

LINGUISTIC CHANGE

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Vais, Vas, Mas in Canadian French:

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Introduction

The present study examines a case of variation in the verbal morphology of Canadian French, with special reference to the local French spoken in the city of Welland, Ontario. The variable involves the alternate forms of *aller* 'go' and *s'en aller* 'go, leave' in the 1st ind. pres., both in their main verb and auxiliary functions. The study will illustrate the fact that a comparative examination of sociolinguistic data on contemporary Canadian French and other colonial varieties of French (including French-based creoles) can, owing to their conservative nature, provide insights into the popular French of the precolonial period about which still relatively little is known, given that the sources which up until now have been exploited by language historians are either literary texts or the observations of prescriptive grammarians on the speech of the bourgeoisie or aristocracy (see Turdill 1986 for a similar view on the value of colonial varieties of English). Sociolinguistic explanations will be offered for the differential diachronic evolution of Canadian and European French with respect to the variable under study (but which also account for the retention in Canadian French of many other features that have either become stigmatized or disappeared in European French).

The variable

Whether they function as main (i.e. motion) verbs or as auxiliaries of the periphrastic future, *aller* and *s'en aller* present alternating forms in the 1st ind. pres. as shown in the examples below:²

- (1) a. *J'vais sur la parenté au Québec* 'I go to my relatives in Quebec' (W40-5700)
 - b. *J'vas à l'église* 'I go to church' (W53-3810)
 - c. *J'vais dire une chose* 'I'm going to tell you something' (W46-5630)
 - d. *J'vas y aller mais qu'i fasse beau* 'I'm going to go there as soon as it's nice' (W55-4160)
 - (2) a. *J'm'en vais à Ottawa* 'I'm going to Ottawa' (W54-6780)
 - b. *J'm'en vas à une assemblée* 'I'm going to an assembly' (W53-4820)
 - c. *J'm'en vais vous dire pourquoi* 'I'm going to tell you why' (W54-6240)
 - d. *J'm'en vas y aller* 'I'm going to go there' (W58-2500)
- It can be pointed out that *s'en aller* (but not *aller*) was occasionally used (4 times out of 25) without an overt subject pronoun, be its function that of main verb or auxiliary. When so used, *s'en aller* was always conjugated with the *vas* form:
- (3) a. *M'en vas à l'église pour faire ma religion* 'I go to church to do my religion' (W05-335)
 - b. *M'en vas dire comme y'en a qui disent* 'I'm going to say as some say' (W54-1290)

In the auxiliary function there exists yet a third and quite unique variant, namely *m'as* or more rarely *j'm'as* (7 tokens out of 71):

- (4) a. *Ben m'as dire comme on dit* 'Well I'm going to say as one says' (W57-2570)
- b. *M'as aller à beach* 'I'm going to go to the beach' (W58-3020)
- c. *J'sais pas si j'm'as prendre des vacances* 'I don't know if I'm going to take any vacation' (W10-336)

It is important to stress here that what we are interested in is conjugation with *vais* or *vas*, verb type and function being considered as possible linguistic constraints (see variable rule analyses further). The variable, then, because of the strict morphological grounds on which we have defined it, obviates the problem of occasional lack of semantic equivalence between *aller* (which always means 'go') and *s'en aller* (which sometimes means 'leave'). The *m'as* variant, however, poses a problem of classification as it is not obviously a conjugated form of either *aller* or *s'en aller*. In the historical section that follows we will present evidence justifying its treatment as a separate variant.

