



5-2010

It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It: A Comparison and Contrast of Dialects of the Spoken French Language in Three Different Francophone Regions

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Recommended Citation

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It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It: A Comparison and Contrast of the Dialects
of the Spoken French Language in Three Different Francophone Regions

French 493

Shande King

No matter the language or the speaker, spoken language continues to sound different amongst any two speakers. The exact same sentence can be repeated by two native speakers of the same language and convey completely opposing messages in this similar phrase. Multiple factors can influence the diverse portrayals and interpretations of one language. In further dissecting these various factors of the spoken language, one can see exactly how this notion affects specifically the French language, particularly in formal versus informal contexts and in multiple francophone regions of the world, focusing on the country of origin France and northern and southern Québec, Canada.

To compare these dialects of the French language, one must first understand the variations from what is the original language. Standard French remains defined narrowly as the language preserved by the French Academy and spoken distinctly in the capital city of France, Paris. Major and minor differences from this spoken language direct the speech away from this standard into one of the many different dialects of the French language, no matter the proximity to Paris. For example, any French spoken within the country of France can be still considered “hexagonal French” because the speakers are within the hexagon-shaped country of France. But within the roughly six borders of only one Francophone country in the world, slight differences remain in the spoken languages. A more open vowel sound on the most commonly used words in southern France may change the phonetics and phonology of the language in this region, but it is important to note that this does not change the level of formality of this spoken language or those who speak it. A long versus short vowel sound does not make one person group or dialect better or worse than another – merely different. To further study the differences in

phonetics and phonology of French spoken in widespread francophone regions, one must know in detail the standard French dialect, the one spoken in Paris as mentioned above.

The history of the language sees French evolve through several changes throughout the past hundreds of years, but modern French, which is obviously what the Francophone world speaks today, stretches back only the past two hundred fifty years. Although the languages that serve as the origin to French have been spoken for the past hundreds of years, such as the Latin spoken in northern Gaul and the Gaulish words that the habitants of French patois speak even today, the speakers of the modern French language have spoken this in various regions only during the past few hundred years. These Gaulish influences still remain today, though, as words such as *bouleau*, *bruyère*, *chêne*, *if*, *mouton*, *bouc*, *ruche*, *charrue*, *soc*, *suic*, and *glaner* remain in the vocabulary of French in French patois (French 4). The reason for this is that the culture of these regions at this time period very distinctly defined these people groups, and the unique characteristics led them to utilize certain words or phrases more than any other francophone regions. Specifically, citizens of the regions that spoke Gaulish particularly used agricultural and domestic terminology because of their lifestyles conducive to these activities in these regions.

Gaulish remains only as one of the many influences that have caused alterations in the spoken French language. Latin, Arabic, Normans, and other people groups have entered the European regions and left the traces of their spoken dialects in French, causing the differences found in French spoken in various regions across the continent of Europe and then further across the world. Forceful impositions of certain groups during invasions on France as well as cultural adaptations of certain people groups are all

influences on the modern French that we speak. As dynamics change between people of different geographical locations, aspects of culture beyond a location on a map influence the lifestyle of people of a common region. The French language remains no exception to this change, as dialects have distinct differences in francophone regions across the world to this day, and the context of living in these regions causes changes as well.

To focus on spoken French dialects, one must break down any verbal speech into its components, which are the physical production of the sound, or phonetics, and the distribution of tone of the speech, or phonology. The most important aspect of spoken language, which lies in the physical production of the speech, is the pronunciation, which defines phonetics. The most important aspect of phonetics is the pronunciation of vowels. In modern French, the pronunciation of vowels follows strict rules of phonetics. In speaking standard French, one must first note that French is characterized by much greater muscular tension in comparison to English. For example, the lips in pronouncing English are relatively relaxed, but in French they are much tenser. This is very noticeable in the fact that when the lips are spread, particularly for the vowel /i/ (as in the words *dit*, *vite*, and *grise*), the corners of the mouth are stretched apart much more vigorously than in the case of the English vowel sound in words such as *tea*, *meet*, and *please*. Further, the lips are increasingly more rounded in the /u/ vowel sound in French words such as *coup*, *toute*, and *rouge* in comparison to English words such as *coo*, *toot*, and *spoon* (Introduction 19). Also, whenever a vowel is considered a stress vowel, the stressed vowel is long, much longer in French than in English. With these noticeable differences in spoken French and spoken English, one realizes the importance of the role that each individual factor plays in pronouncing French vowels.

The pronunciation of French vowels is predicated upon four factors: the point of articulation, the degree of aperture (also known as the height of the tongue), the lip configuration, and the orality vs. nasality. The first major difference is the point of articulation.

