

Issues in longitudinal vowel analysis: evidence from Montreal French
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In Montreal French, a process of diphthongization affects long vowels: those that are inherently long due to historical compensatory lengthening (Yaeger-Dror and Kemp, 1992), and those that are allophonically lengthened by /v, z, ʒ, R/ (*les consonnes allongeantes*) (Dumas, 1981; Santerre and Millo, 1978).

Previous sociolinguistic analyses of diphthongization have been both impressionistic and apparent-time (Santerre and Millo, 1978; Yaeger, 1979; Cedergren et al, 1981). Our quantitative analysis of diphthongization in real time examines both the trajectory of this change through the community as well as individual speakers' participation in it across their lifespans. We tracked individuals' vowel trajectories across a 24-year span for a panel of six speakers of diverse social classes. Matched trend samples from the 1971 and 1984 Montreal corpora, with four speakers sampled per year, provide a picture of the community as a whole.

Comparing individual speakers' longitudinal trajectories to the changes in the community has raised a number of questions that bear on the longitudinal analysis of speakers' vowel systems. The vowels [i:, y:, ε:, and α:] show significant lowering and backing in the community. A number of panel speakers' longitudinal movements mirror this. However, other speakers are anomalous, shifting their vowels when the community does not, or changing with the community between 1971 and 1984 but returning to their 1971 values in 1995. We present these results and discuss their possible interpretations: simple statistical noise in the data, true community-influenced change, change introduced by the aging process, or a combination of these three possibilities.

References

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