Yes-No Questions in Acadian French

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This study involves comparison of Atlantic Canada Acadian French varieties which differ in their sociodemographic histories. The data come from archival and sociolinguistic corpora recordings for four communities: Baie Sainte-Marie, which has a long history of dialect isolation; Chéticamp and Iles-de-la-Madeleine, which have had close historical ties; and L'Anse-à-Canards, which saw relatively late 19th century settlement involving Acadian settlers with origins in Chéticamp and Iles-de-la-Madeleine along with a northwestern France founder group.

The history of French yes-no questions has involved no fewer than seven variants, with those illustrated below robustly present in our Acadian varieties. 1 involves pronominal inversion (P-INV); 2 rising intonation (INT); and 3 the *ti* question particle (TI).

1   Voudrais-   tu   une   tasse de café?   (AC-03)
        want.COND.2SG you.SG INDF.F.SG cup   of coffee
        'Would you like a cup of coffee?'

2   Vos   garçons sont   venus?   (CH-02)
        your.PL sons   be.PRS.3PL came
        'Your sons have come?'

3   Le   puit est   ti dehors icitte?   (BSM-13)
        DEF.M.SG well be.PRS.3SG   Q outside here
        'Is the well outside?'

P-INV and INT can be traced to Old French while TI is the result of 16th century reanalysis of the third-person singular subject pronoun *i(l)* and a preceding epenthetic [t] in complex inversion constructions (Brunot & Bruneau 1969; Foulet 1921).

Of a total of 1362 tokens extracted for analysis, P-INV is limited to the second person, arguably its last bastion in spoken French. The overall results contrast with Québec French in that further reanalysis of the Q particle ([ti] > [ty], i.e., TU) has not taken place (cf. Léard 1996) and TI is indeed compatible with negation as in 4 (cf. Vinet 2000).

4   Elle était   ti pas rose?   (MA-13)
        she be.IMP.3SG Q NEG pink
        'Wasn't it pink?'

A number of linguistic and social variables were tested in a series of mixed-effects Rbrul analyses for each community. No social variables were selected as significant. The main findings for the linguistic variables are as follows. TI is found throughout the verbal paradigm only for L'Anse-à-Canards, reminiscent of the northern Metropolitan French pattern of the late 19th century (Renchon 1967). For the remaining communities, TI is strongly favoured in third-person contexts but entirely absent from second-person contexts. INT is favoured in negative yes-no questions for Chéticamp, Iles-de-la-Madeleine and L'Anse-à-Canards but not to the extent that has been found for Québec French, where the effect is categorical (Elsig 2009). However, no polarity effect is found for Baine Sainte-Marie. To account for this case of interdialectal variation, we consider the semantico-pragmatic content of negative questions, specifically whether they are information-seeking or confirmatory, i.e., either affirmative or negative confirmation-seeking (Borillo 1979, Ladd 1981). Where there were sufficient negative tokens, our analysis revealed a relationship between TI and negative questions which are affirmative confirmation-seeking (clearly seen for Baie Sainte-Marie and to a somewhat lesser extent, L'Anse-à-Canards). This suggests a dialectal difference between Québec French and finely grained variation in Acadian French along

with a distinction involving subtype of negative question, a finding not reported in earlier studies of French varieties.

References

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