

A comparative diachrony of utterance-final tags in Canadian English

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Utterance-final tags (UFTs) are frequent, multifunctional discourse features that establish common-ground between interlocutors.

(1) a. We used to go hay-riding, sleigh-riding, *you know*. (EOE/f/1879)

b. It only cost you ten, fifteen cents to go in, *you see*. (EOE/m/1891)

c. Nothing like that, *eh*. (DCVE/m/1876)

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A growing body of literature has examined the synchronic reality of these forms (e.g. Columbus 2010; Denis & Tagliamonte 2016), yet comparatively little work has examined them in diachronic speech materials. Although it is clear that the repertoire is undergoing change in contemporary Canadian English (CanE) (i.e., *right* is increasing in apparent time), the more distal state of affairs remains murky.

In this talk we tackle UFTs in two sets of diachronic materials: The Earlier Ontario English Corpus and the Diachronic Corpus of Victoria English. These collections—recorded in the 1960s–1980s with speakers born 1871–1936—provide a view to CanE as spoken around the turn of the 19th century. Our approach is comparative (Tagliamonte 2002); we consider 3675 tokens from more than 80 speakers.

Our results indicate robust dialectal variegation in earlier CanE. The most enduring claim about this variety concerns homogeneity of urban centers. We provide empirical diachronic evidence for this: the strongest split in our data distinguishes urban Victoria and Belleville from rural Niagara and Eastern Ontario. This split is driven by *you see*, infrequent in rural locales but vigorous in the urban centers, where it competes with *you know*. At the same time, there is suggestive evidence that *eh* was not historically robust in the west: it is exceptional in the DCVE, used by few speakers, but in EOE it is attested across the sample with multiple uses per speaker. Contra expectations from the literature (e.g. Trudgill 2004), these findings suggest that regional dialect variation is a historical reality of CanE.