver English, the question of the regional and social variability of grammatical items in areas thousands of miles apart can be examined.

To investigate such aspects of linguistic change and the correlation of variation with factors such as location, gender, generation and socio-economic status within the field of Canadian English, some thirty grammatical variables elicited from the 340 informants in the two surveys were analysed and compared. Employing matrices (Charts 1-3 below) which utilized two age (Old, i.e., 40 and over, and Young, under 40) and two socio-

* A version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the American Dialect Society, December 30, 1986, New York, New York. Travel costs to the meeting were supported in part by the Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Victoria, and the Graduate Students Society.

economic status groups (Group II - High, Group I - Low)² in addition to the two cities and two sexes, statistical techniques involving a loglinear analysis and logistic regression³

Chart 1. Number of Informants by Generation.

Region	Young	Old	
Ottawa	51	49	100
Vancouver	104	136	240
	155	185	T = 340

were used.

Following the extraction of the most frequently occurring variants from each of the grammatical items, the response to choice was examined in order to determine which, if any, of the independent variables might offer an explanation, while further analyses (v. Appendices 1-9) revealed the probability of factors governing individual use.

Of the thirty items studied, almost one-quarter evidenced little or no variation regionally or nationally. These included the preterite forms of the verbs *drink* and *see*, the present perfect of *bring*, the negative imperative of *let*, and contracted negatives with *do* (e.g., *doesn't he*, *doesn't any*, *not any*). Of the remainder, based on a frequency count, almost one-half of the linguistic items showed a certain similarity in usage, while the rest displayed diverging regional norms. These included problematic items such as *between you and me/I*, *to whom/who ... to*, *fewer/less + count noun*, the intensifier *really/real*, the preterites *sneaked/snuck*, *dived/dove*, the past participles *proved/proven*, *drunk/drank*, syntactic variants *didn't use to/never used to*, and the subjunctive *if it were/was*.

A few of these items, shown in Table 1, such as the grammatical variants *have you*, *used not*, *am I not*, the morphosyntactic alternations of *sneaked*, *dived*, *proved*, *lay*, *lain* and *drunk*, provide examples of the direction of social and regional linguistic change.

Chart 2. Number of Informants by Socio-Economic Status.

Region	High Status	Low Status	
Ottawa	60	40	100
Vancouver	120	120	240
	180	160	T = 340

2. SYNTACTIC VARIANTS

2.1 Have you/have you got/do you have

In the case of the variable use of *have* as either auxiliary or main verb in questions (v. Hughes and Trudgill 1979), there was close agreement in the two cities with respect to usage of the more common North American form *do you have*, i.e., approximately one-third of the informants, and again with the lesser use of the typical British social and regional variant *have you got* (25%). However, the Scotch-Irish and northern English *have you* displayed regional discrepancies with one-third of native Vancouverites employing this form. While the response to choice among these variants was made on the basis of age ($p < .001$), each variant showed differing patterns. Thus, while socio-economic status was an important factor in the use of *have you* and *have you got*, with a small but significant increase (from 1% to 3%) in the lower status group, regionally it would appear that a generational shift is occurring among the three grammatical values. For example, whereas *do you have* is the preferred form, and the prestige term (defined, in this case, through the significant interaction of sex, age and socio-economic status), among the young in both Ottawa (Young 57%, Old 18%) and Vancouver (Young 41%, Old 29%), and the form most frequently cited by young women in the eastern city, *have you got* revealed regional variation with respect to a standard since those of lower status in Vancouver (High 22%, Low 28%) along with those over forty, and those of higher status in Ottawa (High 30%, Low 18%) claimed its use. The full verb form *have you*, on the other hand, a locational preference based on age, was the prestige term among those over forty of higher status in Vancouver, and somewhat preferred among the young of low status in that city, as indicated in Table 2. This form was rare, however, among the young in Ottawa.

Chart 3. Number of Informants by Gender.