History

The variation between *vas* and *vais* as conjugated forms of *aller* and *s'en aller* in the 1st ind. pres. dates back at least to the Middle French period (Fouché 1967). Both verbs were pressed into service as auxiliaries of the periphrastic future during this period and were used interchangeably (see Gougenheim 1971:85-110 for a detailed account of this development). Fouché and others look upon *vas* as the result of a process of analogical regularization based on the 2sg. and 3sg. forms *vas* and *va* (phonetically identical).³ *Vais* is also said to be rooted in a process of regularization, having operated however across paradigms on the analogy of *avoir*: 1sg. *ai*, 2sg. *as* and 3sg. *a* (Fouché 1967). It would seem then that both *vas* and *vais* were innovations, the historical form being *vais* (< VL **vaō*).⁴ The latter did not survive past the 17th c. and its demise appears to have been accelerated by the prescriptive grammarians, who considered it archaic. The rivalry was henceforth reduced to *vas* vs. *vais*. Two well-known prescriptive grammarians commented on this case of variation. Vaugelas (1647/1981:54) remarked:

Tous ceux qui savent écrire et qui ont étudié disent *je vais*, et disent fort bien selon la grammair qui conjugue ainsi ce verbe *je vais, tu vas, il va*; car lorsque chaque personne est différente de l'autre, en matière de conjugaison, c'est la richesse et la beauté de la langue, parce qu'il y a moins d'équivoques dont les langues pauvres abondent. Mais toute la cour dit *je va* et ne peut souffrir *je vais*, qui passe pour un mot provincial ou du peuple de Paris.

Ménage (1673), however, had a quite different perception (quoted in Fouché 1967:426):

M. de Vaugelas veut qu'on dise *je va* et soltient qu'on parle ainsi à la Cour; il faut dire *vais* et c'est comme on parle à la Cour. *Je vais, tu vas, il va*... c'est ainsi que ce verbe se doit conjuguer. Et non pas *je va, tu vas, il va* comme le conjuguent les Bourguignons selon le témoignage de Béze... Messieurs de Port Royal qui disent autrefois *je va* trompez par la remarque de M. de Vaugelas s'en sont depuis corrigés et disent aussi présentement *je vais*. M. de Vaugelas lui-même qui veut qu'on dise *va* a dit le plus souvent *vais*...

These two quotes document an interesting case of change in progress involving the status of *je vas* in the course of the 17th c. Once used by both the common people and the aristocracy, it was now losing ground to *je vais* in the speech of the latter as a result of the promotional efforts of grammarians like Ménage. However, *je vas* was to prove difficult to

eradicate since it lingered more or less until the early 19th c. in 'distinguished' French (Grevisse 1986:1247). In 1835 the French Académie decreed that *vas* was rare and colloquial. Nowadays, in France, *vas* is relegated to popular or rural speech (Rey 1986:259; Grevisse 1986:1247) and has acquired the status of a stereotype.

M'as, on the other hand, is nowhere to be found in the various sources on popular European French (including Steinmeyer's 1979 historical work on advanced French) nor is it reported in the dictionaries or other descriptive works on the regional varieties of French or local patois of France consulted by the writers of the *Glossaire du parler français au Canada* (La Société du parler français au Canada 1968:444). However, *m'as* is present in most of the French-based creoles of the Caribbean and Indian Ocean, where it has in fact given rise to the future marker *-a* (Goodman 1964:87). Curiously enough, *m'as* is not attested in Acadian French or its offshoot Cajun French (Chaudenson 1986). Be that as it may, it is improbable that *m'as* is an innovation of Canadian French, given its geographic dispersion. It is more plausible to hypothesize that it was already used in France at the time of colonial expansion (it must have actually been quite frequent in white colonial speech to serve as the basis for marking futurity in the creoles).

The etymology of *m'as* remains enigmatic as well. In fact, the most commonly held view—actually the only serious one proposed thus far, at least to our knowledge—really concerns *j'm'en vas*, which is said to represent a morphophonemic reduction of *j'm'en vas* > **j'm'en vas* (via disarticulation of intervocalic *v*) > *j'm'as* (via vowel fusion), both phonological rules being independently motivated. (see Junneau 1976:85). Presumably, *j'm'as* then underwent pro-drop to give *m'as* (see below). It is clear, however, that we are dealing here with an historical process of reduction and that, in modern Canadian French, *m'as* must be analyzed as an amalgam which has lost its ties with the full form *j'm'en vas* from which it is putatively derived. That the frequency of occurrence of *m'as* (64 tokens) by far outweighs that of any of its fuller related forms (there were only 3 tokens of *j'm'en vas* in the auxiliary function, 2 of *m'en vas* and 7 of *j'm'as*) also motivates ascribing it independent status.

