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A Real-time Analysis of the Variable Use of Expletive 'il' in Montréal French

Abstract

This paper examines the linguistic and social factors constraining the variable use of expletive *il* in Montréal French. Based on two corpora of spoken French recorded in 1971 and 2012, we study the evolution of the omission of *il* over 40 years. The analysis of the linguistic factors shows a general omission increase between 1971 and 2012, but within a stable language system, as this variable is subject to the same linguistic constraints despite the passage of time. However, while the general tendencies suggest that the omission is on the rise in the Montréal community, the apparent-time analysis of the 2012 data shows a reversal of this trend toward the standard variant (*il* realization).

A Real-Time Analysis of the Variable Use of Expletive *il* in Montréal French

Claire Djuikui Dountsop, Julie Auger and Mireille Tremblay*

1 Introduction

This article examines the variation related to the use of the expletive *il* ‘it’ in Montréal French, a variety in which, when it is overt, it is realized as [i] before a consonant and [j] before a vowel. Previous research on colloquial French (e.g. Frei 1929, Gadet 1989, Auger 1990) and even prescriptive publications (Grevisse and Goosse 2016) have reported that the expletive subject can be omitted in impersonal constructions such as (1).

- (1) a. *Il faut prendre l’ auto*
it is necessary take the car
‘It is necessary to take the car’
(Montréal 2012)
- b. \emptyset faut le faire,
 \emptyset is necessary it do
‘It is necessary to do it’
(Montréal 2012)

The alternance between the presence and the absence of *il* has not yet been explored for its own sake: while we know that expletive *il* often is omitted and that this omission is lexically conditioned (Culbertson and Legendre 2014), we do not know how prevalent *il* omission is, which linguistic factors condition it, and whether *il* omission represents a change in progress in Montréal French. The only study that provides an idea of its use by Montrealers is the preliminary analysis conducted by Djuikui Dountsop (2018) on the Montréal 1984 corpus (Thibault and Vincent 1990). Linguists who have worked on other varieties of French have found that the absence of *il* is favored by high-frequency verbs and main clauses (Zimmerman and Kaiser 2013, Culbertson and Legendre 2014, Widera 2017), a result also found in Montréal French (Djuikui Dountsop 2018). Previous studies also showed that expletive *il* use is associated with an ongoing change in the community studied, either towards more omission in Orléans, France (Widera 2017) or less omission in Montréal (Djuikui Dountsop 2018). The objective of this paper is to answer the following questions: what are the linguistic and social factors that influence expletive *il* omission? Is the omission a stable characteristic of Montréal French or is it associated with an ongoing change? Our goal is not only to confirm the change observed in Djuikui Dountsop (2018), but also to further document the direction of that change in Montréal French. Based on two corpora of spoken French recorded in 1971 and 2012, we study the evolution of the omission of *il* over 40 years. Following this introduction, we review previous work in section 2. Section 3 is devoted to the methodology adopted in our study. The results of the analyses are presented and discussed in section 4. Our conclusion follows in Section 5.

2 Previous studies

While in pro-drop languages such as Spanish, all subjects may be left empty, in so-called semi-pro-drop languages only null expletive subjects are allowed (Rizzi 1982, 1986). In some semi-pro-drop languages, such as Icelandic (2), both pure expletives and null semi-arguments (e.g., weather verbs) are allowed. In others, such as German and colloquial French (3), omission of the expletive with weather verbs is not permitted.

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- (2) Ø rignir í dag.
 Ø-3SG rain today
 'It's raining today.'
 (Sigurðardóttir & al. 2017)
- (3) *Ø pleut aujourd'hui.
 Ø-3SG rain today
 'It's raining today.'

In Modern French, as in German and Icelandic, *il* omission is a phenomenon associated mostly with colloquial speech. Previous descriptions of the phenomenon in French (e.g., Zimmermann & Kaiser 2013; Culbertson & Legendre 2014) focus on the linguistic constraints that license null expletive subjects in colloquial European French. Yet other researchers argue that social constraints also govern the use of this vernacular variant (Ø). This is what Widera (2017) noted in her diachronic study of Orléans French and Djuikui Dountsop (2018) in a synchronic study conducted in Montréal.