The point of articulation is simply a technical term for the “place of the mouth where a sound is produced” (Introduction 21). French vowels are classified by whether or not they are pronounced in the front of the mouth or between the back of the tongue and the velum. If pronounced in the front of the mouth, which is between the blade of the tongue and the palate, the vowel can be known as a “front vowel.” Alternatively, the vowel pronounced between the back of the tongue and the velum is known as a “back vowel.” Other languages indeed have something called a “central vowel,” but this is not required in discussing French vowels.

Secondly, a French vowel must take into account the degree of aperture, or the height of the tongue. For example, the French vowel /a/, as in the words *ma* and *patte*, is pronounced in the front of the mouth with tongue hardly raised at all and the mouth fairly wide open (Introduction 22). But as a counterexample, the French vowel /i/, as in the words *lit* and *vite*, is also a front vowel but instead pronounced with tongue raised well up towards the palate and the mouth only slightly open (Introduction 22). In classifying the vowel based on the terminology of the height of the tongue, the /i/ in this previous example can be called a high front vowel and the /a/ a low front vowel. Similarly, if classifying the vowel based on the terminology of the degree of aperture, or openness, of the mouth, the /i/ in this previous example can be called a closed front vowel and the /a/ an open front vowel. Of course, other vowels exist in between these two extreme

examples. Examples include the /é/ as in the words *été* and *santé*, which would be classified as high-mid or half close and the è and ê of words such as *très* and *bête*, which would be classified as low-mid or half open.

Thirdly, a French vowel should take into consideration the lip configuration. The difference between the French vowels /i/ and /u/ lies in the lip configuration. Both are considered a high front vowel when discussing the degree of aperture. The difference lies in the fact that the /i/ of the word *lit* is pronounced when the lips are spread and the /u/ of the word *mur* is pronounced when the lips are rounded (Introduction 22). With this distinction made, the /i/ in the previous example can be classified as a high front unrounded vowel (or a “spread vowel”), and the /u/ in the previous example can be classified as a high front rounded vowel. It is important to note that of the sixteen vowel sounds in the French language, eleven of these are rounded (Introduction 22). Thus, with this connection made, one should remember that the rounding of the lips in French is much more pronounced than in similar vowels in English.

Finally, one must remember that the French vowel can be classified as either oral or nasal. Most European languages do not need to take into account the fact that air exits both the mouth and the nose. French, however, is one of the three languages that does contain nasal vowels, with Portuguese and Polish being the other two (Introduction 23). When the velum is lowered throughout the pronunciation of a vowel, allowing the air stream to escape freely through both the mouth and the nose, the vowel is said to be pronounced with “nasal quality,” thus classifying it as a nasal vowel. French has four major nasal vowels, which are considered individual phonemes in their own rights and not allophones to other phonemes.

But beyond all these rules about vowel pronunciation in the French language, different contexts and different dialects tend to alter even consonant sounds when speaking the language. But, to best understand the exact changes in consonant sounds, one must discuss how a consonant is pronounced correctly in standard French.

First of all, one should discuss how a consonant is different in the French language versus the English language. One difference, for example, is that in English, the release of voiceless stops, particularly at the beginning of a word, is accompanied by a puff of air (Introduction 101). One can feel this by putting the back of his or her hand an inch or so in front of the mouth and then saying a word that starts with a hard /p/, such as *paper* or *pick*. This is known as an “aspiration,” thus voiceless stops in the English language are known as “aspirated.” French voiceless stops for consonants, however, are not aspirated. Thus, native speakers of English must make a conscious effort to avoid making these aspirated stops in speaking French.

The consonant is defined as “a speech sound made by releasing the breath current after it has been temporarily stopped in some part of the mouth” (Batt 70). This means that air is purposely prevented from flowing at some point. Further, the consonant can be classified among three different major parameters, all of which distinguish each individual consonant.

First, the consonant may or may not have the quality of sonority, which means that the consonant is either voiced, or sonar, or not voiced (Dansereau 200). This is defined by the vibration of the vocal chords. If the stopped air in the mouth is accompanied with the vibration of the vocal chords, the consonant sound is sonar and thus heard because it is voiced. In contrast, if there is no vocal chord vibration while the

air is stopped, the consonant sound is not voiced. Many consonants can be paired together in similarity except for this characteristic, because the only thing that separates the one consonant from the other is if it is sonar or not. For example:

The consonant /p/ is not voiced, while the consonant /b/ is sonar.

The consonant /t/ is not voiced, while the consonant /d/ is sonar.

The consonant /k/ is not voiced, while the consonant /g/ is sonar.

The consonant /f/ is not voiced, while the consonant /v/ is sonar.

The consonant /s/ is not voiced, while the consonant /z/ is sonar.

And the consonant /ʃ/ is not voiced, while the consonant /ʒ/ is sonar.

