

Linguistic variation in a minority setting: A variationist study of subjunctive use in Acadian French

Acadian French (AF) as spoken in the Maritime Provinces in Canada is widely considered distinct from Laurentian French (LF) due to isolation from external varieties and low exposure to standard French (Comeau, 2011; Flikeid, 1994; King, 2013; Valdman, 1980). In this paper, I test this hypothesis by focusing on the inherent variability of subjunctive use in spoken discourse, where the subjunctive form (1) varies with the indicative (2) and the conditional (3) forms in the same context.

- (1) Non, moi, il *faut* qu' ça **soit** (**SUBJ.**) plus que ça là. (21.4: 1537)
'No, me, it has to be more than that.'
- (2) Parce pour faire quoi ce qu'on fait, *faut* qu'on **est** (**IND.**) intelligents. (16.3: 2288)
'Because to do what we do, we have to be smart.'
- (3) *Faudrait* que ça **serait** (**COND.**) au moins deux semaines. (28.3: 2342)
'It should be at least two weeks.'

Recent studies on LF (Poplack, 1990, 1997; Poplack et al., 2013; St-Amand, 2002) suggest that contrary to the received wisdom, variant selection is not conditioned by semantic motivations, but rather by morphosyntactic (e.g. presence of complementizer *que*) or lexical (e.g. governor identity) factors. Furthermore, these studies have shown that subjunctive is restricted to only a handful of governors (*falloir, vouloir, aimer, pour que*). While a similar pattern has also been found in Hexagonal French (Kastronic, 2015), Comeau (2011) suggests that the subjunctive is still semantically motivated in AF as spoken in Baie Sainte-Marie (Nova Scotia), with a near-categorical use of subjunctive under specific governors.

Can this semantic effect on subjunctive use be generalized to other varieties of AF? Is there a clear distinction between AF and LF in regards to the *conditioning* that underlies variant choice? In order to address these questions, I make use of a corpus of informal AF from Northeastern New-Brunswick (Beaulieu, 1995) from which I extracted and coded over 1300 contexts where the subjunctive could have been selected. I coded each token for a variety of semantic and morphosyntactic factor groups which could have an effect on variant choice. The method I employ for extraction and analysis is the same as was used in Poplack et al. (2013), thus allowing for direct comparison of my results with theirs.

My results reveal, contrary to expectations, that the rate of subjunctive is much lower in AF spoken in Northeastern New Brunswick (25%) than in LF (76%). This result is surprising, considering that in AF spoken in Nova Scotia, the rate is near categorical (98%). However, the same handful of governors as those found in LF have the highest rates of subjunctive, in addition to representing the vast majority of all governors and all subjunctive morphology, with similar proportions in both varieties. Moreover, variable rule analysis reveals that variant selection is conditioned by morphosyntactic factors, while apparent semantic factors are reflections of lexical effects, as has already been found in LF. Considering the real-time study of this variable in LF (Poplack et al., 2013), which has demonstrated that subjunctive becomes more entrenched with these governors over time, I suggest that Acadian varieties follow the same direction at different rates. These findings suggest that even if subjunctive rates differ between these varieties, speakers of AF and LF use the same underlying grammar with respect to this variable – challenging the common belief that AF patterns differently from LF.

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