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## Variability and Future Temporal Reference: The French of Anglo-Montrealers

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Nathalie Dion and H el ene Blondeau

## 1 Introduction

Traditionally, variationists have been interested in understanding the conditioning of variables in the speech of native speakers of a given language. Much less attention has been paid to variation in the speech of L2 speakers. Our research investigates variation in the second language French of Anglo-Montrealers<sup>1</sup> (Thibault and Sankoff 1993, 1997; Blondeau et al. 2002). Being in such close contact with French, the majority language in the province of Quebec, this community allows comparisons to be made with other L2 situations which are qualitatively different. For instance, Mougeon et al. (2002) studied the case of immersion students learning French in Ontario, where English is the majority language.

This paper focuses on the future temporal reference, which alternates in French between three major forms: the *Periphrastic Future*, the *Inflected Future*, and the *Futurate Present*. These variants are illustrated in (1).

- (1) a. Periphrastic Future (PF)  
Je pense que je *vas finir* (PF) le programme. (Janie, 194)  
'I think that I am going to finish the program.'
- b. Inflected Future (IF)  
Parce que il y *aura* (IF) pas le choix. (Ted, 1208)  
'Because there won't be a choice.'
- c. Futurate Present (FP)  
Je *pars* (PRES) samedi pour y aller. (Liz, 171)  
'I leave Saturday to go there.'

What makes the expression of the future temporal reference interesting to examine is that both French and English make use of a superficially similar Periphrastic Future variant (PF) formed with the verbs *aller* and *go* as shown

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in (2). The PF variant alternates with *will* (WF) in English (see (3)), with the Inflected Future (IF) in French (see (4)), and with the Futurate Present in both languages.

- (2) a. Bien demain, tu *vas aller* (PF) au bingo, tu *vas gagner* (PF).  
(FR/OH/065) (Poplack and Turpin 1999)  
'Well tomorrow, you're going to go to bingo, you're going to win.'
- b. You wanted honesty, I'm *gonna give* (PF) you honesty.  
(ENG/QC/021) (Poplack and Walker 2003)
- (3) I said, "I'll (WF) get in touch with Madame." (ENG/QC/021)  
(Poplack and Walker 2003)
- (4) On se *mariera* (IF) pas. (FR/OH/006) (Poplack and Turpin 1999)  
'We won't get married.'

Fortunately for us, future temporal reference has been analyzed in a variationist framework in both L1 French (Emirikian and Sankoff 1985; Poplack and Turpin 1999) and L1 English (Poplack and Walker 2003). Although the two languages share a variant form, analyses of the variation in both languages have shown that the conditioning of the variability is distinct for each language. Emirikian and Sankoff, as well as Poplack and Turpin, have documented the linguistic constraints on this variable in French, confirming a similar configuration of factors. They identify a strong influence of polarity with negative contexts clearly favoring the French-specific synthetic variant (IF). In English, as recently reported by Poplack and Walker (2003) for Quebec English, the conditioning of the variation between the *will* and the *go* future shows a configuration differing from French; in particular, polarity appears not to influence the variability in English. The presence or absence of negation will therefore be considered as a diagnostic in determining the extent of native-like acquisition of variability.

Given the differences in the conditioning of the same variable in French and English, one might wonder how L2 speakers of French would behave. Will learners behave in the same way as the L1 speakers of French, or will they adopt the English conditioning into their language? What role, if any, will extralinguistic factors play in the acquisition of variability? Our analysis will address these issues by acting as a counterpart to other studies that have documented L2 French in a non-contact situation. Specifically, we will compare the results of our present study to those of Nadasdi et al.'s (2003) examination of the future temporal reference system in the speech of French

immersion students in Toronto. A number of common issues will be addressed including: How do the variant rates compare? In particular, which variant is most common? Which linguistic factors condition the variation? We will then investigate whether the conditioning on variation among these L2 speakers more closely mirrors the constraints proposed for French or English.

## 2 Methodology

Our analysis is based on a corpus of 29 Anglo-Montrealer informants aged between 18 and 35 years and who were selected from a larger corpus to represent maximal variation along the fluency continuum (Sankoff et al. 1997). Each participant was interviewed in French in the early 1990s by an interviewer who has French as a mother tongue. The participants differ from one another according to their mode of acquisition of French, the type of exposure they have had to French, their current degree of contact with Francophones (in social and professional contexts) and the degree to which they use French in their daily lives. For example, some individuals work or live in mostly French environments, whereas others only have sporadic contact with French speaking Montrealers.