The second characteristic of the consonant is the manner of articulation. This can be broken into four groups:

1. The first group is the group of the “occlusives,” also known as the “explosives.” These consonants are ones in which the passage of air closes completely during one instant, and then it opens again to achieve the production of the consonant sound (Dansereau 201). Examples of these consonants are the /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, and /g/ consonants.
2. The second group is the “fricatives,” also known as the “constrictives.” These consonants are produced when the friction of the passage of air in the mouth proceeds through a constriction of the mouth to produce the sound. Examples of these consonants are the /f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, and /r/ consonants.
3. The third group is the “liquids,” which are known to distinguish themselves from the other consonants. They do this by their capacity to join themselves to other consonants to form groups of consonants that are acceptable at the beginning of

syllables (Dansereau 201). The two liquids are /l/ and /r/, and examples of the groups of consonants at the beginning of words and syllables are /bl/, /br/, /pl/, and /pr/.

4. The final group of consonants is called the “nasals,” the group of consonants in which the consonants are entirely nasal. In pronouncing these letters, one allows the air to pass from the nose as well as the mouth. Every other consonant is considered “oral,” where the soft palate prevents the passage of air in the nasal cavity, which forces the air to leave only from the mouth (Dansereau 201).

Examples of these consonants are the /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, and /ŋ/ consonants.

As one can see from the different categories of this characteristic, the manner of articulation is determined by the passage of the air through the mouth and/or the nose, whether or not this air is restricted, and whether or not this air is accompanied with the vibration of vocal chords.

The final characteristic that defines the consonant sound is the point of articulation, similar to the pronunciation of French vowels. This is defined simply as the “place where the articulatory organ of the lower mouth (the lower lip, the lower teeth, or the tongue) approaches the organs of the front of the mouth (the upper lip, the upper teeth, the alveoli, the hard palate, or the velum) (Dansereau 201). The point of articulation of a consonant takes its name from two major points of contact, either the upper or lower part of the mouth region. Again, these consonants can be grouped together, this time into six different categories (Dansereau 201-202):

1. The first group is the bilabials, in which the contact is in between the two lips.

These examples include the /p/, /b/, and /m/ consonants.

2. The second group is the labiodentals, in which the contact is between the upper teeth and the back lip. These examples include the /f/ and /v/ consonants.
3. The third group is the dentals, in which the contact is between the tip of the tongue and the upper teeth. These examples include the /t/, /d/, /n/, and /l/ consonants.
4. The fourth group is the alveolars, in which the contact is between the tip of the tongue and the alveolus. These examples include the /s/ and /z/ consonants.
5. The fifth group is the palatals, in which the contact is between the upper part of the tongue and the hard palate. These examples include the /j/, /ʃ/, and /ɛ/ consonants.
6. The sixth and final group is the velars, in which the contact is between the back of the tongue and the soft palate (or the velum). These examples include the /k/, /g/, /ŋ/, and /r/ consonants.

Overall, the consonants vary much more in sound than the vowels do, and thus, in the French language, many more consonants than vowels exist. However, because of the very specific definitions of each of these individual phonemes, it may seem more difficult to vary these sounds in the French language from their normal, accepted sounds.

Some of these specific characteristics of the spoken French consonant cannot be altered greatly within the language. For example, a consonant cannot change sonority, or go from voiced to unvoiced or vice versa, because then the entire sound changes and the consonant will lose its identity to another consonant sound. In regards to the examples provided previously, if one were to suddenly voice the sound produced when placing the

tongue on the roof of the mouth, the /t/ consonant transforms into the /d/ consonant. Similarly, Parisians and other French speakers cannot alter the manner in which they articulate these consonant sounds and cause a slight change in the verbal sound created. For example, in regards to articulation, a consonant classified as a fricative cannot be pronounced in the manner of another group, such as the liquids or the explosives or the nasals. Again, every single consonant sound is categorized into exactly and only one of these groups, as any other alteration to the sound will change the identity of the sound and categorize the consonant into another group. An example of this would be to change the /t/ sound of the explosive group into the fricative /s/ sound. No longer would the air passage be closed and then explode open, but the air would flow constantly but through a constriction of the mouth (in this case, the tongue constricts air by touching the roof of the mouth). This example is not too accurate because it also causes the point of articulation to change, as the tip of the tongue no longer touches behind the upper teeth but further back to the alveolus. This helps explain the third example of how consonants cannot change. The final parameter for consonant pronunciation is the point of articulation, which explains where the parts of the mouth make contact to produce the noise. Similar to the other parameter, any change to the point of articulation will change the consonant sound. If a dental /t/ were to become an alveolar /s/, as mentioned before, the tip of the tongue must change its contact point from behind the upper teeth to near the alveoli, and this change in location will change the overall sound of the consonant. It is possible to make the same /t/ or /s/ consonant sound in either of these positions, but this requires more work than necessary, which explains why no French speakers do so, and

thus explains that standard French spoken in any context will not change the consonant sounds.

