

Old and new diversities in the diaspora:
The case of Haitians in Toronto

This paper is based on the *Toronto Haitian English* project, which aims at documenting the variety of English that Haitians speak in the highly multicultural city of Toronto and identifying typical phonetic features found in their English. Sociolinguistic research in Canada has recently focused on ethnolinguistic variation in Toronto English and more generally on how Canadian English is changing, and to what extent immigrant communities established in the country play a part in this change and how they contribute to its linguistic diversity (e.g. Hoffman & Walker 2010, Nagy et al. 2013, Baxter & Peters 2013). This paper examines phonetic variation in the English spoken by a heterogeneous group of Haitians living in Toronto, which is in contact with various forms of Canadian English. The data comes from sociolinguistic interviews conducted with 24 Haitians and concerns two categories of English speakers: 1. informants who live in Toronto or in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and were born in Haiti, both their parents are Haitian and their native tongue is *not* English and 2. informants who live in Toronto or in the GTA and were born in Toronto or elsewhere in Canada, both their parents are Haitian and their native tongue or dominant language *is* English or they have native-like competence in English. The realisations of some phonological variables like dental fricatives, intervocalic phoneme /t/ and phoneme /ɹ/ and their correlation with some social variables like age, gender, occupation, language background, and number of years in Toronto will be presented. Statistical results reveal that Haitian speakers who were born in Haiti and learnt English as a foreign language exhibit high intra-speaker variation: this variation reflects variants characteristic of Standard Canadian English such as a tap [ɾ] for the phoneme /t/ although its voiceless stop [t] counterpart also appears in their speech. The range of phonetic variation for the phoneme /ɹ/ is also particularly interesting and displays the following realisations: the alveolar approximant [ɹ] found typically in English, the voiced uvular fricative [ʁ] often observed in francophone speakers of English and the labio-velar approximant [w] present in Haitian Creole, although the situation of Haitian Creole <ɹ> is a complex one (Nikiema & Bhatt 2005). Other phonetic variants produced by Haitians match those found in the speech of Anglophone Caribbean speakers also established in the Toronto area; other variants may signal influence from Haitian Creole or French. Haitian speakers whose English is their mother tongue were found to produce a majority of mainstream Canadian English features. Haitians' English phonology, especially for speakers in category 1, reflects their sociocultural and sociolinguistic situation of "in-betweens" in the Canadian diaspora (Madibbo & Maury 2001), exhibiting a sense of identity preservation with respect to the host society and towards their 'Haitianity'. Yet, there is no suggestion that a Haitian English variety is emerging in the Toronto area, which may be explained by the current lack of strong community ties and a relatively young settlement in the city, and also due to individual socio-historical and migratory trajectories.

References

- Baxter, L. & Peters, J. 2013. Black English in Toronto: A new dialect? *Proceedings from Methods XIV*.
- Hoffman, M. F. & Walker, J. A. 2010. Ethnolects and the city: Ethnic orientation and linguistic variation in Toronto English. *Language Variation and Change* 22(1): 37-67.
- Madibbo, A. and Maury, J. 2001. L'immigration et la communauté franco-torontoise: le cas des jeunes. *Francophonies d'Amérique* 12: 113-122.
- Nikiema, E. & Bhatt, P. 2005. R diphthongs in French lexifier creoles: Evidence from Haitian. *Toronto Working Papers in Linguistics* 24: 45-63.
- Nagy, N., Chocie, J. & Hoffman, M. 2013. Analyzing ethnic orientation in the quantitative sociolinguistic paradigm. In L. Hall-Lew & M. Yaeger-Dror, Special issue of *Language and Communication: New perspectives on the concept of ethnolect*.