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Philip Comeau

Ruth King

Carmen L. LeBlanc

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# The Future's Path in Three Acadian French Varieties

## Abstract

In the present study, we investigate the expression of future temporal reference in three closely-related varieties of Atlantic Canada Acadian French, varieties which differ substantially in their sociolinguistic histories. The three communities (Baie Sainte-Marie, Nova Scotia; L'Anse-à-Canards, Newfoundland; and the Iles de la Madeleine, Quebec) have experienced varying types and degrees of dialect contact since their original settlement. At one end of the continuum, Baie Sainte-Marie had the most homogeneous settlement pattern and has been largely isolated from other French varieties, including other Acadian varieties, for several centuries. The Iles de la Madeleine is at the other extreme, involving the most heterogeneous mix of original settlers and a subsequent history which is defined by waves of dialect contact. In an intermediary position, L'Anse-à-Canard's settlement history is less heterogeneous than that of the Iles de la Madeleine but did involve late 19th century dialect contact with European French. The study is based on linguistic data for speakers born between 1873 and 1925, which constitute some of the earliest audio recordings for the varieties, along with sociohistorical data drawn from nominal censuses, cadastral maps, family genealogies, etc. Our goal is to determine the extent to which the grammaticalization path of the periphrastic future (which would ultimately overtake the inflected future as the majority variant in other spoken varieties) would be mirrored in the three communities. The results of multivariate analyses show, for Baie Sainte-Marie, the earliest stage in the evolution of the periphrastic future: it is still associated with imminent contexts. For L'Anse-à-Canards, we see the strong association of the variant with proximal contexts more generally. For these two communities, then, the use of the periphrastic future has not spread to distal contexts. Finally, for The Iles de la Madeleine, we find some weakening of the temporal distance effect and the emergence of a polarity constraint not attested for the other Acadian communities: negative utterances are associated with the inflected future, a finding resembling that found in variationist research on varieties of Laurentian French, wherein the periphrastic future has become the general marker of futurity. We explain the acquisition of the polarity constraint in terms of contact with speakers of Laurentian varieties. In sum, the historical trajectory of the future variable is reflected in intercommunity variation for the earliest linguistic attestations for spoken Acadian French.

# The Future's Path in Three Acadian French Varieties

Philip Comeau, Ruth King and Carmen L. LeBlanc\*

## 1 Introduction

The present study involves systematic comparison of three varieties of Atlantic Canada Acadian French which differ considerably in their sociodemographic histories with regard to degree and type of dialect contact. It is part of a program of research which investigates systematically the linguistic consequences of dialect contact across time and space, rather than simply invoking contact-based explanations in a post-hoc manner. Here we focus on the expression of future temporal reference, a phenomenon which has undergone considerable variation and change in the history of the French language and which has been the object of a number of variationist studies. We are thus able to compare our own results with the historical record and with the sociolinguistic literature for French varieties which shows similarities to and differences from Acadian patterns.

The article is organized as follows. We first describe the sociolinguistic history of Acadian French and the three speech communities with particular reference to dialect contact. We next outline the history of the future temporal reference variable and its variants. The methodology of the present analysis is outlined, relevant factors which might condition variation presented, and appropriate statistical tests performed. The results are given and interpreted in terms of what set of conditioning factors provides the best account of the data for each variety. Based on both the relative proportion of variants expressing future temporal reference and these linguistic conditioning factors, we conclude that the three varieties fall along a continuum from most to least conservative in the trajectory of change, a continuum which parallels their respective histories of dialect contact.

## 2 Acadian French

### 2.1 Overview of the History of the Variety

Acadian French refers to (often marginalized) varieties of French spoken in the Canadian provinces of New Brunswick (NB), Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), Nova Scotia (NS), Prince Edward Island (PEI) and parts of eastern Quebec (QC), shown in Figure 1. It differs from the more well-known North American variety, Laurentian French, in part due to the different European origins of the colonists. The majority of Acadian settlers came predominantly from rural areas in the provinces of the *centre-ouest* of France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, whereas Laurentian colonists were more diversified, with substantial numbers of settlers from north of the Loire Valley.<sup>1</sup> Another reason for differences between the two varieties is the relative isolation of Acadians from contact with other Francophones and from the normative influences of a French language education system, isolation which lasted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century for some varieties and which continues to the present day for others (Flikeid 1994). For example, Acadian varieties preserve, to varying degrees, archaic 1<sup>st</sup> person pronominal use (e.g., *je parlons* 'we speak') and 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural verbal morphology (e.g., *ils parlont* 'they speak'), both of which were in decline in colloquial speech in France by the

