

The unique features of Newfoundland English have long been known to North American dialectologists. The distinct vocabulary and grammar of Newfoundland English have been well documented (e.g., Story 1965; Paddock 1966; Story, Kirwin, and Widdowson 1990). However, less is known about how Newfoundland English relates to other varieties on a phonetic level. A new study of regional phonetic patterns across Canada reveals that even young, university-educated Newfoundlanders, who might be expected to be in the vanguard of convergence with mainland Canadian English, variably retain traces of a phonemic distinction between the low-back vowels of words in the 'cot' and 'caught' classes. Since a merger of these word classes is widely considered to be a defining feature of Canadian English, this aspect of Newfoundland speech calls into question its status as a Canadian variety.

The new data on Newfoundland English come from tape-recorded sociolinguistic interviews with six university students from various regions of Newfoundland. Data for this paper come from acoustic analysis of first and second formant frequencies of the vowels elicited in the word list portion of the interviews. These included six tokens of each of the low-back vowel classes, carefully balanced for allophonic environment, involving exact minimal pairs wherever possible. T-tests were used to establish whether the first and second formant means for the two classes indicated a phonemic distinction in either height or advancement. Two of the six subjects showed a statistically significant distinction ( $p < 0.05$ ) in both dimensions, with 'cot' class words lower and further front than 'caught' class words, while a third showed a distinction in advancement but not in height. A subsequent analysis of one distinct and one merged subject investigated the role of the third formant and of vowel duration in supporting the presence or absence of a distinction in the primary dimensions. Neither subject showed a significant distinction in rounding (indicated by the frequency of the third formant), but both showed a significant distinction in length, as measured by a paired t-test, with the 'cot' class words approximately 25% (500-600 msec) longer on average than the 'caught' class words.

These data suggest that Newfoundland's status as a dialect of Canadian English should be reassessed. Indeed, its distinctness on the level of phonemic inventory underscores its unique status at other levels of grammar. Issues for further research include the lack of an obvious relation between the phonemic status of the low-back vowels and other aspects of Canadian English in Newfoundland. The hypothesis that the Canadian Shift will be most advanced among speakers with a low-back merger is disproved by a one speaker who is a notable exception to it. On the other hand, a clear relation emerges between the low-back merger and another well-known Canadian feature, Canadian Raising. The three Newfoundland speakers who display the low-back merger also show Canadian Raising of /au/, whereas those who maintain a low-back distinction do not exhibit raising.

#### References:

- Paddock, Harold J. 1966. A Dialect Survey of Carbonear, Newfoundland. M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland.
- Story, George Morley. 1965. Newfoundland dialect: An Historical view. *Canadian Geographical Journal* 70: 127-131.
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