Region	Male	Female	
Ottawa	47	53	100
Vancouver	120	120	240
	167	173	T = 340

2.2 Am I not/aren't I

In the choice of the variants *am I not* and the rarely occurring Hiberno-English *amn't I* versus the preferred *aren't I* form, age ($p < .0001$) and location ($P < .04$) were the important factors. While Atwood (1953: 31) found *aren't I* rare in the eastern United States thirty-five years ago, two-thirds or more of the informants in both Canadian cities cited this as the most common form; the non-standard *ain't I*, often heard locally in Vancouver among school-aged adolescents, and seen in daily papers, was claimed by 1% or less. Though the lesser used *am I not* occurred significantly more often in Ottawa (26%) than in Vancouver (17%), among those over forty (Old 29%, Young 8%), and those of higher status (High 22%, Low 16%), especially men (Men: High 25%, Low 16%; Women: High 19%, Low 16%), the generational trend in both cities was definitely towards the more colloquial term. *Aren't I* was the preferred form of the young (86%, Old 62%), particularly those of high status (Young High 89%, Young Low 83%; Old High 62%, Old Low 63%), and of young women (93%, Young Men 81%; Old: Women 61%, Men 63%). It would seem then that while *am I not* was prestigious, particularly for men, and for those over forty, *aren't I* has become the more accepted usage among the young.

2.3 Used not/didn't use to/never used to

The negative forms with *used to*, that is *used not*, *never used to*, and *didn't use to*,⁴ were also irresolute, with the choice among forms based on location ($p < .0001$). Seventy-six percent of those in Vancouver preferred the *never used to* form. In the Ottawa data, where wording of the sentence frame⁵ allowed a large number of unusable replies, nearly half (23%) of those offering a suitable response (approximately 50%), suggested *didn't use to*, while almost a similar number admitted to the *never used to* form, and the remainder, the British *used not*.

Table 1. Grammatical Variation and Usage of Selected Items in Canadian English: Ottawa and Vancouver.*

	Ottawa (100)**	Vancouver (240)**	
		Correct	Used***
Syntactic Variants			
have you	10	39	<u>35</u>
have you got	25	18	<u>25</u>
do you have	<u>38</u>	37	<u>35</u>
am I not, amn't I	26	30	17
aren't I	<u>68</u>	66	<u>75</u>
used not, usedn't	6	4	2
didn't use to	<u>21</u>	13	13
never used to	17	76	<u>76</u>
Morphosyntactic Forms			
<u>Preterite</u>			
sneaked	32	52	<u>45</u>
snuck	<u>65</u>	46	<u>50</u>
lay	<u>67</u>	68	<u>68</u>
laid	24	27	<u>27</u>
dived	6	19	23
dove	<u>93</u>	73	<u>74</u>
<u>Perfect</u>			
has lain	<u>50</u>	55	<u>52</u>
has laid	27	37	<u>37</u>
has drunk	<u>64</u>	48	<u>48</u>
has drank	27	44	<u>43</u>
proved	8	18	19
proven	<u>88</u>	76	<u>79</u>

* Figures for missing data and infrequent variants have been omitted.

** Number of informants.

*** The figures in the second column are the percentages given by informants for the so-called correct forms, while the third column refers to the actual use as stated by individual respondents. The numbers underlined indicate majority usage or preferred values in each city.

Table 2. *Have you Usage: Ottawa and Vancouver (Location x Age x SES).*

	N	%
Vancouver Old Low	26	37
Vancouver Old High	32	49
Vancouver Young Low	17	35
Vancouver Young High	8	15
Ottawa Old Low	3	18
Ottawa Old High	6	19
Ottawa Young Low	0	0
Ottawa Young High	1	4

The overwhelming preference in Vancouver, the locational variant, *never used to*, appears, however, to be somewhat lacking in prestige in that city, although the form was favoured to a certain extent by Ottawans of higher status. Generally, *never used to* was the preferred term of older men (Old 69%, Young 49%), and young women (Young 63%, Old 55%), and those of lower status, although *didn't use to* was also frequently cited by Ottawa men (Men 35%, Women 11%; Vancouverites 13%). On the other hand, *used not*, of rare occurrence in Vancouver (2%), and uncommon in Ottawa (6%), was a prestige term for a small percentage of the population, especially those over the age of forty. Use of this term was non-existent among the young in Vancouver, however. Thus, while *never used to* was preferred in Vancouver, in Ottawa it was a term both of innovation and prestige.