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<sup>1</sup>The label Laurentian French refers to varieties that have their origins in early settlements along the banks of the St. Lawrence River, including varieties now spoken in Quebec, Ontario and in western Canada. The labels Acadian and Laurentian French refer to historically and structurally distinct varieties and replace the homogenizing label Canadian French.

end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (King, Martineau and Mougeon 2011). This is also true for the future temporal reference variable under study here since one variant, the inflected future, has been shown to be in decline in Laurentian French (e.g., Poplack and Dion 2009) but to remain in robust use in conservative Acadian varieties spoken in PEI and NL (King and Nadasdi 2003).

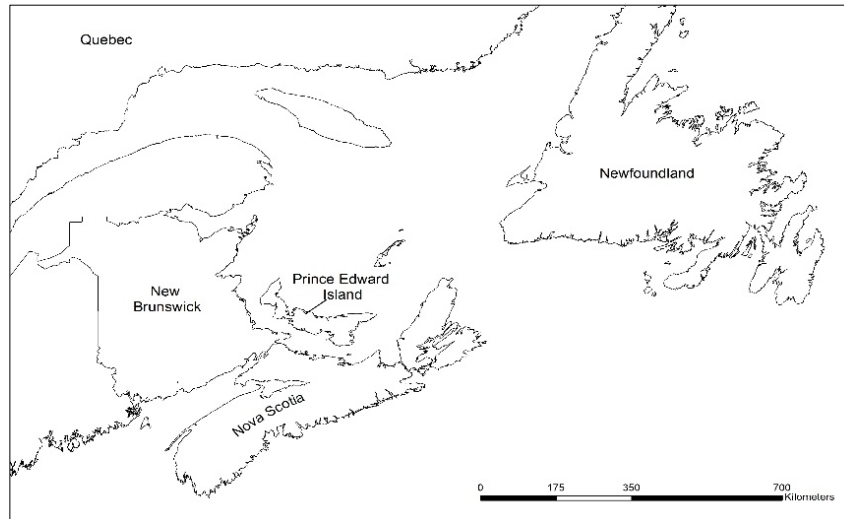


Figure 1. The provinces of eastern Canada.

## 2.2 The Three Speech Communities

An important source of variation in Acadian French, then, is degree of contact with supralocal varieties of French over the centuries, stemming from the forced removal of the Acadian people during the British Expulsion of 1755–59. The post-Expulsion dispersal of the Acadian people and subsequent years in exile involved dialect (and language) contact of various sorts, with the return from exile beginning in the 1760s and lasting several decades. Ross and Deveau (1992) document the fact that southwest Nova Scotia saw the return of a significant proportion of former inhabitants of the original Acadian colony at Port-Royal along with a few other pre-Expulsion settlements; it has remained one of the most homogenous of Acadian regions to this day. On the other hand, Acadian settlements in other regions involved complex immigration patterns and population movements. For instance, settlement of Chéticamp on Cape Breton Island in present-day NS involved a mix of Acadians who had been returned to France, others from PEI, and still others who had spent time in the French islands of St-Pierre and Miquelon off the southern coast of NL (Chiasson 1986, Ross and Deveau 1992). Beginning in 1765 and in fact continuing until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the previously-uninhabited Iles de la Madeleine would become a place of refuge for Acadians who had gone into hiding during the Expulsion, as well as for Acadians who had been exiled in Miquelon, the New-England colonies, and Europe. They were later joined by Acadians from the Chéticamp and Ile-Madame areas of NS (Carbonneau 2009, Fortin and Larocque 2003). From about the same time, Acadians also fled to the Baie St-Georges area of western NL, with small waves of immigration from the Chéticamp area in particular continuing until the mid-1870s (Brosnan 1948, Mannion 1977). In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Acadian immigration to NL included several families from the Iles de la Madeleine (Hubert 1926, Naud 1994). In addition, some parts of Baie St-Georges, in particular the Port-au-Port peninsula, saw significant late 19<sup>th</sup> century settlement by metropolitan French from Brittany and Normandy, creating a dialect contact situation not found elsewhere in Atlantic Canada (Biays 1952, La Morandière 1962). Today, many descendants of the early Acadian settlers live in francophone enclaves in eastern Canada.