### 2.1 The Variable Context

From these interviews, all cases in which speakers made reference to an event posterior to speech time were extracted. In addition, we initially extracted all instances where future and conditional morphology were used, in order to have a broader understanding of the informants' use of synthetic morphology. The initial data set included 706 tokens.

For the purposes of making direct comparisons to the results obtained by Nadasdi et al. (2003), Poplack and Turpin (1999), and Poplack and Walker (2003), the methodology adopted in these studies was carefully followed. As explicitly described in Poplack and Turpin (1999), we excluded from the multivariate analysis all tokens not referring to a future event including habitual reference tokens as exemplified in (5) and protases of conditional *si*-clauses as illustrated in (6).

- (5) Des fois, on *va se parler* (PF) en français. (Jeanne, 315)  
'Sometimes we talk to each other in French.'
- (6) Si je *vas quitter* (PF) Montréal ça va être pour quitter Québec.  
(Mike, 488)  
'If I leave Montreal, it will be to leave Quebec.'

Also, since this is a data set of second-language speakers, there were instances where the Inflected Future morphology was mistakenly used in conditional contexts as illustrated in (7). These cases were also excluded.

- (7) a. *J'aimerai* (IF) bien m'acheter un Harley-Davidson. (Ted, 1099)  
 'I would really like to buy myself a Harley-Davidson.'  
 b. C'est pas quelque chose que j'*aimerai* (IF) faire. (Tony, 710)  
 'It's not something that I would like to do.'

## 2.2 Coding

Each of the 237 tokens retained was coded for a series of factors found to be important in the studies conducted by Poplack and Turpin (1999), Poplack and Walker (2003) and Nadasdi et al. (2003) in order to allow a direct comparison of our results to theirs. The effect of sentence type on variant choice is by far the most important in the conditioning of future variants in L1 Canadian French. We coded each token according to whether or not the verb expressing future temporality was negated, interrogative, or declarative-affirmative. We also examined the effect of adverbial specification on variant selection by contrasting the absence or presence of either a specific or non-specific adverb.

Along with these factors, we assigned codes for temporal distance of the envisaged action. Following the same classification as Poplack and Turpin (1999), actions set to occur within 24 hours of the speech time were contrasted to those slated to occur at a later time. In cases where there were no overt cues, tokens were coded as ambiguous. Extralinguistic factors including the speaker's gender and the influence of their contact with French were also considered. Within the general framework of Sankoff and Thibault's research, from which our corpus is drawn, the speakers under analysis were classified according to their personal degree of contact with French in their social, as well as educational, environments. The evaluation schema developed in Sankoff et al. (1997) is illustrated in (8) below.

It was also important for the purposes of our study to develop measures of linguistic ability to contrast speakers in their overall ease in using French. In this analysis we make use of the gender-marking score as a general measure of linguistic ability (Blondeau et al. 2002). For this measure, subjects were rated on their production of correct gender marking on 20 nouns in an excerpt of the French interview. We also added a measure of the speakers' abilities to conjugate verbs in another synthetic form in French: the conditional. Each speaker was ranked according to the rate at which they used regular and irregular conditional morphology.

- (8) Degree of Contact with French (according to the calculation discussed in Sankoff et al. 1997)
- .5 point
    - English is the dominant language in a bilingual workplace
  - 1 point
    - French friends
    - French is the dominant language in a bilingual workplace
  - 2 points
    - Francophone spouse, significant other or current roommate
    - Using French at work

### 3 Results

#### 3.1 Variants Used

The results indicate that Anglo-Montrealers make use of all three variants of the future temporal reference: the Periphrastic Future, the Inflected Future and the Futurate Present. However, like the Toronto speakers (Nadasdi et al. 2003), their inventory of variants does not include the non-standard *m'as* construction. Furthermore, when looking at L2 competence, it is also important to consider the use of non-native variants. Nadasdi et al. (2003) found that their French Immersion students used non-native variants in 14% of all future contexts. These situations included cases where the verb had been conjugated in another tense (for example, the conditional or the imperfect) and where the verb was in its infinitive form. As shown in Table 1, only the conditional case was found in our data accounting for only 1% of the total.