3. MORPHOSYNTACTIC FORMS: PRETERITE AND PERFECT

3.1 Sneaked/Snuck (Past Tense)

The morphosyntactic forms also presented interesting regional differences. While a majority of Greater Vancouverites (52%) claimed that *sneaked* was the correct form, a certain amount of disparity was evident in use, with *snuck* clearly the preferred form in the two cities (Ottawa 65%, Vancouver 50%). Indicating a generational shift, the response to choice of the two variants was made on the basis of age ($p < .0001$). The standard *sneaked*, the preferred form for those over forty, was used significantly more often by those of higher status (High 47% to Low 34%) and men rather than women (Men 43%, Women 39%). This was also the prestige term for the older generation. The colloquial *snuck*, extremely popular with the young (Young 88%, Old 25%), and almost universal in young women, verged on being a term of low prestige. It would seem, however, that its acceptance among the young, particularly women, does not allow it to be classified as a stigmatized form.

3.2 Lay/laid (Past Tense)

In the case of the preterite of the intransitive verb *to lie* (down), distribution of the major variants, i.e., *lay* and *laid*, was based on socio-economic status ($p < .0001$), with *lay* much more apt to be used by those of higher status (High 73%, Low 55%) and age (Old 76% vs. Young 57%). A clear generation gap was perceived in both cities with a national convergence in score as shown in Table 3. Young women were leading the trend away from this form. The use of *laid*, however, while more common among the young, appeared equally lacking in prestige. Older women of high status, and men of high status

tended to use this form least. Since *lay* was plainly the preferred variant of two-thirds of the informants in both cities, and the prestige choice, it seems unlikely that a

Table 3. Usage of *Lay*: Ottawa and Vancouver (Location x Age).

	N	%
Vancouver Old	103	76
Vancouver Young	59	57
Ottawa Old	37	76
Ottawa Young	30	59

generational shift is occurring at this time (cf. Atwood 1953: 18).

3.3 Has lain/has laid (Past Participle)

For the present perfect of *lie*, the preferred form of majority usage in both cities (Ottawa 50%, Vancouver 52%) was *has lain*. The choice of this form versus *has laid* was made on the basis of age ($p < .003$) and socio-economic status ($p < .04$), with *has lain* a generational (Old 63% vs. Young 38%) and prestige (High 62%, Low 39%) term, used somewhat more often by women (53% to 50% for men) and Vancouverites (52% to 50% for Ottawa). The standard value was preserved more often by those over forty of high status, and by higher status women in both cities; lower status women and women under forty in Ottawa used the form least. Regionally, there was a greater difference in use based on socio-economic status in Ottawa than in Vancouver. The non-standard *has laid* was most frequently employed by young women, more often of lower status. Of the other variants, six percent of those informants in Vancouver and four percent of those in Ottawa offered the form *lied*, while eleven percent of those in the eastern city suggested *layen*.

3.4 Has drunk/has drank (Past Participle)

With the perfect of *drink*, i.e., the choice of the preferred value *has drunk* versus the non-standard variant *has drank*, socio-economic status ($p < .0001$) and location ($p < .05$) were the most important factors, with an interaction of sex, age and socio-economic status ($p < .04$) also significant. Twice as many informants of high status (High 69%) as of low (35%) used this term, which was a generational choice (Old 59% to 45% for Young) as well. Older, high status women were most conservative of this value, while young women of lower status diverged most from the traditional norm. Although a generational shift towards the low prestige *has drank* can be noted in Vancouver, those under forty of high status were retaining the standard value. Men in Vancouver (Vancouver: Men 45%, Women 42%) used the former term, i.e., *has drank*, twice as often as men in Ottawa (Ottawa: Men 23%, Women 30%). With respect to other forms, six percent of those on the Pacific Coast offered *drunken* or *dranken*, and three percent in the east suggested *drunken* or *drinken*.