Our broader research program examines five Acadian communities, shown in Figure 2, which differ in terms of degree of dialect contact. For the present study, we target three of these speech communities. We take the Baie Sainte-Marie (BSM) variety in southwest NS as our baseline: due to dialect isolation across several centuries, including the immediate post-Expulsion years, it is

arguably closest to the variety spoken by Acadian settlers to the New World. This is borne out by the results by previous research on a number of morphosyntactic variables (e.g., the expression of past temporal reference (Comeau, King and Butler 2012) and the use of both the present and imperfect subjunctive mood (Comeau 2011). For Baie Sainte-Marie, our results are based primarily on data for the community of Grosses Coques, which also provided the data for our earlier research. By way of comparison, we target two communities which partially share a history of population movements: those of the north side of the island of Cap-aux-Meules in the Iles de la Madeleine (IM) and the western Newfoundland community of L'Anse-à-Canards (AC).

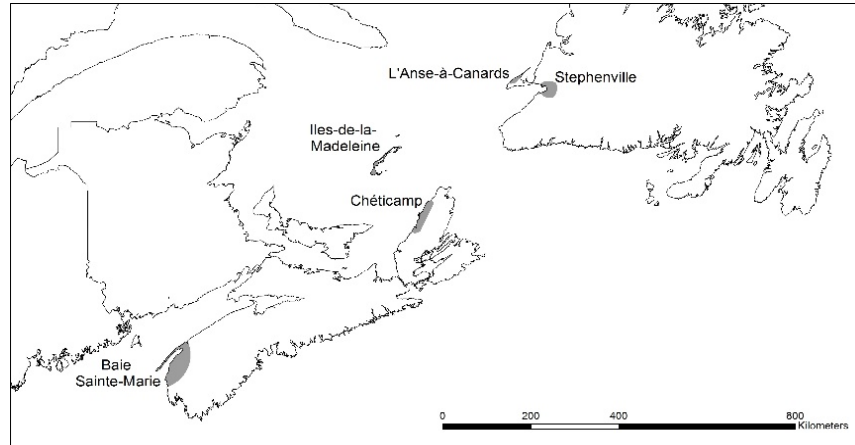


Figure 2. The Acadian speech communities for the present study.

The results of detailed analysis of sociodemographic data drawn from the NL nominal census of 1911, the NS and QC censuses of 1901, the parish registers of Iles de la Madeleine, the community cadastral map of L'Anse-à-Canards (NL) for 1900 (Government of Newfoundland), and genealogical history (<http://automatedgenealogy.com/census/>; <http://ADDNL>) are summarized in Table 1. It shows that the proportion of heads of family by community and settlement group varied along the lines suggested in the historical overview provided above.

Community	Acadian	Other French	English/Other
Iles de la Madeleine (IM)	384 (77%)	65 (13%)	52 (10%)
L'Anse-à-Canards (AC)	41 (67%)	17 (28%)	3 (5%)
Baie Sainte-Marie (BSM)	299 (89%)	13 (4%)	25 (7%)

Table 1: Ethnolinguistic origins of head of families for each speech community, 1901.

Notice that the BSM population was comprised almost entirely of Acadians while AC and IM residents included a much higher proportion of other French residents. In the case of AC, “other French” refers to settlers from Brittany and Normandy while in the case of IM, “other French” involves a mixed population from Québec and also from France and its overseas territories.

### 3 Future Temporal Reference

#### 3.1 History of the Variable

The main variants for the expression of future temporal reference are the inflected (1) and the periphrastic future (2):

- (1) *Bientôt il sera comme grand-père.* (BSM-18)  
soon he be.FUT.3SG like grand-father  
‘Soon he will be like Grandfather.’