Lexical, morphosyntactic, and phonological factors favor (or disfavor) the absence of *il* in oral communication. Culbertson and Legendre (2014) showed that omission is higher in impersonal constructions with frequently used verbs. This result is confirmed by Djuikui Dountsop (2018), who finds that omission is highest with *falloir* 'be necessary', the most frequent verb in her corpus. Moreover, omission of the expletive is favored in main clauses (Zimmermann and Kaiser 2013, Culbertson and Legendre 2014, Widera 2017, Djuikui Dountsop 2018). This result is not surprising, given that it has often been shown that during an ongoing change, the new forms tend to spread more quickly in main clauses, as embedded ones are considered a conservative linguistic context (Givón 1976, Bybee 2002). Djuikui Dountsop (2018) further showed that in Montréal French, the omission of *il* is more frequent when the verb used is followed by a finite clause than by an infinitival one, and when the verb is used with an auxiliary.

With regard to social factors, in her study of ESLO 1 (1969) and ESLO 2 (2014), Widera (2017) showed that *il* omission is on the rise in the French community of Orléans where young people make more expletive omission than older speakers. This increase of *il* omission is also confirmed in real time. Interestingly, Djuikui Dountsop's (2018) apparent-time study of Montréal French revealed a change in the opposite direction: in the Montréal 1984 corpus, omission of the expletive appears to be on the decline, with young people disfavoring it. Her results showed that while there was no significant difference between men and women, the socio-economic category of speakers had an important influence on the use of the expletive, as speakers from the upper class made fewer omissions than those from the lower and middle classes. All these observations suggest that expletive *il* is a variable worthy of interest and further analysis.

3 Method

3.1 Corpora

The data analyzed in this research come from two Montréal corpora recorded in a forty-one years interval. The Sankoff-Cedergren corpus (Sankoff et al. 1976) was collected in 1971 and has a total of 120 speakers equally split between women and men. The speakers are between 15 and 85 years of age and come from different socioeconomic backgrounds. However, because 6 speakers did not use any impersonal constructions and 4 did not delete any expletive *il*, the present study focuses on the remaining 110 speakers who showed variable *il* omission. This sample represents 56 women and 54 men. The FRAN-HOMA corpus (Martineau and Séguin 2016, Blondeau et al. to appear), for its part, has a total of 50 speakers recorded in 2012 and 2013 with 24 women and 26 men. As in 1971, the speakers belong to different social strata and their age varies between 18 and 85 years old. The interest in exploring the two corpora lies in the fact that they are comparable both in terms of the context of interview and speakers' profile. In contrast, the 1984 corpus was characterized by an overrepresentation of the middle and upper classes.

3.2 Exclusions

Zimmerman and Kaiser (2013) and Culbertson and Legendre (2014) show that *il* omission is restricted to the following impersonal verbs: *falloir* ‘be necessary’, *sembler* ‘seem’, *rester* ‘remain’, *paraître* ‘appear’, *manquer* ‘lack’, *suffire* ‘suffice’, *valoir mieux* ‘be best to’. The latter five verbs were excluded from the analysis either because there were too few tokens or because *il* was categorically present in one corpus (Table 1).

Corpora	1971		2012	
	Omission	N	Omission	N
<i>manquer</i>	0	26	0	30
<i>paraître</i>	7	38	0	18
<i>rester</i>	0	53	3	40
<i>suffire</i>	3	13	0	0
<i>valoir mieux</i>	0	0	1	1
Total	10	130	4	89

Table 1: Verbs excluded from the analysis

3.3 Variable contexts

Only two verbs permit a variable and regular use of the *il* expletive in both corpora: *falloir* and *sembler*. Table 2 provides the rates of omission of expletive *il* with *falloir* and *sembler* in the 1971 and 2012 corpora. Overall, the rate of omission has increased by 20% from 1971 to 2012. The results show *falloir* is far more frequent than *sembler* and accounts for above 80% of the data (83% in 1971 and 93% in 2012). However, this higher frequency is associated with a higher rate of omission of *il* only in the 1971 corpus. It is not clear at this stage whether this neutralization of the lexical effect in 2012 is to be linked to the overall decrease¹ of the use of *sembler* between 1971 and 2012.