3.5 Dived/dove (Past Tense)

The two remaining verbs are also forms of divided usage, with the choice between *dived* and *dove* made on the basis of age ($p < .001$). *Dove* was clearly the preferred form

in both cities, used by almost 95% of Ottawans and more than 75% of native Vancouverites. While the form *dived* occurred more often in the speech of Vancouver informants, women, those over forty and persons of higher status, *dove* was the prestige term in Ottawa, and the predominant form of the young (93% to 68% for Old), used somewhat more by those of male gender.

3.6 Proved/proven (Past Participle)

In the case of the variants, *proved* versus *proven*, *proven* was again clearly a majority preference, although *proved* was used significantly more often by Vancouverites, women and those over forty, with signs of prestige use in that city. *Proven*, however, was in general use somewhat more often by those of higher status (High 83% to Low 80%), Ottawans (88% to 79% for Vancouverites), by those under forty of high status, and men. Regionally, the use of *proved*, the conservative value, shows vestiges of British influence in Vancouver.

4. CONCLUSION

The examples cited above have shown a few of the regional grammatical preferences in Canadian English in which the choice of an individual variant and the use of a linguistic value appear to be dependent on a factor, or combination of factors, such as age, sex, social class or location. The majority preference or common usage, as in the case of *do you have*, was not necessarily co-terminous with a generational or regional term of prestige such as *have you* in Vancouver, or *have you got* in Ottawa. Certain forms were also associated with gender, e.g., the colloquial use of *snuck* and *really* in female speech, and the male preference for *sneaked*, *dove* and *proven*. Shown in the speech of women over forty and those of higher status and age, gender, generation and socio-economic status combined to offer preservation of standard values in *lay*, *lain* and the past participle of *drink*, while a more striking example of a generational shift in the standard language was noted in the case of *aren't I*, the prestige form of the young versus the older term of preferred usage *am I not*.

Of the thirty grammatical items from the two surveys, seven showed no noticeable variation. From the response to choice between and among linguistic variants in the remaining variables, socio-economic status (40%) and age (37%), followed by location (23%), proved to be the most important factors, with gender important only in the choice between *really* and *real*. However, each of the grammatical values of a linguistic item or variable was associated in a statistically significant manner with one or more of the independent variables, indicating use according to a matrix defined by city, gender, generation or social group.

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Appendix 1

P-value, Significant Factors in the Use of (1) *Have you*, (2) *Have you got* and (3) *Do you have*.

Source	Variant 1		Variant 2		Variant 3	
	F value	PR>F	F value	Pr>F	F value	PR>F
Overall	18.85	.0001*	7.60	.004*	8.78	.002*
SES	12.43	.006*	12.24	.007*	***	
Loc x Age	18.66	.001*	3.39	.098+	17.51	.001*
Loc x SES	16.82	.002*	33.92	.0003*	***	
Age x SES	51.20	.0001*	13.21	.005*	***	
Loc x Sex x Age	***		10.68	.01*	7.64	.017**
Loc x Age x SES	11.33	.007*	16.06	.003*	***	
Sex x Age x SES	***		***		6.39	.03**

* significant at $\alpha = .01$

** significant at $\alpha = .05$

+ significant at $\alpha = .10$

*** not significant

Appendix 2

P-value, Significant Factors in the Use of (1) *Am I not?* and (2) *Aren't I?*

Source	Variant 1		Variant 2	
	F value	PR>F	F value	PR>F
Overall	62.12	.0001*	17.64	.0001*
Location	91.23	.0002*	12.35	.0001*
Age	249.71	.0001*	38.37	.0001*
SES	9.03	.029**	***	
Loc x Sex	19.59	.007*	***	
Loc x Age	8.02	.037**	***	
Loc x SES	10.67	.022**	***	
Sex x Age	54.51	.0007*	19.77	.001*
Sex x SES	12.79	.016**	***	
Age x SES	***		4.86	.05**
Loc x Sex x Age	***		4.50	.059+
Loc x Sex x SES	4.14	.098+	***	
Sex x Age x SES	5.59	.06+	***	