The other aspect of spoken language, whether in French or any other language, is phonology, which focuses on the intonation of the language. Intonation refers to the “melody of the speech, i.e. to the differences in pitch that occur in speech” (Introduction 145). The “melody” to the speech of French in any francophone region may differ because a change in pitch can be easily done – the mouth does not need to change position, but instead the vocal cords change the pitch. Although one cannot exactly define when or why a certain francophone region chooses to change the intonation of a French sentence or question from the standard French way, one can still see the major differences in the speeches across regions and offer up reasoning for these.

In standard French, it is the tendency for the intonation to increase at the end of each rhythmic group at the beginning and middle of each sentence, but fall at the end of the final rhythmic group of the sentence (Dansereau 7). A small natural break or “rupture” separates two different rhythmic groups, which define themselves by making one unit of grammar, such as a noun group (normally subjects or objects), a verb group, or prepositional groups, just as examples (Dansereau 7). The similarity of function within a group makes the ruptures easy to place, thus the rationale for the increase in tone at the end of each rhythmic group.

For sentences other than declaration sentences, such as questions, the intonation changes greatly. Just as in English, the intonation at the end of the question will go up to indicate a lack of confidence in the answer, hence why it is a question. Thus, no rhythmic group will end with an intonation that goes down. Further, information questions will

have a sharp rise on the question word (such as “où, pourquoi, comment, etc.), and then a quick fall so that it may rise to the end again.

Beyond the simple definition of how Parisians and other speakers pronounce standard French, there exist multiple other ways to pronounce French in other francophone regions of the world. Specifically, North American French in Canada varies greatly from standard French in Paris. The phonetics and the phonology all have small as well as large changes that make the pronunciation of the French unique among this region, and the changes even diversify amongst the northern and southern regions of Québec, Canada, the specific eastern province where changes are most evident. These differences can be broken into the phonetics of vowels, the phonetics of consonants, and the phonology of the spoken language as well.

Relaxations of phonetic and pronunciation rules in standard French exist in different situations in Paris, and the same exists in Canada. In Québec, Canada, the French dialect has become so relaxed on these rules and unique unto itself that it has become known as “Québécois.” As contexts change from formal to informal, Canadians also relax their mouths and tongues in the pronunciation of their French language to make noticeable differences. When speaking with friends from northern Québec, in small towns where the citizens do not have contact with major cities such as Montréal or Québec City, many Canadians will speak French as they have only known it. And this speaking is severely relaxed in terms of following the rules of articulation of vowels that standard French adheres to as explained above. However, beyond just the noticeable differences in degree of aperture and configuration of the lips, orally evident differences permeate the spoken French of Québec, Canada.

One of those major differences lies in the prolonged pronunciation of the high vowels. The short /i/, /y/, and /u/ of the standard French are pronounced more openly in Canada. The vowels become more of the sound of the English words *bit* and *put* with greater tension. In changing these vowel sounds, new symbols were created to more accurately represent the pronunciation of Canadian French. (Introduction 74)

The normal short /i/ in standard French becomes [ɪ] in Canadian French.

The normal short /y/ in standard French becomes [ʏ] in Canadian French.

The normal short /u/ in standard French becomes [ʊ] in Canadian French.

These vowel sounds are present in several word examples that make the word harder to understand to standard French speakers, such as:

facile [fa sɪ]

musique [mʊ zɪk]

cousine [kʊ zɪn]

The more open pronunciation of these high vowels in Canadian French affects greatly some of the major factors in pronouncing French vowels. The point of articulation really does not change for words with the short /i/, /y/, or /u/ sound. No matter if the pronunciation is more open or not, the placement of the origin of the sound does not change. A vowel will always be a “front” vowel or a “back” vowel because the airflow must come from the same point to originate the sound. Also, the oral vs. nasal factor will remain unaffected in a French word concerning these three high vowels. If the standard French vowel remains a short /i/, it is the same in Canadian French as well because a more open pronunciation only affects the position of the mouth and not necessarily the

airflow through the mouth and nose. By openly pronouncing one of these short vowels, one does not make the air flow through both the mouth and the nose.

However, the other factors of French vowel pronunciation can and are significantly altered. By openly pronouncing the words that use a short /i/, /y/, or /u/ vowel sound, the point of aperture or the height of the tongue can drastically change. The opening of the mouth allows for more movement of the tongue and lips, thus the height of the tongue, which is high for these “high vowels,” can become lower. This makes the word sound more forced with the musculature of the tongue forcing the word forward. For example, in pronouncing the word *cousine* with a French Canadian accent, the word rolls off the tongue and out of the mouth with more force as it does not attempt to keep the tongue at a high position. Rather, the Canadian French is content to raise the tongue high enough to produce a shortened vowel sound that is more open and less full, which produces the unique French sound.

