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Regionality and Dialect on Lexical Variation: The Influence of Length of Residence and Educational System on Lexical Choices in Canadian English

Individuals are able to accommodate linguistically to new contexts. A relationship exists between length of residence and lexical preferences, with non-native speakers absorbing local lexical variants quickly. As well, one's surroundings are a significant factor for language learning and English speakers are influenced by the English dialect in which their education was based on (e.g., American vs. British). There have been lexical comparisons between the Canadian and American dialects; however, to date, there is no study that incorporates length of residence in Canada with people who initially learned English through the American dialect. This preliminary study concentrates on lexical variation in non-native Canadian English speakers and examined differences in people's use of lexical terms. Twelve participants who learned American English in their native countries (e.g., Japan) were classified according to length of residence in Canada and given a vocabulary questionnaire, asking individuals to identify the lexical term they most often used in everyday speech.

Findings confirmed that individuals who resided in Canada for a longer time period also exhibited more Canadian lexical variants compared to American ones (e.g., grade one vs. first grade, respectively), especially for lexical terms frequent in daily use. The amount of time spent in Canada influenced the self-reported preference for Canadian lexical variants, reinforcing the idea of dialect convergence. Overall, linguistic accommodation occurred quickly, yet certain lexical variants were more resistant or susceptible to change. This research has implications in educational practices and linguistic flexibility and future studies will benefit from using more diverse methods to measure actual lexical usage.