

**Poplack, Shana & James Walker. 2002. An English “Like No Other”?: Language Contact and Change in Quebec. NAW 31. Stanford University. October.**

The success of Quebec’s language laws has fundamentally altered the relationship of English and French in the province. Quebec anglophones, historically a socioeconomically dominant presence, have dwindled in number and power over the last thirty years. Concomitantly, the English establishment has become increasingly vocal about the changes that their language, in its minority-language guise, has purportedly undergone as a result of contact with French.

This poster introduces a new project which, for the first time, scientifically tests the claim that Quebec English is undergoing contact-induced change. Our approach is three-pronged. We investigate the inference of change over (apparent) time by comparing the speech of *relic* anglophones (those who acquired their vernacular prior to the “Quiet Revolution” of the 1960s and remained *in situ*) with that of younger generations. Contact-induced change, if it has occurred, should be most evident among those who acquired English after the passage of the “Language Laws” (1977). Second, to rule out the possibility that (eventual) distinctions between the English of relic and younger anglophones are simply the result of independent internal evolution, we supplement the temporal comparison with a sociogeographic component. We compare the English spoken in three urban centres in which the proportion of English mother-tongue claimants varies widely (Quebec City, Montreal and Ottawa-Hull), controlling for ethnic diversity where pertinent. If hospitality to contact-induced change is a function of minority status, as many claim, its effects should be most apparent in Quebec City, where native anglophones have constituted a minority at both the provincial and local levels since at least 1850. Finally, making use of variationist methodology, we adduce the existence and direction of change by comparing variable conditioning, first, among the contact varieties, and then with that of the putative source, French. We focus on English features with apparent counterparts in French, as instantiated in the variable expression of present, past and future temporal reference (e.g., inflected vs. periphrastic future, perfect vs. preterite). Such structures are said to be prime candidates for transfer.

Initial findings reveal little influence of French on the grammar of Quebec English despite sporadic use of a small set of regionally-specific borrowed items. On the contrary, we document the persistence of ethnic/dialectal features presumably transmitted by the original settlers of these communities, confirming the strength of ethnolinguistic boundaries even in situations of intense contact.