* significant at $\alpha = .01$

** significant at $\alpha = .05$

+ significant at $\alpha = .10$

*** not significant

Appendix 3

P-value, Significant Factors in the Use of (1) *Used not*, (2) *Never used to* and (3) *Didn't use to*.

Source	Variant 1		Variant 2		Variant 3	
	F value	PR>F	F value	Pr>F	F value	PR>F
Overall	42.75	.0003*	18.10	.0003*	6.88	.007
Location	39.57	.002**	49.16	.0001*	***	
Age	***		4.09	.078+	***	
SES	161.38	.0001*	12.98	.007*	***	
Loc x Sex	54.26	.0007*	***		19.17	.001*
Loc x SES	43.27	.001*	5.80	.043**	***	
Sex x Age	***		11.35	.009*	***	
Sex x SES	6.32	.05**	6.87	.031**	4.23	.064+
Age x SES	81.93	.0003*	***		3.28	.098+
Loc x Sex x Age	49.67	.0009*	***		***	
Loc x Sex x SES	40.01	.002*	***		***	
Loc x Age x SES	125.46	.0001*	***		***	

* significant at $\alpha = .01$

** significant at $\alpha = .05$

+ significant at $\alpha = .10$

*** not significant

Appendix 4

P-value, Significant Factors in the Use of (1) *Sneaked* and (2) *Snuck*.

Source	Variant 1		Variant 2	
	F value	PR>F	F value	PR>F
Overall	40.69	.0001*	28.94	.0001*
Sex	16.95	.003*	***	
Age	80.88	.0001*	84.36	.0001*
SES	27.30	.0005*	17.12	.002*
Loc x Sex	18.19	.002*	***	
Loc x SES	***		7.07	.024**
Sex x Age	***		8.04	.018**
Sex x SES	***		3.50	.09+
Age x SES	9.71	.01*	***	
Loc x Age x SES	9.67	.01*	***	

* significant at $\alpha = .01$

** significant at $\alpha = .05$

+ significant at $\alpha = .10$

*** not significant

Appendix 5

P-value, Significant Factors in the Use of (1) *Lay* and (2) *Laid*.

Source	Variant 1		Variant 2	
	F value	PR>F	F value	PR>F
Overall	14.50	.0003*	10.96	.001*
Age	39.80	.0001*	6.29	.033**
SES	39.28	.0001*	21.15	.001*
Loc x Age	5.13	.047**	4.00	.077+
Sex x Age	13.07	.005*	***	
Age x SES	***		4.65	.059+
Loc x Sex x Age	8.71	.01*	5.59	.042**
Sex x Age x SES	***		15.23	.004*

* significant at $\alpha = .01$ ** significant at $\alpha = .05$ + significant at $\alpha = .10$

*** not significant

Appendix 6

P-value, Significant Factors in the Use of (1) *Has lain* and (2) *Has laid*.

Source	Variant 1		Variant 2	
	F value	PR>F	F value	PR>F
Overall	58.62	.0007*	74.40	.0001*
Location	71.12	.0011*	***	
Sex	10.13	.034**	4.61	.085+
Age	207.28	.0001*	195.19	.0001*
SES	31.14	.005*	91.47	.0002*
Loc x Sex	31.68	.005*	4.33	.092+
Loc x Age	22.43	.009*	***	
Loc x SES	64.25	.001*	55.41	.0007*
Sex x Age	***		75.19	.0003*
Sex x SES	***		34.60	.002*
Loc x Sex x Age	***		11.58	.019**
Loc x Sex x SES	35.46	.004*	***	
Age x SES	10.30	.033**	16.03	.01*
Loc x Age x SES	7.37	.05**	***	

* significant at $\alpha = .01$ ** significant at $\alpha = .05$ + significant at $\alpha = .10$

*** not significant

Appendix 7

P-value, Significant Factors in the Uses of (1) *Has drunk* and (2) *Has drank*.

