NEW DIALECT FORMATION IN HAPPY VALLEY-GOOSE BAY: A REPORT ON ONGOING RESEARCH

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Introduction

IN THIS PAPER, I REPORT on the early stages of my M.A. (Linguistics) research, which focuses on the variety of English spoken in the relatively new Labrador community of Happy Valley-Goose Bay (henceforth HVGB), founded in 1941. The English of HVGB is a mixed variety that has emerged from a number of input dialects which have been in sustained contact over the past 62 years. These include English regional dialects from coastal Labrador as well as various parts of the island of Newfoundland, along with American, Mainland Canadian, Innu, Inuit, and Southern Inuit dialects of English. This complex linguistic scenario served as the linguistic input to subsequent generations of native-born Happy Valley-Goose Bayers.

Because the town includes original residents from multiple dialect areas within NL, and their descendants, it offers a prime opportunity to observe the effects of dialect contact among the original generations of the community down to the present-day youth. Analysis of the speech of HVGB gives me the opportunity to address a question of critical importance to theories of sociolinguistic variation and dialect change: how the process of dialect levelling (Trudgill 1986; Britain 1997; Kerswill and Williams 2000; Kerswill 2002) takes multiple sources of linguistic input and effectively produces a new community dialect. I will attempt to answer this question by looking at the development of selected components of the HVGB vowel system, from earliest substrate forms involving multiple dialect sources to current forms used by native HVGBers.

In what follows, I provide some background on the origins of the community, report on some of my initial observations from the field, and briefly outline my research project.

Happy Valley-Goose Bay: Origins

The foundations of the central Labrador community of HVGB can be traced to the spring of 1941, when Canada and the United States sent teams to look for a site for a new air base to provide military support during World War II. The area that became Goose Bay Air Base was chosen as a result of its optimal weather as well as its location on a level sandy plateau. While the base was being developed, the market for fur and fish was decreasing; this brought

many people from the north and south coasts of Labrador to the area to work on the construction of the base. These workers brought along their families, many of whom also obtained work on the base (Rompkey 2005). The Goose Bay Agreement signed in 1944 specified that the Canadian Government would employ Newfoundland labour as much as was practical; recruitment centres were set up in Newfoundland, and word also spread to the isolated communities of Labrador.

One story that emerged during my interviews was that the first families to arrive settled in Otter Creek, an area used mainly for cabins today. There were a dozen families there when the Military told them that they could not live within a five-mile radius of the airstrip because of the ongoing war, and the possibility of bombings and other military activity. That's when three men got in a boat and left Otter Creek, looking for another place to settle with their families. As the story goes, they crossed the Hamilton (now the Churchill) River, and when they decided on an appropriate spot, the two larger men carried the smaller third man to shore on their shoulders, so that all could step ashore at the same time.

The new arrivals set up tents and began to build small houses along the banks of the river, in the area that eventually became known as Happy Valley. For the first ten years of its existence, Happy Valley was almost completely inhabited by Labradorians. Between 1951 and 1956, however, the population grew from 257 to 1145. This was mostly due to in-migration from the island of Newfoundland, which in 1949 had undergone Confederation with Canada. As a result, the town's operation was taken over by Newfoundlanders (Zimmerly 1975). As I learned during my fieldwork, in the early days, migrants from Newfoundland and migrants from Labrador often tended to cluster on separate streets and in separate parts of the developing community.

Today, HVGB has grown into a town of approximately 7500. Its population is composed of original residents – the immigrant generation – and their children and grandchildren, the first native-born generations in HVGB.

Military presence and impact

Throughout the community's formative period, residents of HVGB had varying degrees of contact with the military personnel living on Goose Air Base. Some residents spoke of being a part of Happy Valley softball and hockey teams that played against American and Canadian military teams. Some single migrants from the island of Newfoundland who worked on the base also lived there in the women's or men's barracks, paying rent of five dollars a month. Once they married, they usually moved down to the Valley. I heard stories of the many

dances they would attend every Saturday at the Non-Commissioned Officers Club on the base, and yet they would always be up and ready for church on Sunday. Many of those who worked on the base seemed to have had considerable contact with the Americans or (mainland) Canadians. Some of the women I interviewed worked in the military officers' homes, taking care of the children. Many developed close relationships with the families, and were offered the opportunity of accompanying them back to the U.S. when their posting in Goose Bay was done. Others still keep in touch with members of the American military by phone, and some have even gone down to the U.S. to visit them after they left.

In short, the military presence in the area clearly had a very strong impact on HVGB. Whenever I asked about the base everyone told stories with excitement and pride, of the vibrant and lively community they were living in. Many of my interviewees have seen major changes over the last 60 years, as the town has developed and the various military groups have come and gone. One speaker made the following observation: "This traditionally, and still is I think, a very cosmopolitan area…We had people here from all over the world and many of them still live here." In addition to the many Labradorians and Newfoundlanders, there were people in HVGB from the USA, mainland Canada, and many places in Europe. Since HVGB presents such a unique speech community, it offers an ideal setting in which to investigate how a mutual dialect has been formed and influenced by such a wide variety of input dialects.