	1971		2012	
	% omission	N	% omission	N
Falloir	47% (781)	1 661	66% (676)	1024
Sembler	38% (127)	333	68% (55)	81
Total	46%	1994	66%	1105

Table 2: General trends in the omission of *il* in 1971 and 2012

In the case of *falloir*, expletive omission is permitted in four different contexts. Thus, the alternation between the 2 variants of the expletive is observable in the following configurations: A- Falloir + finite clause (4); B- Falloir + infinitival (5); C- Falloir + nominal complement (6); D- in the lexicalized expression *comme (il) faut* ‘appropriately’ (7).

- (4) Ah oui! moi Ø faut Ø je bouge
 ah yes me Ø is necessary COMP I move
 ‘Oh yes! I have to move’
 (Montréal 2012)

¹ The use of the verb *sembler* may well be declining as a result of another, unrelated, change in progress. For example, this decline could be attributed to the rise of other discourse markers such as *comme* or *genre*, which both mean ‘like’. In this case, the apparent increase of expletive omission with *sembler* would be an artefact and would result from the fact that in 2012 *sembler* is mainly used by older speakers, who tend to show higher rates of expletive omission.

- (5) Non Ø faut la garder comme ça
no Ø is necessary her keep like that
'No, we have to keep it like that'
(Montréal 2012)
- (6) Ø faudrait ma mère pour te dire ça
Ø would be necessary my mother for you say that
'It would take my mother to say that to you'
(Montréal 1971)
- (7) Il faut que je lise comme Ø faut
it is necessary that I read as Ø is necessary
'It is required that I read well'
(Montréal 1971)

Sembler occurs in similar structures as *falloir*, but also some that are specific to it. Contrary to *falloir*, it often contains a 1sg accusative clitic: *il me semble* 'it seems to me'. In our corpus, variable *il* omission is only possible when *me* is present. Use of *il semble* is very rare in our data, and omission of *il* is not observed in such cases, as shown in the example in (8).

- (8) *Ben je suis née à la maison il semblerait là.*
well I am born at the house it would seem there
'Well, I was born at home, it seems'
(Montréal 2012)

Thus, in the presence of *me*, the expletive can be absent in three major configurations: A- Me + *Sembler* + finite clause (9); B- Me + *Sembler* + Infinitival (10); C- in the lexicalized expression (*il*) *me semble* 'it seems to me' (11), often used as the end of a sentence, as an afterthought.

- (9) Ø *me semble que j' aurais été assez vieille*
Ø me seems that I would-have been enough old
'It seems to me that I would have been old enough.'
(Montréal 1971)
- (10) Ø *me semble de les voir tout seuls là.*
Ø me seems of them see completely alone there
'I can imagine them out there alone.'
(Montréal 1971)
- (11) *Mais c' était un temple là Ø me semble.*
but it was a temple there Ø me seems
'But, it was a temple there, it seems to me'
(Montréal 2012)

The next two tables show the rate of expletive omission with *falloir* and *sembler* in each of these contexts. Starting with *falloir*, Table 3 shows the effect of the type of complement on the rate of omission: finite complements have the highest rates of omission, closely followed by infinitival complement. Nominal complements and the lexicalized expression *comme il faut* show lower rates of expletive omission. Between 1971 and 2012 the rate of omission of the expletive increases in all but one context with *falloir*. The only exception is the lexicalized form *comme il faut*, which shows a non-significant decrease in the rate of omission (from 33% to 20%). All other contexts show an important increase (+19% when *falloir* is followed by a finite clause, +17% when it is followed by an infinitival clause, and +35% when followed by a nominal.)