Perhaps the most affected and altered factor of the vowel pronunciation is the lip configuration. The movement of the lips is vital because this is what can allow air to flow centrally or laterally (Casagrande 16). The sounds of the lips, known as “labial sounds” (Casagrande 17), can drastically change speech production along with other parts of the mouth such as the teeth and tongue.

Concerning the pronunciation of these high vowels, Canadian French speakers openly pronounce these words, for they close the shape of the mouth and thus alter the lip configuration, sometimes knowingly but otherwise unknowingly. To make this sound a more open vowel sound, the mouth as a whole becomes more round, making the air flow through a more narrow passage and easier to close off. By stopping the air flow of the

word faster, the word becomes shorter in pronunciation and the feeling of completeness is lost, which also takes away from the standard sound of the word. Again with the example of the word *cousine*, the /u/ sound becomes shortened as the Canadian French speaker quickly moves to the consonant /z/ sound, and similarly does the same as the /i/ sound becomes shortened as it pushes to the end of the word and end with the consonant /n/ sound. This explains why it is necessary to have different phonetic symbols in transcribing Canadian French vs. standard French. For this example, the word *cousine* is no longer [kuzin] but [kuzIn].

But differences exist in Canadian French and standard French beyond the pronunciation of these three high vowels. Other vowels are affected by the influence of the Canadian French accent, and thus the four major factors for French vowel pronunciation can also change. The vowel /ã/ in standard French is often heard in many words that utilize a tall /a/ sound, and it is often a sound that many people recognize when distinguishing French from other languages. The distinct pronunciation of this vowel, however, is not always the same as you cross the Atlantic Ocean from Paris, France to Québec, Canada.

The vowel /ã/ also has a very distinct pronunciation that gives it a unique definition of how to pronounce it according to the four rules of vowel pronunciation in French. First of all, this vowel has a unique point of articulation. Most vowels produce the sound distinctly from either the back of the mouth or the front, allowing air passage to flow accordingly. This is what classifies a French vowel as either a “front vowel” or a “back vowel.” Sometimes, the vowel requires that the vowel sound be produced near the middle of the mouth. In the case of the /ã/, this is not true. The /ã/ is considered a back

vowel because the air is pushed entirely through the mouth, starting from the back where the vowel commences. Secondly, the mouth has a low tongue height. This is necessary because a high height of tongue or even a low-mid or a mid height of tongue would cause an obstruction for the air passage from the back of the mouth, and the vowel sound would be blocked and less understandable. Third, the mouth will have a very rounded configuration of the lips. Again, the lip configuration is important to keep constant in pronouncing this specific vowel because otherwise, the vowel sound changes completely. In choral music, the shape of the mouth allows for more sound to be pushed in the desired direction. This is why choral directors, when directing choirs to sing chamber music and other classical pieces, demand vowels to be “tall” so that no quality of sound is lost as the commissures of the lips are pushed to the side. The mouth is instead pushed forward, which forces the air to move forward and the vowel sounds pure. In returning to the pronunciation of the specific /ã/ vowel, the lips in this case push the commissures forward so that air is completely pushed through the mouth. Further, the position of the lips is a tall one, again to preserve the pure sound of the long vowel. Any change in the lip positions here would cause the vowel sound to be less pure and could potentially even change the vowel. For example, the pronunciation of the word *dans*, which has the standard French pronunciation of [dã], could easily be confused with *d’un*, which has the pronunciation of [d^ẽ] in Canadian French because of the lowered height of the tongue. Finally, this /ã/ vowel sound is nasal, as noticed by the mark above the letter. This, according to the definition of a nasal vowel, means that air flows from the mouth and the nose. This is what distinguishes certain French vowels from vowels in every other language that does not utilize nasal sounds.

In Canadian French, however, serious changes can be made to this one vowel. The vowel in standard French, as just described, is a low back rounded vowel, as in the example words *an*, *grand*, *cent*, and *entre*. However, Canadians tend to pronounce words with this vowel sound in a less open sense, as opposed to the tall high vowels that were previously discussed. With this major change to the vowel sound, certain words can sound different and thus not understandable, particularly to those who speak only standard French and learned the language in this manner. For example, the word *vends*, which is a conjugated form of the verb *vendre*, can be confused with a completely different word because of the pronunciation in Canadian French. In focusing on the four factors of French vowel pronunciation, the /ã/ has some major changes in Canadian French. Certain aspects do not change, though. For example, the point of articulation still remains in the back of the mouth. If the point of articulation was to change and the vowel was to be produced further up in the mouth, the speaker would not produce enough air necessary to fully complete this vowel sound; rather, the vowel sound would just not be made. Secondly, the degree of aperture must remain the same, which is low. To move the tongue up, as previously mentioned, would obstruct the airflow and not produce a comprehensible sound. Finally, the orality vs. nasality would remain the same. This vowel, by definition, is a nasal vowel. Otherwise, the vowel completely changes sound and becomes a different vowel. The only major difference here lies within the critical lip configuration. A good example was provided previously to show how a less wide height can sound like a different word. For the word chosen in this example, very often Canadians will pronounce the word *vends* as *vin*, as the /ã/ vowel sound changes to more

of a short, nasal / $\tilde{\epsilon}$ / sound. The confusion in trying to determine a word as *vends* or *vin* is a direct result between the different pronunciations of standard and Canadian French.