	Toronto Immersion students (Nadasdi et al. 2003)	Anglo-Montrealers
	14%	1%
Type	(conditional, imperfect, infinitive)	conditional

Table 1: Distribution of non native variants by corpus

This finding demonstrates that Anglo-Montrealers are much more closely related to L1 speakers; they make use of the same inventory of variants as the L1 speakers, and they use significantly fewer non-native variants than the students examined in Nadasdi et al. (2003). This first result confirms other findings on different variables which have shown that exposure to L1 French has an influence on the repertoire of variants used by L2 French speakers (Blondeau et al. 2002).

### 3.2 Distribution of variants

Table 2 displays a comparison of the distribution of the variants in the L2 French of the Anglo-Montrealers with the ones reported for the L1 French speakers (Poplack and Turpin 1999) as well as for the L2 French of the Toronto French immersion students (Nadasdi et al. 2003). When examining the distribution of the three future temporal reference variants, one might notice that the rate of Periphrastic Future use is higher for Anglo-Montrealers (81%) than it is for both L1 French speakers (73%) and the Toronto Immersion students (78%).

	L1French: (Poplack & Turpin 1999)		L2 French: Anglo- Montrealers		L2 French: Toronto Immer- sion students	
	Total N=3594		Total N=237		Total N=352	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
<b>Periphrastic Future</b>	73	2627	81	193	78	273
<b>Inflected Future</b>	20	725	10	24	11	39
<b>Futurate Present</b>	7	242	8	18	11	40

Table 2: Distribution of *future* variants by corpus  
This table does not include non-native variants

In the case of the Inflected Future, Anglo-Montrealers had the lowest rate of use among all three groups at 10%. This result may seem odd since one would expect these speakers to behave more like L1 speakers than the Toronto French Immersion students. Three facts, however, lead us to believe that these rates are not unusual at all, and do not reflect the influence of English.

First, Poplack and Turpin (1999) have noted that younger speakers are less likely than older speakers to use the Inflected Future variant. It can then be inferred that the younger speakers in their sample use this variant less than the average of 20%. Since the informants in the corpus we are studying are all in the younger cohort, it is likely that their behavior is no different from that of the younger L1 speakers. Second, the higher rate of Periphrastic Future cannot be due to the distribution of variants in English either, since the English Periphrastic *go* Future only accounts for 41% of the total data (Poplack and Walker 2003), a rate much lower than the L1 French rate. Third, in order to test the hypothesis that the low level of inflected future could be a sign that these speakers have not mastered the synthetic morphol-

ogy, the level of productivity of the conditional in their speech was measured. In all, there were 225 tokens making use of conditional morphology, almost half of which were cases of irregular verbs. Since future and conditional morphology are so similar in Canadian French, and since the conditional is quite productive, there is no reason to believe that they do not make use of the synthetic future variant because they have not mastered the Inflected Future morphology. As observed earlier, some speakers even mistakenly used the Inflectional Future morphology in conditional contexts, as illustrated in (9).

- (9) J'*aimerai* (IF) ça m'ouvrir un restaurant quelque chose dans le genre. (Ted, 947)  
'I would like that, to open a restaurant or something of the sort.'

#### 4 Linguistic Conditioning

In order to know if the Anglo-Montrealers are really respecting the L1 community norms, or if they are more similar to the French Immersion students, it is crucial to examine the conditioning of the variable. Table 3 displays a comparison of our results concerning the influence of the linguistic factors on the choice of the future variants to those of Poplack and Turpin's L1 Canadian French study (1999) and Nadasdi et al.'s L2 French Immersion study (2003).

The effect of temporal adverbial specification is constant from one corpus to another. First, the three studies show that the Periphrastic Future is favored in the least marked context; that is, in cases without temporal adverbs. Second, the previous studies found that the presence of a specific temporal adverb favored the occurrence of the Futurate Present variant. In our study, this tendency is confirmed by a strong effect of 0.91.

There exists, however, one important difference in the conditioning of the factor of temporal adverbial specification. Poplack and Turpin (1999) found that the Inflected Future was favored in cases where a non-specific adverb was present. Though in our data we note the same tendency, this finding was not confirmed by Nadasdi et al. (2003). The conditioning of the variants in the context of temporal adverbs in our study is therefore completely parallel to that found in L1 French. Greater contact with French has permitted speakers of this corpus to behave more similarly to L1 French speakers than to their French Immersion counterparts. The prescriptive literature attributes an important role to the effect of temporal distance on variant selection. Though in L1 French empirical data has shown that the influence of this factor is significant, its range is quite low. Furthermore, this fac-

tor was found not to exert an independent effect since it interacted with adverbial specification. Temporal distance was not selected as significant in either our study or the Toronto study.