- (2) On va être trois bon-nes jeunesse-s ensemble. (IM-05)  
 one go.PRS.3SG be.INF three good-F.PL youth-PL together  
 ‘We are going to be three good young ones together.’

A third variant, the futurate present, is illustrated in (3). However, this variant was too infrequent in our corpora to be included in quantitative analysis.

- (3) Je le fais la semaine qui vient. (AC-02)  
 1SG it do.PRS.1SG the.F week which come.PRS.3SG  
 ‘I’m doing it next week.’

The Old French inflected future is found in the earliest documents for the language; for instance, it is found in the *Serments de Strasbourg*. The periphrastic future is attested from the Middle French period, originally as a verb of spatial movement with the verb *aller* ‘to go’ followed by an infinitive and a temporal adverb. Fleischman (1982:84) notes that the grammaticalization of the periphrastic future was gradual, with temporal anchoring shifting from the adverbial to the periphrastic form to mark imminence. Flydal (1943:39–40) suggests that it was only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that the periphrastic form went from indicating simply imminence to indicating a proximal future. From this period onward, use of the periphrastic future increases to eventually become the dominant marker of futurity in most varieties of French.

The dominance of the periphrastic future over the other variants has been found in variationist studies for several varieties of contemporary French, including Deshaies and Laforge 1981 for Quebec City, Poplack and Turpin 1999 and Poplack and Dion 2009 for Ottawa-Hull, Wagner and Sankoff 2011 for Montreal, and Grimm 2015 for smaller Franco-Ontarian communities near the Quebec border. However, prior research for three varieties of Acadian French, two spoken in PEI and one in NL, show quite different results: use of the inflected future is robust and the periphrastic future is preferred only with proximal events King and Nadasdi 2003.

### 3.2 Methodology of the Present Study

Our focus is on the speech of the oldest Acadians for whom spoken-language data is available through the archival recordings and sociolinguistic corpora mentioned above. This speaker sample, comprising both males and females born between 1873 and 1925, arguably acquired their native variety before English had made inroads in the communities. Whereas IM has always had very limited contact with English, AC and BSM have since seen substantial language contact from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century on; we were thus able to focus exclusively on the effects of dialect contact by concentrating on this age group. As in prior research on the variable, we are concerned with the forms of the future only in future temporal reference contexts. For example, while the variants may be used to express habituality, such use falls outside the variable context.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, we excluded forms of the future in imperatives and, following standard practice for sociolinguistic variables, fixed expressions.

First and foremost among potential conditioning factors is proximity to the moment of speech: the periphrastic future is traditionally associated with events taking place close to the moment of speech while the inflected future is associated with events at some remove from the moment of speech (Grevisse and Goose 1993). While some variationist studies of Laurentian French have found a small effect for proximity on variant choice (e.g., Poplack and Dion 2009, Poplack and Turpin 1999), prior studies of Acadian French have found this to be the most important constraint (King and Nadasdi 2003). We broke down this factor group as follows: within the minute, hour and day, within the week, longer than a week, within a month, longer than a month, longer than a year, continual and indeterminate. These finely-grained distinctions allowed us to test for imminence and a subset of proximal contexts: a statistically significant result for “within the minute” and “within the hour” versus more distal contexts would provide evidence of remnants of the earliest functions of the periphrastic future in the language.

It is also important to consider the potential effect of polarity, first commented on by Seutin

<sup>2</sup>Thus our research is not comparable with that of Chevalier (1996) for southeast New Brunswick Acadian French, since she considered morphological forms of the future expressing both futurity and habituality.

(1975) for Laurentian French; discussion of such an effect is negligible in grammatical commentary across the centuries. However, all studies of Laurentian varieties conducted to date have found use of the periphrastic future to be almost totally absent from negative contexts (e.g., Deshaies and Laforge 1981, Grimm 2015, Poplack and Turpin 1999). Such an effect was not found in prior work for Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland Acadian varieties (King and Nadasdi 2003).