As can be seen in Table 4, *sembler* shows an increase of 30% in the rate of expletive omission, an increase observable both in the productive *me semble* + finite clause construction and the lexicalized phrase. Due to its rarity in the 1971 corpus and its absence in the 2012 corpus, nothing can be said about *il* omission in the *sembler* + infinitive construction.

	1971		2012	
	% omission	N	% omission	N
Finite	52%	646	71%	610
Infinitival	47%	895	64%	354
Nominal	10%	78	45%	20
<i>Comme il faut</i>	33%	42	20%	40
Total	782 (47%)	1661	677 (66%)	1024

Table 3: Omission of *il* according to type of complement with *falloir*

	1971		2012	
	% omission	N	% omission	N
Finite	39%	221	69%	59
<i>Il me semble</i>	36%	107	64%	22
Infinitival	60%	5	--	0
Total	38%	333	68%	81

Table 4: Omission of *il* according to type of complement with *sembler*

Overall, comparing Tables 3 and 4, we can see that the two verbs are similar in that there is an increase in the rate of omission in almost all contexts. These results seem to indicate an overall increase of expletive omission in the community, but no change in the linguistic constraints. The remaining of the paper explores these two issues by conducting multivariate analyses of the linguistic and extralinguistic constraints of expletive omission. Given that there are only 59 tokens with *sembler* in 2012, the constructions with *sembler* have been set aside, and only constructions involving the verb *falloir* are considered.

3.4 Independent variables for the analysis of *falloir*

3.4.1 Linguistic factors

In this study, several independent variables are considered. The four linguistic factors taken into consideration are: type of complement, type of clause, the presence vs. absence of auxiliary, and polarity. For these analyses, *falloir* + nominal, and the lexicalized expression *comme il faut* were excluded. We thus considered only cases where *falloir* is followed by a finite or an infinitival clause.

Type of complement: It was mentioned above that the variable context is relatively dependent on the type of complement governed by the verb. Each occurrence was therefore coded for whether it appears with a finite and an infinitival complement.

Type of clause: Previous studies consider the type of clause as a relevant factor in considering the omission of the expletive *il*. The question is to determine which type, main or embedded, favors the absence of the expletive subject. Starting from the hypothesis that main clauses are more innovative than embedded clauses (Givón 1976, Hock 1991), this study will provide an opportunity to examine the influence of the main clauses on the omission of *il* in spoken French.

- (12) a. \emptyset *faudrait* *que tu ailles faire un tour*
 \emptyset would.be necessary that you go make a turn
 ‘You should go for a visit’
 (Montréal 2012)
- b. *Je pense que \emptyset faut pas essayer de refaire le monde.*
 I think that \emptyset is necessary not try to remake the world
 ‘I think we shouldn’t try to remake the world.’
 (Montréal 2012)

Presence of an auxiliary: The possible effect of tense is another factor for which we coded our data. While some tenses were too infrequent to warrant a statistical analysis, it was found that compound verb tenses had a general tendency to occur with the expletive *il*. In order to test whether the morphological paradigm had an influence on the presence vs. absence of the expletive, we then coded this factor group as follows: no auxiliary as in (4), auxiliary *avoir* ‘have’ (13a), and the semi-auxiliary *aller* ‘go’ used in the periphrastic future (13b).

- (13) a. \emptyset *a fallu* *que je fasse de gros efforts.*
 \emptyset has been necessary that I make of big efforts
 ‘I had to make a big effort’
 (Montréal 2012)
- b. \emptyset *va falloir* *que je lâche de lire.*
 \emptyset goes be necessary that I leave of read
 ‘I’m gonna have to give up reading.’
 (Montréal 1971)

Negative ‘pas’ and polarity: In this study, we first coded polarity (affirmative vs. negative) as a syntactic constraint. However, since the only attested negation with *falloir* is *pas* ‘not’ (14) in our corpora, we considered this as a factor group in the analysis, instead of polarity.

- (14) \emptyset *faut pas qu’ il me fasse manquer la messe.*
 \emptyset is necessary not that he me make miss the mass
 ‘I don’t want him to make me miss church.’
 (Montréal 1971)

3.4.2. Social factors

In this article, three social factors were considered in the multivariate analysis. These are age, gender, and socioeconomic class.