	French L1 speakers			Anglo-Montrealers			Toronto French Immersion students		
	IF	PF	FP	IF	PF	FP	IF	PF	FP
	.145	.727	.052	.058	.868	.042			
<b>Adverbial Specification</b>									
Specific	.37	.23	.78	.43	.12	.91	NS	.33	.71
Non-specific	.85	.19	.58	.91	.21		NS	.40	.64
No adverb	.47	.56	.46	.47	.60	.38	NS	.66	.30
Range	48	37	32	48	48	53		33	41
<b>Temporal distance</b>									
Proximal	.52	.56	.44	k/o*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Distal	.48	.43	.57		NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Range	4	13	13						
<b>Polarity</b>									
Negative	.99	.01	NS	.98	.03	k/o*	NS	NS	NS
Affirmative	.36	.65	NS	.43	.56		NS	NS	NS
Range	63	64		55	53				

Table 3: Influence of linguistic factors on choice of future variants

\* Due to knockouts, these factors were not included in the multivariate analysis

The most important factor constraining the variation in L1 French is the one that associates the Inflected variant with negative contexts. As Table 3 shows, the range for this factor is 63 in L1 French. Although this constraint is quite strong, it is never taught in the classroom. Obeying this constraint could therefore be a sign that the L2 learner has integrated more than just prescriptive rules. In the Toronto study, polarity was not found to be statistically significant (Nadasdi et al. 2003). This factor is significant, however, in the variant selection of the Anglo-Montrealers, and interestingly, in the same direction as the L1 speakers. There is a 0.98 probability that a negative context will cause the presence of the Inflected Future.

In order to look more closely at what is going on, an additional analysis was conducted on habitual reference tokens which were initially excluded from the variable context but still bear future morphology. As illustrated in Table 4, the same patterning was found: the Inflected variant is overwhelmingly associated with negative contexts, with a probability weight of 0.98.

Inflected Future .009	
Polarity	Prob.
Negative	.98
Affirmative	.41
Range	57

Table 4: Influence of polarity on the incidence of the Inflected Future morphology in habitual contexts

Table 5 displays a comparison of the effect of the significant factors conditioning the choice of future variants in four groups: three groups of French speakers (L1 and L2) and one group of L1 English speakers. In L1 English, polarity is the only factor that behaves differently from French since it does not exert a significant effect, as reported by Poplack and Walker (2003). The Anglo-Montrealers, therefore, pattern like the L1 French speakers while simultaneously differing from the English speakers.

The Anglo-Montrealer L2 French also differs from the French of the Toronto Immersion students. These students are similar to L1 English speakers in the same areas in which they differ from French speakers.

	L1 French	Anglo-Montrealer L2 French	Toronto L2 French	L1 English
<b>Adv. Specification</b>				
Adverbs favor FP	√	√	√	√
No adverb favors PF	√	√	√	√
Non-specific adverb favors IF	√	√	NS	n/a
<b>Temporal Distance</b>				
No clear pattern	√	√	NS	√
<b>Polarity</b>				
Negative contexts favor IF or WF	√	√	NS	X

Table 5: Comparison of the significant factors conditioning the choice of future variants in four groups of speakers

### 5 Level of Contact with French and Measures of Linguistic Ability

The linguistic conditioning of the future variants used by the Anglo-Montrealers closely resembles that of the L1 French system, and opposes that used by the speakers of Toronto's sample. One might wonder if the Anglo-Montrealers are behaving homogeneously, or if some of the informants are affecting the overall results. In order to test this possibility a comparison of our informants was undertaken. They were contrasted according to their level of contact with French and three measures of linguistic ability: gender agreement proficiency, the use of regular conditional morphology, and the use of irregular conditional morphology. The analysis is summarized in Table 6.

Upon examination of the effect of these factors on the occurrence of the Inflected Future, we observe a noticeable difference between speakers; those with a higher level of contact with French use the Inflected Future more (48%) than those with limited contact (12%). Also, speakers who have higher levels of linguistic ability have higher rates of Inflected Future tokens.