Again, this difference can be found in only certain parts of Canada, particularly in different regions of Québec. As one moves further north into more rural Québec, the Canadian French becomes more nasal, thus it is easier to close the mouth in pronouncing the / \tilde{a} / vowel. And similar to the high vowels of earlier, the French spoken in southern Québec closer to the major cities remains more similar to standard French, but still contains some influence from the regions in Québec. Thus, the word *dans* in Québec City sounds more like [d \tilde{a}] than *d'un* in northern Québec, which is the correct pronunciation for standard French. One cannot emphasize how much more the differences between Canadian and standard French are exacerbated by moving further north and away from urban society in Québec.

Another major difference in Canadian French and standard French is an instance that only happens under certain circumstances. These circumstances, though, truly define when the differences can be noticed, and they should be noticed well. This is a difference that French speakers may only notice in certain regions of Québec or by certain individuals who happen to uniquely pronounce these French words differently. This difference is the fact that some Québec speakers diphthongize certain long vowels (Introduction 75). This may appear to be a common mistake that any speaker can make in any language, but it is a trend that happens often among French speakers in Canada compared to French speakers in Europe.

Two specific examples of long vowel sounds that Canadians tend to diphthongize are [ɛ:] and [ɑ:], which, when extended, can become [ɛj] or [aj] and [aw], respectively

(Introduction 75). This small but important detail is unlike the other mentioned examples in that all four factors of the pronunciation of a French vowel are unchanged upon initial pronunciation of the word— the point of the articulation remains the same, the degree of aperture remains the same, the configuration of the lip does not change, and the vowel does not change from oral to nasal or vice versa. Instead, the only difference is in the length of how long the word is mentioned. By doing this, though, the speaker will consequently alter one of the initial four factors, thereby changing the word as a whole. Using the sound examples from above, one can hear distinct differences in words such as the following:

frère, normally pronounced [frɛr], becomes [frɛjr] or [frajr]

prêtre, normally pronounced [prɛ tr], becomes [prɛj tr] or [praj tr]

phrase, normally pronounced [fraz], becomes [frawz]

câble, normally pronounced [ka bl], becomes [kaw bl]

The speaker of these words in Québécois French must still use the same point of articulation and the same degree of aperture. Also, the speakers of French in northern Québec do not change the orality of a word to nasal or the nasality of a word to oral. They do, however, significantly change the configuration of the lips. In elongating the vowel sound, from [frɛr] to [frɛjr] or [frajr] in the word *frère*, for example, the mouth may have to open wider to make longer the sound of the vowel. In the example of the word *frère*, the mouth opens taller to allow for more air to flow out and the vowel sound to extend further. This influences the sound of the vowel, as noticed by the phonetic spellings above, as it adds an extra phoneme to the word in Québécois French. The added [j] sound results from the opened mouth and the change in lip configuration. And, as

noticed by the secondary phonetic spelling given in the example above, the change in lip configuration as the mouth opens can even provide for a second pronunciation of the word, which is what makes Canadian French so difficult for native speakers of French from Europe to understand.

The most evident example of this elongated vowel in the diphthongizing of a word, however, is the elongation of the /ɛ/ sound. Although this has been discussed in brief above, a more thorough examination of this difference reveals the most distinguishable aspect of Québécois French. This diphthongized /ɛ/ causes the most trouble for standard French ears because the sound of this particular vowel is so prevalent among French and its constant alteration in Québec confuses even Parisians of the true meaning of words and sentences.

The elongated /ɛ/ indeed does happen often in the province of Québec in the French language. However, the major difference becomes noticeable again as one changes the context of the situation. Standard French speakers rarely make this diphthongized change in the vowel sounds because they do make efforts to preserve their spoken French as the pure dialect, and the standard by which all people must follow. This is particularly noticeable when speaking to an authority or to strangers, such as purchasing items in a store or discussing academics in a classroom setting. And noticeably in France, one really cannot find this unique diphthongized sound in a much more casual setting. The context of the language in standard French did indeed cause influence in a changed vowel sound with the high vowels, as previously discussed. But concerning this diphthongized vowel, standard French speakers tend to never make this difference, whether in formal or informal settings.