Age: Speakers were divided into three age groups: A- 15-29 years old, B- 30-49 years old, and C- 50 years old and above. The use of age as a relevant factor dates to classical sociolinguistics, which uses it to determine the dynamics of a language in both apparent and real time (Labov 2001, Labov et al. 2013). In the present study, we compare the apparent time in two corpora 40 years apart. Testing the different age groups in 1971 and 2012 will permit to determine if the omission of *il* is a stable characteristic of Montréal French.

Gender: In variationist sociolinguistics, it has been shown that women play an important role in language change: in a stable community, they use more standard variants than men, while in a context of change, they are the innovators of the ongoing change (Labov 1972). By comparing the two corpora, we want to determine whether the respective roles of men and women with respect to this variable have remained the same or whether they have changed.

Socioeconomic class: The participants were divided into three socioeconomic groups: the upper class, the intermediary class, and the lower class. Given that *il* omission is associated with informal speech, the expected result is that lower class speakers, who are more exposed to the informal register, will omit the expletive at higher rates than upper and intermediary class speakers.

4 *Falloir*: Results

We now turn to our multivariate analyses of *falloir*, focusing on the constructions for which we have the largest numbers of tokens: when it is followed by finite and infinitival clauses, for a total of 1,541 tokens for the 1971 corpus and 964 for the 2012 corpus. In order to determine the extent to which the system may have changed over time, we ran separate analyses for the two corpora with GoldVarb X (Sankoff et al. 2005). This will allow us to determine whether *il* omission has progressed over time, whether the grammatical conditioning for its omission has changed, and whether omission rates differ across social groups.

4.1 Linguistic conditioning

Our analysis of *falloir* tests four linguistic factors: complement type, presence and type of auxiliary, type of clause, and presence/absence of *pas*. The analysis performed yielded the results presented in Table 6. As we can see, all the factors analyzed have a significant influence on *il* omission.

Factor groups	1971 (N=1541)			2012 (N=964)		
	Input : 0.492			Input : 0.696		
	Weight	N	%	Weight	N	%
AUXILIARY						
No auxiliary	.515	736/1457	50.5	.533	647/913	70.9
Semi-auxiliary <i>aller</i>	.458	14/30	46.7	.461	9/13	69.2
Auxiliary <i>avoir</i>	.183	10/54	18.5	.044	4/38	10.5
Range	33			49		
TYPE OF CLAUSE						
Main	.538	678/1280	53.0	.572	564/754	74.8
Embedded	.320	82/261	31.4	.262	96/210	45.7
Range	22			31		
NEGATIVE ADVERB PAS						
Presence	.661	113/174	64.9	.640	62/78	79.5
Absence	.479	647/1367	47.3	.487	598/886	67.5
Range	18			15		
TYPE OF COMPLEMENT						
Finite	.545	337/646	52.2	.535	434/610	71.1
Infinitive	.468	423/895	47.3	.440	226/354	63.8
Range	8			10		

Table 6: Linguistic constraint(s) on the omission of the *il*

The input values for the 1971 and 2012 analyses confirm that *il* omission has progressed in Montréal French: whereas it was lightly disfavored in 1971, omission is clearly favored in the 2012 data. However, this is the only change that has taken place, as the effect of the different linguistic constraints has remained remarkably stable over the 40-year period. Indeed, *il* omission is slightly favored in the absence of an auxiliary and disfavored in its presence, particularly with the *avoir* auxiliary. The disfavoring effect of *avoir* can be attributed to the ban against onsetless syllables, as *il a fallu* is pronounced [jafaly] in Montréal French, a more optimal pronunciation than [afaly]. Not surprisingly, given the favorable effect of main clauses on language change, omission is more likely in main than in subordinate clauses; cf. Zimmermann and Kaiser (2013) and Widera (2017) for similar results in European French.

