

**Obsolescence and innovation in discourse-pragmatic change:
The view from Canada**

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Research on discourse-pragmatic features has typically focused on their textual and interpersonal functions (e.g. Aijmer, 2002; Jucker & Ziv, 1996; Schiffrin, 1987); however, considerable research has established that they also carry social meaning such as speaker age, sex, social class and education (e.g. Denis & Tagliamonte, to appear; Dubois, 1992; Pichler, 2009; Pichler & Levey, 2011). My research on socially stratified corpora of spoken Canadian dialects is beginning to map the nature of these combinatorial factors. I began by focusing on right periphery items and constructions (Tagliamonte, 2006), including phenomena such as general extenders (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2010) and utterance final particles (Denis & Tagliamonte, to appear). These analyses have revealed dramatic patterns of obsolescence and innovation across the 20th and into the 21st century. Further, a contrast between major varieties of English as well as urban vs. rural dialects has emerged exposing variegated developmental patterns and therefore new insights into mechanisms of discourse pragmatic change (Tagliamonte, to appear; Tagliamonte & Denis, 2010).

In this presentation, I extend this research program to consider forms on the left periphery, including *well*, (1), *so*, (2), *like* (3) and others, e.g. *oh*, *ah*, *I mean*, *anyway* etc.

- (1) *Well*, some of the girls, their home was in North Bay. (KL, F, 89)
- (2) *So*, we lost our stripes, we lost a mickey. (NB, M, 89)
- (3) *Like*, you don't find this stuff in Canada. (SP, F, 16)
- (4) *Oh* it was alright. I was cabin-girl. (TS, F, 93)
- (5) *Ah*, he didn't take that lightly. (KL, M, 20)

Preliminary analyses suggest that this area of the language is also undergoing substantial reorganization. For example, *well* and *oh* tend to be an older person's usage, while *like*, increases among youth, particularly women. In contrast, the most frequent form, *so*, seems to operate outside social evaluation and is used across the age span, at least in some locales.

The fact that both change and stability is evident in the data as well as varying social, interactional and other influences suggests that discourse-pragmatic variation offers multiplex insights into interaction, grammar and community. I will explore these tantalizing issues in my presentation.

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