Data collection and methods

In order to investigate the emergence of a new HVGB variety, I am analyzing the speech of 48 residents of the community. My sample consists of four males and four females of Newfoundland descent and four males and four females of Labrador descent, in each of three generational groups. The first, the migrant generation, represents people who moved from Newfoundland or other parts of Labrador to HVGB to work on the base within the first 10-15 years of its opening. The next generation is made up of the first-native born generation in HVGB. The final group consists of the second generation of native-born HVGBers – that is, those with at least one parent born in HVGB.

I have conducted sociolinguistic interviews (Labov 1984) with each of the 48 members of my sample. In the conversational portion of the interviews, I asked questions that will allow me to obtain the phonetic variables needed as well as gain a sense of speakers' social identities, orientations and attitudes toward HVGB, Labrador, Newfoundland, America and Mainland Canada. Speakers also read from a word list that elicits a complete set of English vowels. The use of a word list along with a conversational interview will yield two

different speech styles for comparison, a more formal speech style from the word list, and a relatively informal speech style from the conversational portion.

My study will focus on key components of the vowel system of HVGB. Once selected, these vowels will be investigated for all 48 speakers, via the acoustic analysis software Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2012), along with The Penn Phonetics Lab Forced Aligner (Yuan and Liberman 2008), an automatic alignment toolkit designed to assist in acoustic analysis of vowels by isolating the vowel from the rest of the sounds in each word. The acoustic measurements of these vowels will determine their position in vowel space, along with tongue height and backness (Kennedy and Grama 2012). In addition, I will use Praat to investigate the status of several well-known known phonetic features of Newfoundland and Labrador English. The first is the NORTH-START merger (Clarke 2010) where words like "horse" are pronounced as "harse." The second involves the PRICE diphthong, whereby a word like "ice" is realized with a rounded nucleus, to sound like "oice," rhyming with the vowel in "voice." Finally, I will examine the pronunciation of LOT and THOUGHT words, which, in traditional Newfoundland English, are considered to be merged and sound more like the word "pam" (i.e. a fronted pronunciation). My initial acoustic analysis of the LOT and THOUGHT merger, found in Figures 1 and 2 are from wordlist productions of the words "HOD" (a member of the LOT lexical set) and "HAWED" (from the THOUGHT set).

Figure 1 Newfoundland migrants

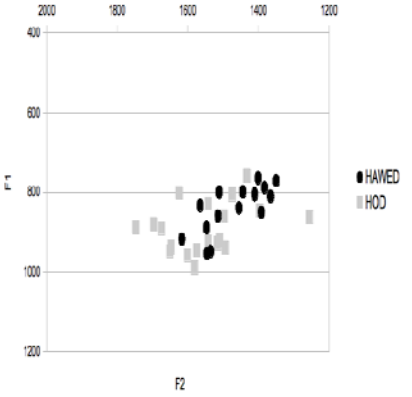

Figure 2 Labrador migrants

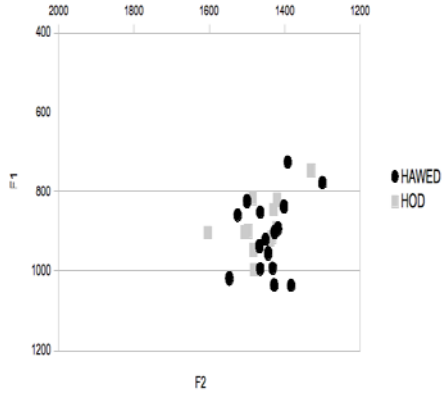

Figure 1 shows the distribution of LOT and THOUGHT tokens, produced by Newfoundlanders who moved to Labrador. The corresponding data for Labrador migrants are found in Figure 2. These data show that among the sample of men and women from the island who moved to Labrador, the two vowel sets were not fully merged (a t-test revealed a significant difference at $p < .05$). In contrast, Labradorian men and women did have a LOT/THOUGHT merger ($p > .05$). At this stage in my analysis, I report that the initial linguistic makeup of migrants to HVGB did show different phonemic realizations for these two vowels. What remains to be seen is whether this phonological pattern is found in the speech of younger members of the HVGB. Did both systems, one with the merger and one without, persist or did the merger advance at the expense of the split as studies have repeatedly shown (Herzog 1965; Labov 1994)?

My analysis will also aim to determine the effects of dialect contact on the regionalized dialect currently spoken in HVGB. I will examine the data for patterns consistent with Trudgill's stages of dialect formation, in particular mixing, levelling and focusing (Trudgill 1986). While mixing is evidenced in the existence of a variety of phonemic forms that are used concurrently and inconsistently, levelling occurs when marked phonetic features in the input dialects are lost; the result may be the emergence of a more focused and stable community variety. In addition, I will compare the results of my acoustic analysis to the findings reported in the Atlas of North American English (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006) to determine which, if any, unique properties exist in the HVGB vowel system.

My study will provide additional insights into sociolinguistic theories of dialect evolution, and help us to understand how a unified speech community (Patrick 2008) is created in a relatively new town, while in its infancy, and while the original settlers are still alive. My thesis research will produce a corpus of a variety of recorded spoken English never before investigated, to be shared with other sociolinguistic researchers interested in the results of languages and dialects in contact. This thesis will be the first research study on the largest community in Labrador and will therefore offer a benchmark for future analysis of linguistic variation in HVGB and Labrador. It will add to our knowledge of Canadian English dialects, providing further understanding of the processes of language variation and change. Moreover, my study will also significantly add to the relatively small body of acoustic phonetic research on dialects of Newfoundland and Labrador English.

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