The presence absence of *pas* also favors *il* omission. While our initial intention was to test a possible effect of polarity, as we explained above, the fact that *pas* is the only negation observed in our corpus makes it impossible for us to determine whether the effect observed is due to polarity or to the *pas* item. Because *pas* appears most often with the present, 58% in the 1971 corpus and 85% in the 2012 corpus, we hypothesize that the favoring effect of *pas* is of a phonological nature. Specifically, we suggest that *faut pas*, with its two syllables, constitutes a phonological phrase that does not require the presence of *il* (compare, e.g., *Faut pas faire ça* ‘it’s not necessary to do that’ with *Faut faire ça* ‘it is necessary to do that’). The final factor group that significantly influence *il* omission is the type of complement clause: finite complement clauses slightly favor omission, while infinitival clauses slightly disfavor it.

In summary, the analysis shows a considerable omission increase between 1971 and 2012, but with a stable language system. Indeed, this variable is subject to the same linguistic constraints despite the passage of time. The next section turns to an analysis of the social conditioning.

4.2 *Falloir*: Social conditioning

In contrast to the multivariate analysis of linguistic factors presented in section 4.1, which excluded nominal complements and the lexicalized phrase *comme il faut*, for social factors, we considered all tokens of constructions with *falloir*. We thus analyzed a total of 2,685 tokens, 1,661 from the 1971 corpus and 1,024 from the 2012 corpus. Separate analyses were conducted in order to compare the trends in apparent time on the one hand and to assess the trajectory of *il* omission on the other hand. The results are reported in Table 7. Non-significant results are indicated in square brackets.

	1971 (N=1661)			2012 (N=1024)		
	Input = 0.467			Input = 0.624		
Factor groups	%	N	Weight	%	N	Weight
AGE						
Young (15-29)	57	808	.58	49	239	.37
Middle (30-49)	51	300	.57	60	468	.48
Older (50+)	30	553	.35	74	317	.64
<i>Range</i>	23			27		
SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS						
Intermediary	58	645	.59	61	408	[.48]
High	43	486	.46	57	295	[.49]
Low	37	530	.43	68	321	[.54]
<i>Range</i>	16			6		
GENDER						
Male	50	729	.52	63	541	[.51]
Female	45	932	.48	61	483	[.48]
<i>Range</i>	5			3		

Table 7: Social constraints on the omission of *il* in 1971 and 2012

According to the results in Table 7, all our three factor groups affect *il* omission in the 1971, but only Age is a significant factor group in 2012. In 1971, age is the most significant factor, with young and middle-aged speakers favoring *il* omission and older ones disfavoring it. Omission is (weakly) favored by men and speakers of the intermediary SEC. While age is also selected as a significant factor in 2012, the apparent time results reveal a very surprising pattern. Specifically, the 2012 pattern is the mirror image of the 1971: the oldest speakers are now the ones who favor *il* omission, while middle-aged speakers slightly disfavor it and young speakers disfavor it. This pattern is all the more surprising in view of the fact that overall *il* omission has increased in real time. This suggests that young people are now leading a change in the opposite direction toward a standard variant.

To summarize, the real-time results from section 3.3 show a general increase of expletive omission with both *sembler* and *falloir* between 1971 and 2012. This general trend is confirmed in section 4.1, which shows a general increase of *il* omission with *falloir*. In section 4.2, the apparent analysis of the 1971 corpus suggests a change in progress toward more expletive omission. In this context, the apparent time analysis of the 2012 corpus stands in sharp contrast since it indicates a change in progress toward less expletive omission. The next section shows how a combination of our two real-time corpora can help reconcile these two divergent results.

4.3 Making sense of the apparent and real time data

The apparent contradiction between the real time data, which, along with the 1971 apparent-time data, show an increase in the rate of expletive omission, and the 2012 apparent-time data which

show a decrease in the rate of omission stems from the fact that the oldest speakers in the 2012 corpus omit the expletive more often than the youngest speakers in the 1971 corpus. In the 1971 corpus, the youngest speakers, born between 1942 and 1956, omit the expletive at a mean rate of 57%. In the 2012 corpus, the speakers belonging to the 50+ age group, who were born between 1923 and 1961, omit the expletive at a mean rate of 74%.