Examining these two factor groups, temporal distance and polarity, allows us to place each variety along the grammatical trajectory of the expression of future temporal reference. Do they retain traces of imminence conditioning variation? Do they show strong conditioning for proximity to the moment of speech? Do they have the periphrastic future as the general expression of futurity? Is there also a significant effect for sentential polarity? In addition, we considered the remaining linguistic constraints found in the literature for the variable for which we had sufficient data: adverbial specification (e.g., Poplack and Turpin 1999), grammatical person/number (e.g., Grimm 2010), *quand / mais que* 'when' clauses (e.g., Chevalier 1996) and contingency in *si*-clauses (e.g., Wagner and Sankoff 2011).

#### 4 Results

The overall distribution of the two variants is found in Table 2. The proportion of inflected future (hereafter IF) found in the BSM and IM communities is higher than reported for Laurentian French in the variationist literature. While the proportion for AC is smaller in comparison (24%), as we will see below, this is due to the high proportion of proximal future contexts in the corpus and their overwhelming association with the periphrastic future (hereafter PF). We will return to inter-community differences in our discussion of linguistic constraints on variant choice.

Community	Inflected Future		Periphrastic Future	
Baie Sainte-Marie	257	38%	425	62%
L'Anse-à-Canards	67	24%	209	76%
Îles de la Madeleine	356	39%	557	61%

Table 2: Overall distribution of the variants.

In Table 3, we present the results for three independent multivariate analyses, one for each community, which measure the effects of the linguistic factor groups on the selection of the PF variant.<sup>3</sup> We begin with the results for IM since we were able to test all of the factor groups given the high number of tokens for this community. We see that four factor groups are selected as significant: polarity, temporal distance, grammatical person/number and *quand/mais que* clause. The results show that PF is strongly disfavoured in negative contexts and strongly favoured for events taking place within the minute but disfavoured in more distal contexts<sup>4</sup>. As for grammatical person/number, Fleischman (1982) suggests that PF may be preferred with 1<sup>st</sup> person singular subjects as it is linked to high speaker involvement in the event. However, in the variationist literature this hypothesis is not supported. In our case, while the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular has an almost neutral effect on variant choice, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> persons plural have a favouring effect on use of PF. With regards to 2<sup>nd</sup> person subjects, Table 3 shows that PF is disfavoured. While Poplack and Turpin (1999) found that formal *vous* favoured IF (which we consider an indication that IF is associated with formal style in Laurentian French), both 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular and plural disfavour PF in our data; there is no clear explanation as to why this pattern obtains. As for clause type, the presence of a *quand/mais que* clause disfavours PF while its absence has a near-neutral effect. This result mirrors what was found for PEI and NL by King and Nadasdi (2003). Turning to BSM, we see that polarity is not selected as significant but that proximal events favour the PF. In the case of

<sup>3</sup>For BSM, there were only 132 tokens of the variable in the archival recordings. We thus report the analysis of Comeau 2011, 2015 which included a number of speakers younger than those for IM and AC. However, age was not selected as significant in this earlier study as a predictor of variant choice and the hierarchy of factors within the groups was the same as for the BSM archival data (the latter based on percentages of tokens) and those obtained by Comeau (2011, 2015) (through multivariate analysis).

<sup>4</sup>Indeterminate tokens were excluded from this factor group.

distal contexts, the data were coded across a fine continuum, as noted above, and as distance from the moment of speech progressed, the use of PF went from disfavoured to an almost neutral effect (.31–.49). For this community, grammatical person/number and *quand/mais que* clauses were not included in the analysis due to interactions in the data. Finally, for AC, we see that polarity is not selected as significant but that proximal events very strongly favour PF. Grammatical person/number was not selected as significant while *quand/mais que* clauses was poorly distributed and presented a knock-out.