Source	Variant 1		Variant 2	
	F value	PR>F	F value	PR>F
Overall	21.23	.0003*	25.15	.0001*
Age	36.52	.0005*	13.47	.0037*
SES	77.76	.0001*	57.42	.0001*
Loc x Sex	***		11.42	.006*
Loc x Age	12.54	.009*	***	
Loc x SES	6.62	.037**	***	
Sex x Age	8.40	.023**	***	
Loc x Age x SES	4.54	.07+	***	
Sex x Age x SES	5.77	.047**	***	

* significant at $\alpha = .01$
 ** significant at $\alpha = .05$
 + significant at $\alpha = .10$
 *** not significant

Appendix 8

P-value, Significant Factors in the Use of (1) *Dived* and (2) *Dove*.

Source	Variant 1		Variant 2	
	F value	PR>F	F value	PR>F
Overall	35.91	.0005*	74.91	.0004*
Location	11.63	.019**	29.70	.006*
Sex	35.71	.002*	13.95	.02**
Age	19.56	.007*	31.83	.005*
SES	64.24	.0005*	143.50	.0003*
Loc x Sex	48.57	.0009*	71.24	.001*
Loc x SES	64.02	.0005*	131.56	.0003*
Sex x Age	***		4.66	.097+
Age x SES	40.22	.001*	67.27	.001*
Loc x Sex x Age	26.41	.004*	28.40	.006*
Loc x Age x SES	33.81	.002*	56.50	.002*
Sex x Age x SES	8.27	.035**	4.77	.094+

* significant at $\alpha = .01$
 ** significant at $\alpha = .05$
 + significant at $\alpha = .10$
 *** not significant

Appendix 9

P-value, Significant Factors in the Use of (1) *Proved* and (2) *Proven*.

Source	Variant 1		Variant 2	
	F value	PR>F	F value	PR>F
Overall	847.78	.0012*	5.53	.015**
Location	650.13	.002*	14.22	.006*
Sex	365.08	.003*	***	
Age	516.32	.002*	***	
SES	984.87	.001*	6.49	.034**
Loc x Sex	341.87	.003*	***	
Loc x Age	104.92	.009*	***	
Loc x SES	269.10	.004*	***	
Sex x SES	360.77	.003*	6.14	.038**
Loc x Sex x Age	144.66	.007*	***	
Age x SES	1470.26	.0007*	13.25	.007*
Loc x Age x SES	512.01	.002*	3.93	.083+
Sex x Age x SES	438.56	.002*	5.25	.05**

* significant at $\alpha = .01$ ** significant at $\alpha = .05$ + significant at $\alpha = .10$

*** not significant

NOTES

¹ Data Library, University of British Columbia.

² The comparable Woods (1979) *Socio-Economic Class Index* for Ottawa and the Murdoch (1979) *Index of Social Stratification* for Greater Vancouver (v. Gregg 1984) were each divided at midpoint to provide two broad social classifications.

³ I am indebted to Dr. John Petkau and Le Thinh, Department of Statistics, University of British Columbia, for advice and assistance regarding the method of analysis which utilized procedures from SAS (Statistical Analysis System).

⁴ Whereas Atwood commented on the universality of *didn't use to* in the eastern states, this form in Great Britain, depending on the point of view, was either archaic (Fowler 1965) compared with the standard *used not*, or, as a result of verb reclassification, now employed by younger speakers (Hughes and Trudgill 1979: 23).

⁵ The instructions were 'Make the following sentence negative: We used to go there.' Of the *other* responses (47%), 29% replied 'never went' and 12% 'didn't go there.' Missing data accounted for 9% of the total.