Figure 1 presents the six age groups from the 1971 and 2012 corpora. It clearly shows two distinct trends about expletive omission: a first trend toward expletive omission, and a second trend against expletive omission. This figure also shows that, unlike the other two groups from the same corpus, the oldest speakers of the 2012 corpus participate in the change towards an increase in the rate of expletive omission.

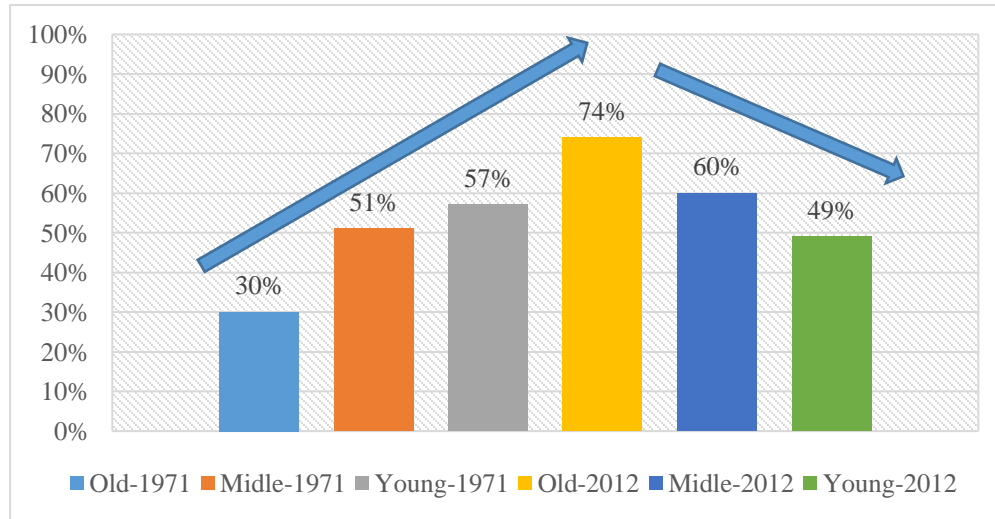


Figure 1: *il* omission in 1971 and 2012

One may wonder what prompted the change. It is possible that the change was triggered by the increased access to education and international influence in the post-war era, leading to Québec's Quiet Revolution, a period characterized by rapid social and political change. We leave this question to further research.

5 Conclusion

In this article, we have studied the use of expletive *il*, with the aim of determining the factors that condition its omission in Montréal French. Based on two corpora recorded in an interval of 40 years, we performed statistical analyses on impersonal constructions with *falloir* and *sembler*. The results show that the omission of *il* is influenced by linguistic and social factors.

Overall, the analyses show a general increase in the rate of omission in all contexts, but one, the lexicalized phrase *comme il faut*. A multivariate analysis of the verb *falloir* followed by a tensed or an infinitival clause showed that *il* omission is governed by a mixture of phonological and morphosyntactic constraints. Specifically, we propose the disfavoring effect of a vowel initial auxiliary results from the ban against onsetless syllables, while the favoring effect of the negative adverb *pas* is due to prosodic phrasing. This leaves the favoring effect of main clauses and finite complement clauses as true morphosyntactic constraints. Moreover, a multivariate analysis conducted on *falloir* shows that, while the general tendencies suggest that the omission is on the rise in the Montréal community, 46% in 1971 and 66% in 2012, an apparent-time analysis of the 2012 data shows a reversal of this trend toward the standard variant (*il* realization).

To conclude, previous studies of this community have often shown a shift either to the standard variant, as in the case of R pronunciation (Clermont and Cedergren 1979) or plural pronouns (Blondeau 2001), or to the non-standard variant in the case of consequence markers (Blondeau and

al. 2019). The real- and apparent-time results of expletive omission offers a third scenario: a change toward the non-standard variant (expletive omission) followed by a reversal of this trend toward the standard variant (*il* realization). Taken together, these results suggest that there is no system-wide change toward or away from the standard: each variable has its own dynamics, and patterns of language change can be multidirectional.

6 References

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