	Affirmative Contexts		Negative Contexts	
	N	%	N	%
<b>LINGUISTIC CONTACT LEVEL*</b>				
1 & 2	3	12	0	0
3 & 4	10	40	5	42
5, 5.5 & 6, 7	12	48	7	58
<b>LINGUISTIC ABILITY</b>				
Gender Agreement Proficiency				
65-90%	5	20	0	0
95-100%	20	80	12	100
Conditional Morphology				
0 tokens	1	4	0	0
1-9 tokens	3	12	0	0
10+ tokens	21	84	12	100
Irregular Conditional Morphology				
0 tokens	1	4	0	0
2-5 tokens	6	24	0	0
6-9 tokens	4	16	2	17
10+ tokens	14	56	10	83

Table 6: Effect of linguistic contact and ability on the incidence of the Inflected Future and the Inflected Future in negative contexts

\* Codes for linguistic contact refer to Sankoff et al. (1997).

It was also necessary to verify if these occurrences of the Inflected Future were being used in negative contexts, precisely the context favored by first language speakers of French. A positive correlation is apparent when we examine the number of Inflected Future tokens in negative contexts. Table 7 shows that the higher the degree of contact with French and the higher the speaker's linguistic ability, the greater the incidence of the inflected future. These results indicate that not all speakers in our sample are behaving in the same way. It seems as though only the most productive speakers in intense contact situations are following the L1 community norms. It should be noted, however, that there is a general, and perhaps coincidental, scarcity of negative contexts in the speech of those individuals with the lowest levels of linguistic ability and of those with the least contact with French.

	Negative Contexts	
	N	%
<b>LINGUISTIC CONTACT</b>		
Level of Contact		
1 & 2	0	0
3 & 4	7	44
5, 5.5 & 6, 7	9	56
<b>LINGUISTIC ABILITY</b>		
Gender Agreement Proficiency		
65-90%	1	6
95-100%	15	94
Conditional Morphology		
0 tokens	0	0
1-9 tokens	0	0
10+ tokens	16	100
Irregular Conditional Morphology		
0 tokens	0	0
2-5 tokens	0	0
6-9 tokens	4	25
10+ tokens	12	75

Table 7: Comparison of the incidence of negative contexts according to linguistic contact and ability

Since this is precisely the context in which the Inflected variant is strongly favored among L1 speakers, the lack of negative utterances in the speech of certain speakers in this corpus is an important consideration. There is no way of knowing if these specific informants would obey the L1-like conditioning of variants if they did produce the Inflected Future in negative contexts. What we do know is that *all* of those speakers whose speech

contains negative contexts *do* choose the Inflected variant more often than the Periphrastic variant, regardless of their linguistic ability or level of contact with French.

## 6 Conclusion

Our analysis has shed light on the variability of future temporal reference in the L2 French of Anglo-Montrealers, a community in close contact with French. One of our findings is that Anglo-Montrealers use the same variants as the L1 French speakers and avoid the use of non-native variants, causing them to differ from the Toronto Immersion students studied by Nadasdi et al. (2003). In addition, distribution of the variants is similar in the L2 French of the Anglo-Montrealers and in L1 French. Although rates are slightly lower for the Inflected Future for the L2 speakers, there is no evidence that these speakers don't master the synthetic morphology as shown by our analysis of their productive use of the conditional. As an interpretation, one can suggest that the lower rate of the Inflected Future may be attributable to the current change that has been reported to be taking place in L1 French (Poplack and Turpin 1999).

Furthermore, the analysis of the linguistic conditioning of the variability of future temporal reference indicates that the L2 French of Anglo-Montrealers follows patterns mirroring L1 French and not the English system. In particular, the multivariate analysis shows that polarity is influential in the choice of the Inflected future in the L2 French of the Anglo-Montrealers, just as it is in L1 French. Therefore, we can conclude that the Anglo-Montrealers have acquired this L1 constraint, even though it is not explicitly taught in the classroom. Using the effect of polarity as a diagnostic, this study further demonstrates that the L2 French of the Anglo-Montrealers differs from the L2 French of the Toronto French Immersion students since this variety resembles more closely the English system where the polarity does not exert a significant effect. With this comparison in mind, one can confirm that L1 patterns have a better chance of being acquired by L2 speakers who interact with L1 French speakers (Nagy et al. 2003; Blondeau et al. 2002).

In sum, through the study of the use of French by Anglo-Montrealers who are in contact with L1 French on a regular basis, our analysis has demonstrated that the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence is greatly dependant upon contact with speakers of the target language.

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