This account leaves a number of questions unresolved, however. First, why did the contraction of *j'm'en vas* to *j'm'as* only take place in the auxiliary function?

- (5) a. **M'as* à Montréal 'I'm going to Montreal'
b. **j'm'as* à la maison 'I'm going home'

Second, why did it only take place in the 1st, and not in the other person-number combinations?⁵

- (6) a. **(Tu) vas* à Montréal 'You're going to Montreal'
b. **'(Il) s'z* à la maison 'He's going home'

Third, following Hall (1979:175), how does one explain that *m'as* is practically never used with the subject pronoun *je* in view of the well-known fact that French is not a pro-drop language?

In answer to the first question one could appeal to the oft-made observation that the syntactic function of main verb seems to be more conservative as regards linguistic change than is the auxiliary function (see Cheshire 1982). More specifically, the fact that the auxiliary slot is unstressed would favor morphophonemic reduction.

An answer to the second is suggested by Gougenheim's (1971) detailed study of the use of the periphrastic future in French. The use of (*s'en*) *aller* + infinitive to indicate futurity originated in popular speech and gained currency during the 15th c. It also had

s'en going expressive force, that is, was overwhelmingly concentrated in the 1st. This great preponderance of the 1st, lasted well into the following century. There was thus a time span of two centuries during which *j'm'en vas* could have undergone morphophonemic reduction to *m'as*. It must be assumed that when periphrasis finally generalized to the other person-number combinations (apparently during the 17th c. when the construction was approved by the prescriptive grammarians and also extended to future in the past, e.g. *l'allais mourir* 'I was going to die'), the reduction process was no longer operative.

As concerns the third question, it can be pointed out that the subject pronoun *je* is entirely predictable in *j'm'as* since, as has been mentioned, it is only in the first person singular that *s'en aller* has undergone such drastic morphophonemic reduction, not to mention the fact that *m'* is also a first person singular marker. What probably happened, then, is that *j'm'as* further reduced to *m'as* just as other fully predictable subject pronouns drop in casual style (e.g. *ça fait que* > *fait que* 'it follows that', *il faut* > *faut* 'it is necessary', etc.). The verbal constructions which display frequent deletions of their subject pronouns are exceptional, however, and do not alter the fact that French remains basically a non-pro-drop language.⁶

Present

We will now examine the sociolinguistic status of *vais*, *vas* and *m'as* in contemporary Canadian French and then discuss the results in the light of the historical facts just presented. The only other quantitative study of this variable seems to be that of Deshaies, Martin & Noël (1981) which was centered on the informal speech of Quebec City adolescents resident in two neighborhoods, one lower class, the other middle class. Restricting their observations to the auxiliary context, where all three variants alternate (see above), and not differentiating between *aller* and *s'en aller*, they found the following order of frequency: *vas* (75%), *m'as* (20%) and *vais* (5%). They concluded from the extreme infrequency of *vais* that this variant is in all likelihood a marker of more formal style. Furthermore, as far as they could tell without doing a formal statistical analysis of their data, *vas* and *m'as* were evenly distributed between the two neighborhoods. In other words, neither form seemed to have particular social connotations.

Let us see to what extent these findings are corroborated by our quantitative examination of the social distribution of *vais*, *vas* and *m'as* in Welland French. Beforehand, however, we need to familiarize the reader briefly with the French-speaking community of Welland, Ontario. The community was formed only relatively recently as the result of the immigration of French-Canadians from the province of Québec: its beginnings only going back to World War I. They came predominantly from poor rural areas, attracted by the prospect of finding work in Welland's industries. Over the years the community has become bilingual in English, the language of the local and provincial majority, and is now showing signs of shifting to that language. Our speech corpus is based on a sample of 68 speakers stratified according to age, sex and social class, but in which degree of bilingualism was a random variable (see Beniak, Mougeon & Valois 1985 and Mougeon & Beniak, to appear, for a fuller account of this community and our speaker sample).