This new sound, however, is noticed across the ocean in Canadian French, or Québécois. The change in context of the spoken words influences this sound. Similar to standard French, the French spoken in southern Québec maintains the pure sound of the vowels and does not elongate the sounds in diphthongized French vowels. However, the change is noticed as one approaches different regions of Québec. Traveling further north in Québec towards the rural areas and smaller towns, the French overall becomes a lot more open and nasally, making vowels sound less long. Although words using this vowel do indeed have a bit wider mouth and thus a more heightened tone, a major alteration in vowel sound occurs, again, in the extreme northern regions of Québec in Canada. In the example of the /ɛ/, many words will change sound as the Canadians who speak French in these regions tend to open the mouth in an incredible tall manner and alter the short /ɛ/ sound to a long and nasally /ẽ/ sound. One of the most common examples of this occurrence is the word *peut-être*, in which the phonetic spelling of the word is no longer [pø tɛ trə], but [pø tẽ trə]. When this change in vowel sound affects multiple words within the same sentence, a fluent speaker of standard French can understand practically none of this sentence. Again, this regional change can be attributed to the more relaxed manner of and lack of need to speak in formal contexts in northern Québec.

Besides the many differences in vowel pronunciation in standard and Canadian French, major differences in consonant pronunciations exist also. One major difference found in the Canadian French consonants versus standard French consonants is that the release of dental stops before high front vowels or before these corresponding semi-consonants is frequently accompanied by a /s/ or /z/ sound (Introduction 104). This is an extremely specific but true example of Canadian French speaking consonants differently.

To go into deeper detail, study the specific consonants that fall under these definitions. First of all, the dental stops described above are only the /t/ and /d/ sounds, and the high front vowels are only the /i/ and /y/ vowels. The corresponding semi-consonants that go with the /i/ and /y/ vowels are the /j/ and /ɥ/, so the fleeting /s/ and /z/ sounds that are heard come only after either the /t/ or /d/. A fleeting /s/ occurs after the voiceless /t/, and a fleeting /z/ occurs after the voiceless /d/. This very small detail in the pronunciation of consonants does not alter the word sound at all nor does it distract from discovering the definition of the word, but the difference still exists. Any learned speaker of French will quickly discover that one word in standard French does not sound exactly as it would in Canada, particularly in Quebec.

An example of this difference is noticed in the word *tirer*. The French word *tirer* is simple enough to pronounce – the phonetic spelling, [ti re], shows no difficult nasal sounds, semi-vowels, or other sounds that are not directly portrayed by a consonant or a vowel. However, this does fit the criteria of a word to which a Canadian French would add a fleeting /s/ or /z/, in this case a fleeting /s/. Because the dental stop /t/ is followed by a high front vowel /i/, a fleeting /s/ consonant sound accompanies. The fleeting /s/ and /z/ sounds can be phonetically represented by a /^s/ or /^z/ to show that the consonant exists but only in a slight manner. The following list provides more examples to see phonetically exactly how these differences exist in different French words:

tirer: [ti re] becomes [t^si re]

type: [tip] becomes [t^sip]

tu: [ty] becomes [t^sy]

tube: [tYb] becomes [t^sYb]

tiens: [tj^hɛ̃] becomes [t^sj^hɛ̃]

tuer: [t^hœ] becomes [t^sœ]

dire: [dir] becomes [d^zi:r]

dû: [dy] becomes [d^zy]

reduire: [re d^hir] becomes [re d^zhi:r]

This slight difference in consonant pronunciation is enough to take note; it indeed is a tiny but noticeable difference unique only to Québec, Canada.

Similarly, small and unique alterations apply to the phonology of the spoken French language as well. The standard pattern of a rise in the tone at the end of each rhythmic group remains normal across any spoken French in both Paris and in Québec, Canada, but there remain other modifications to the intonation of Québécois French. First of all, because of the speed of spoken French and an overall more relaxed approach to speech in Canada, the rise at the end of each rhythmic group may be less high than compared to the rise at the end of rhythmic groups of sentences spoken in standard French. When speaking with a Québécois girl named Geneviève from the northern region of the province, the Canadian told me informatively about receiving points against her driving record for breaking a driving rule:

“J’en ai gagné un parce que j’envoyais un texto en train de conduire.”

In stating this long sentence with multiple rhythmic groups, Genevieve barely changed her intonation at all because of the speed at which she was telling me this entire story. The intonation changes did indeed come at the end of rhythmic groups when she increased the tone, but by no means did the intonation rise increase as much as compared to the intonation increase of spoken standard French.

With questions, the pattern is similar. As stated before, questions in standard French have intonations rising at the end of each rhythmic group, with a quick fall on the question word for certain information questions. In Canadian French, the quick rise on the question word leading to the fall may prevent the end of the question from rising again on intonation. For example, in conversation with the same girl from Québec, the Canadian asked about going to the zoo in wondering:

“Est-ce qu’on va au zoo?”