	Iles de la Madeleine Input 0.631 N: 913	Baie Sainte-Marie Input 0.650 N: 682	L'Anse-à-Canards Input 0.904 N: 276
POLARITY			
Affirmative	.59	67% (547/813)	n.s. 63% (381/607)
Negative	.05	10% (10/100)	n.s. 59% (44/75)
	<i>Range 54</i>		
TEMPORAL DISTANCE			
Within the minute	.76	84% (203/241)	.68 82% (84/103)
Within the hour	.50	65% (49/76)	.92 99% (103/104)
Within the day	.47	62% (134/216)	.36 49% (22/45)
Continual	.31	39% (13/33)	n/a .02 16% (6/38)
Distal	.30	44% (118/268)	.31 – .49 .14 24% (13/55)
	<i>Range 46</i>		<i>Range 37</i>
			<i>Range 78</i>
GRAMMATICAL PERSON/NUMBER			
3rd plural	.68	62% (13/21)	n.s. 50% (7/14)
1st plural	.62	75% (144/193)	n.s. 65% (15/23)
1st singular	.53	71% (231/327)	n.s. 87% (90/103)
3rd singular	.50	52% (110/210)	n.s. 62% (50/81)
2 <sup>nd</sup> singular	.36	43% (53/123)	n.s. 81% (38/47)
2 <sup>nd</sup> plural	.11	15% (6/39)	n.s. 25% (2/8)
	<i>Range 57</i>		
QUAND/MAIS QUE CLAUSES			
Absence	.52	63% (523/827)	- 76% (203/269)
Same clause as PF	.33	39% (19/49)	k.o. 0% (0/0)
Diff. clause than PF	.33	41% (15/37)	- 86%(6/7)
	<i>Range 19</i>		
Factors not selected as significant: adverbial specification and contingency <i>si</i> -clauses.			

Table 3: Multivariate analyses for linguistic factor groups.

Across communities, then, we see that grammatical person/number and *quand/mais que* clauses and polarity are only selected as significant for IM. Finally, adverbial specification and contingency are never selected as significant. In the remainder of the paper, then, we will therefore focus on the results for temporal distance and polarity. In all three communities, temporal distance favours PF in the most proximal contexts with almost identical hierarchies of factors within the factor group.



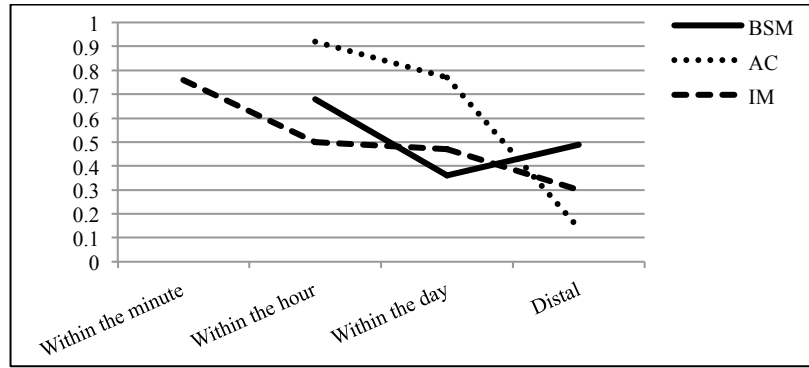


Figure 3: Factor weights for temporal distance by community.

Figure 3 shows the temporal distance breaks (within the minute, within the hour, etc.) along the x-axis and the factor weights for the respective GoldVarb runs along the y-axis. In the case of IM, we see a gentle slope: PF is favoured within the minute, there is a neutral factor weight for within the hour, and beyond that point PF is disfavoured in the more distal events. As for AC, PF is favoured in all three proximal contexts, within the minute, the hour and the day, as can be seen by the factor weights for these contexts which are all quite high. Beyond that point, we see a much steeper slope than the one for IM, showing that PF has not yet expanded to distal contexts for AC. In the case of BSM, PF is also highly favoured in imminent contexts, but as we can see for within the day, IF is actually favoured and has yet to cede ground to PF in this context.

Figure 4 below illustrates the different stages along the grammaticalization path for the periphrastic future in relation to the three Acadian varieties. As has been argued in the literature, the grammaticalization of PF involves it first being used in imminent contexts, then ‘bleeding’ into a ‘general proximity’ context, followed by expanding across the entire system. As the results in Table 3 indicate, IM retains a temporal distance effect but the PF has already made headway across the board. For AC, we see that the PF functions almost entirely to mark both imminent and proximal contexts whereas distal contexts favour IF. Finally, for BSM, we see that PF functions principally to mark imminence and that IF has not yet ceded ground to the PF in other proximal contexts.

