

Frenching it up: The English future temporal reference in a French dominant town

This study is situated within a larger body of research focussed on the future temporal reference (FTR) system, in the case with a specific focus on contact between a Romance language, French, and English. The FTR systems in both languages share a periphrastic variant with *go* (1a) and at least one other variant: the modal *will* as for English (1b) and the inflected future as for French (1c) (e.g. Blondeau 2006; Comeau & Villeneuve 2016; Denis & Tagliamonte 2017; Grimm & Nadasdi 2011; Poplack & Dion 2009; Poplack & Tagliamonte 2000; Torres Cacoulios & Walker 2009; Wagner & Sankoff 2011 among others).

- (1) a. What *is* the weather *going to* be like tomorrow, which is Canada Day? (KAP/F/54)
- b. You know you *will* have to go to work tomorrow. (KAP/F/92)
- c. Il *s'apercevra* pas qu'elle était débarrée. (RFQ.021.1256, as quoted in Poplack & Dion 2009: 574) 'He won't notice that it was unlocked.'

Studies on spoken French, particularly Laurentian French, have shown that the periphrastic future is the preferred variant and that the key determinant of variant choice is polarity: the inflected future is strongly preferred in negative contexts. In contrast, studies on spoken English have report no polarity effect, in addition to showing equivalent rates between *go* and *will* variants. These major quantitative differences in conditioning highlight a site of striking contrast between the two languages, offering a rare opportunity for studying the possible effects of language contact in a highly bilingual community. When speaking English, will Anglophones and Francophones use FTR variants with the same constraints? If not, what are the linguistic and social patterns of contrast?

In order to address these questions, we draw on the methods and practices of variationist sociolinguistics (Labov 1972; Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001), making use of a large corpus of spoken English balanced by mother tongue, gender and age. The data comes from conversational English interviews with residents of Kapuskasing, a predominantly French-speaking town in the province of Ontario, a majority English-speaking province. Only “unambiguous reference to a state or event occurring posterior to speech time” (Poplack & Turpin 1999: 143) are retained for this study, resulting in over 1500 tokens of FTR extracted and coded for independent predictors hypothesized to influence variant choice. When all speakers are considered together, the key findings are that the two main variants expressing the future have near equal frequencies and the effect of polarity is minimal. All this is consistent with what has already been demonstrated in the existing literature on spoken English. However, when Anglophones and Francophones are analyzed separately, significant differences emerge. Most importantly, the effect of negation on the selection of the *will* variant is significant for all Francophones. Yet, this is not the case for the Anglophones, except for the 25 years old and under. Remarkably, the younger Anglophones exhibit a significant contrast between negative vs. affirmative that is not found in contemporary spoken English nor even among the Anglophones elders in their own community. These findings are consistent with recent studies conducted in Northern Ontario towns with large Francophone populations where it was discovered that Anglophones have French patterns in their English (Tagliamonte & Jankowski 2019, 2020). The evidence of patterns of alignment between Anglophones and Francophones in the use FTR in English are reflected in the frequency and

patterns of linguistic constraints in this grammatical system. We interpret these results as a product of social alignment between Anglophones and Francophones driven by increasing linguistic, social and cultural symmetry in the Kapuskasing community. We also suggest that increasing positive affect towards French in Kapuskasing is also a key factor in explaining the results reported in this study.

Selected References

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