Instead of raising the intonation through the first rhythmic group and question word and then dropping back down (at the word “au”) to rise again on the word “zoo,” she dropped the intonation at the very end of the phrase without raising it again. The reason for this could be that the question is evident, as the question word “est-ce que” always introduces a question. Thus, the need for an intonation rise at the end becomes seemingly unnecessary, thus the Canadians, in saving energy, choose not to do so.

These differences in standard and Canadian pronunciation of French can indeed point out unique characteristics beyond simple mouth movements and voice tones. Rather, within Paris and within these regions of Québec one can notice that the pronunciation of the same French sentence may change in the same speaker according to situation formality. In comparing the formal situation such as a newscast in Paris versus a personal experience such as two siblings talking at their apartment in southern Paris, one can see that the difference in situation formality causes the speaker to relax on following these rules.

Following the review of correct pronunciation of standard French vowels, one can determine when these rules are strictly or loosely followed in France, particularly Paris,

the capital city. The differences in spoken French imply sociolinguistic differences as well. Personal contact with multiple Parisians and other native speakers of the language confirms how, when speaking in formal situations, these rules are completely satisfied. When speaking to a stranger to finalize details in a taxi rental or when ordering food at an expensive restaurant, Parisians take deliberate measures to follow exactly all four rules previously mentioned. In less serious situations, however, the context changes. Speaking to a close friend or addressing a young child are less formal contexts, thus the rules of standard French need not be as strictly adhered to in comparison to the formal contexts. For the most part, however, French natives of France still follow these rules quite well.

For example, when an older brother questioned his younger sister about the activities she had done that day at school, he did not consciously think about how he was saying the words coming out of his mouth. Thus, his vowels did stray slightly from the norm, although not by much. The point of articulation remained the same, as did the configuration of the lips. Also, the classification of the vowel as oral vs. nasal stayed the same as well (it would be nearly impossible to change this characteristic in standard French). However, in casually speaking French in France, one can change the height of the tongue. In the experience described at the beginning of this paragraph, when swiftly discussing the day with his sister, the Parisian brother failed to bring his tongue as high as he would normally in speaking in formal situations, such as with professors or other superiors at his school or even with his parents. Instead, he would move faster throughout the sentences simply because he had much he wanted to discuss. Further, discussion with someone whom you know well and converse with on a regular basis can be made less formal in this manner. Although he did not always bring his tongue as high as normal,

which means he did not open his mouth as wide as normal, the Parisian still orally made sure to pronounce the words correctly.

The same sociolinguistic difference becomes even more prominent in Canada. The noticeable difference in Canadian French and standard French concerning high vowels remains constant throughout northern and southern Québec. The French of northern Québec may perhaps even exaggerate further these differences than the French found in southern Québec, particularly around the more urban areas such as in Québec City and Montréal. These cities are metropolises for the country, thus businessmen and professors from around the globe move to these larger cities to work for grand companies. Their more urban upbringings may prevent these Canadian French speakers from completely adapting their spoken languages to the customs of the people in the land. However, as you move further away from these cities, such as northern cities in Québec away from the United States of America, the towns become more secluded and less populated. Here, the citizens are more likely to grow up and learn the French that their ancestors spoke, thus the open pronunciation of these high vowels is very noticeable and hard to understand. A newscast of southern Québec versus one of northern Québec shows a noticeable following of the rules of pronunciation. Concerning the phonetics, the southern Québécois actually pronounces all the vowels and consonants quite similarly to standard French. Concerning phonology, the southern Québécois tends to place a higher intonation increase at the ends of rhythmic groups as a similarity to standard French, whereas the northern Québécois makes this intonation increase less prominent, as stated that Canadians often do. Thus, the more formal of a situation will cause Québécois

speakers to actually adapt their dialect of the French language to sound more like standard French spoken in Paris.

In comparing formal situations across the two regions and informal situations across the two regions, any trained listener to French can notice differences in the informal situations. Because formal situations require energy and effort to follow these rules, the newscasts of both Paris and southern Québec do not differ much in phonetics or phonology. However, the informal situations of speaking with my friend from Québec and listening to the brother and sister talk in Paris do indeed have different levels of adherence to the rules of standard French. The Québécois of informal situations, which are more often heard in the northern region of the province, tend to follow all the deviations previously mentioned from standard French, whereas the informal situation in Paris only happens to change a few of the sounds, such as the one high vowel spoken with less energy.

The study of the dialects of spoken French in different contexts across the regions of Paris, France and Québec, Canada (both north and south) shows small yet very distinguishable vocal differences in these speeches. The speech can vary so much that certain speakers and listeners of the language accustomed to a certain dialect (such as Parisians to standard French and Québécois students to Canadian French) may have trouble understanding each other. This, in turn, may indeed impact the choices of the French speakers' relationships, interests, and goals, which can cause sociolinguistic changes in the lives of the French speakers. The importance of spoken French truly does lie in how the speaker says the words, and not necessarily the words said.

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