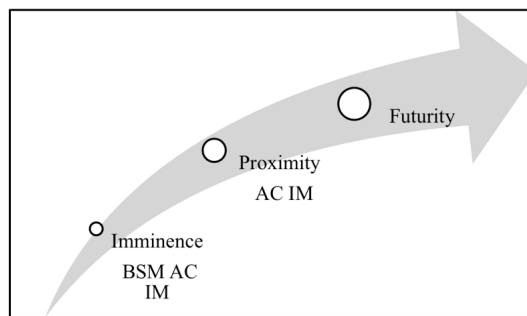


Figure 4: The grammaticalization of the PF in three Acadian varieties.

We turn now to the polarity effect for IM, where, as we have seen, the PF is strongly disfavoured in negative contexts while both variants may be used in affirmative contexts, where IF accounts for 33% of the data. By comparison, in Ottawa-Hull (Poplack and Dion 2009), IF represents 9% of the data in affirmative contexts and in Montréal (Wagner and Sankoff 2011) it represents 13.5%. However, when we consider the data for Laurentian speakers born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century who make up Poplack and Dion’s (2009) *Récits du français québécois d’autrefois* corpus, we see that use of IF is at a rate of 32% in affirmative contexts, very similar to that found here for IM. Data for younger IM speakers will be necessary to determine whether the polarity constraint will follow a similar path to the one found in Laurentian French.

In order to account for the present results regarding the emergence of the polarity constraint in the IM variety, we consider three parameters which impacted the degree and type of dialect contact across communities. These factors involve the varieties in contact at the time of settlement, the length of time it took for the population of each community to stabilize, and further dialect contact that took place following the initial settlement.

	Baie Sainte-Marie	L'Anse-à-Canards	Iles de la Madeleine
Initial Varieties in Contact	Acadian	Acadian	Acadian, French
Length of Settlement	Short	Short	Long
Post-Settlement Dialect Contact	n.a.	French	Acadian, French, Laurentian

Table 4: Sociohistorical profiles of the communities.

Notice first that the initial settler groups for BSM and AC were all Acadians whereas the initial settler groups for IM also included a small contingent directly from France and its overseas territories. As for the amount of time it took for the population to stabilize, it involved a period of only a few years in the case of AC and BSM, but in the case of IM, as many as three generations separate the first arrival of settlers and the arrival of the remaining groups of Acadians. In general, the longer the duration of settlement, the more intense was dialect contact. Lastly, and importantly for the present study, we considered post-settlement contact with other dialects for which there are clear intercommunity differences. As we saw above, BSM has had very little dialect contact, remaining isolated from other francophone communities. AC, on the other hand, saw the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century arrival of settlers directly from France, creating a dialect contact situation not found elsewhere. In the case of IM, we may in fact conclude that its sociolinguistic history is defined by dialectal contact. It is also the only community with direct contact with speakers of Laurentian French. We argue that this particular dialect contact situation set in motion the addition of polarity to the grammar of constraints governing future temporal reference. The results also suggest that the grammaticalization of PF may be more advanced in IM as the temporal distance constraint is weaker: it is now the third-ranked constraint on variant choice for this community whereas for AC and BSM, it remains the strongest.

## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, we have argued in this paper that careful consideration of the historical sociodemographic profiles of individual speech communities is central to explaining this case of intercommunity variation in the expression of future temporal reference. Finely-grained analysis of the social factors which differentiate the communities (the dialectal origin of the initial settlers, the length of settlement, and any post-settlement dialect contact) allows us to account for different linguistic systems, specifically the fact that the three varieties are at different stages in the grammaticalization of the PF variant.

Once we consider these results in light of contemporary research on Laurentian varieties along with the historical record for European French, we recognize that the Acadian results provide a mirror on the history of the variable elsewhere. Finally, we have shown the general utility of systematically investigating the type and extent of dialect contact in accounting for intercommunity variation.

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Philip Comeau  
 Département de linguistique  
 Université du Québec à Montréal  
 Montréal, Canada  
 comeau.philip@uqam.ca

Ruth King  
 Department of Languages, Literature and Linguistics  
 York University  
 Toronto, Canada  
 rking@yorku.ca

Carmen L. LeBlanc  
Department of French  
Carleton University  
Ottawa, Canada  
*Carmen.LebLANC@carleton.ca*