The analysis proceeded in two stages: first we examined the alternation between *vais* and *vas* as main verbs, then *vais*, *vas* and *m'as* as auxiliaries. In both cases we used the VARBRUL program in its microcomputer-adapted version.⁷ The results of the two analyses are presented below in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 evidences the very high degree to which the *vas* form is present in the informal speech of Welland Francophones in the function of main verb (*as* reflected in the input term of 94). Moreover, it shows that *vas* is statistically evenly distributed between the two verbs *aller* and *s'en aller* and between the various speaker categories excepting the three

Table 1. VARBRUL analysis of *vais* vs. *vas* as main verbs⁸

Factor groups	N of		Total	% <i>vas</i>	Factor effects	
	<i>vais</i>	<i>vas</i>			Step-up	Step-down
Social class						
High	7	12	19	63%	.11	.11
Mid	6	43	49	88%	.35	.35
Low	2	70	72	97%	.72	.72
Age						
55+	3	49	52	94%	not	not
35-54	2	30	32	94%	not	not
20-34	6	23	29	79%	sign.	sign.
14-19	4	23	27	85%		
Sex						
F	7	76	83	92%	not	not
M	8	49	57	86%	sign.	sign.
Bilingualism						
French-dominant	5	62	67	93%		
Balanced	3	16	19	84%	not	not
English-dominant	7	47	54	87%	sign.	sign.
Verb						
Alter	12	110	122	90%	not	not
Sen aller	3	15	18	83%	sign.	sign.
Total	15	125	140	89%	input .94	.94

social classes. The higher the class, the lower the probability of using *vas*. Be that as it may, the low effects (.11 and .35) assigned to the factors high and mid class should not conceal the fact that the speakers belonging to these two classes used *vas* no less than 63% and 88% of the time respectively! It should be noted finally that, strictly speaking, the results in Table 1 cannot be compared with Deshaies et al.'s as theirs were based on the auxiliary context, to which we now turn.

The results displayed in Table 2 were generated by a multinomial version of the VARBRUL program. While this program provides factor effects which, upon visual inspection, can provide clues as to which factor groups might have predictive value, it does not incorporate a stepwise regression method. However, by transforming the variable into binary alternations successively contrasting one of the variants against the other two combined, it is then possible to use the binomial version of the VARBRUL program to assess the contribution of the various factor groups, which is how we proceeded.

Looking at the factor effects in Table 2, one can note that *vas* appears to be evenly distributed across speaker groups as indicated by the smallness of the spread between the effects within each factor group, with the probable exception of the factor group sex where the effect of F on probability of use of *vas* is more than double that of M. A subsequent

binomial analysis of *vas* vs. the other two variants combined confirmed the lack of contribution of all of the factor groups excepting sex (see Table 3).

Table 2. VARBRUL analysis of *vais* vs. *vas* vs. *m'as* as auxiliaries

Factor groups	N and %		N and %		Total	Factor effects
	of <i>vais</i>	of <i>vas</i>	of <i>m'as</i>	of <i>vais</i>		
Social class						
High	21 33%	40 63%	2 3%	63	.652 .281 .066	
Mid	20 16%	82 67%	20 16%	122	.269 .289 .442	
Low	7 8%	52 62%	49 41%	119	.109 .236 .654	
Age						
55+	8 9%	49 56%	31 35%	88	.237 .312 .450	
35-54	15 19%	49 61%	16 20%	80	.413 .293 .294	
20-34	17 19%	52 58%	20 22%	89	.204 .345 .451	
14-19	9 19%	34 72%	4 9%	47	.508 .332 .170	
Sex						
F	17 11%	116 75%	22 14%	155	.261 .480 .258	
M	32 21%	68 46%	49 33%	149	.391 .213 .396	
Bilingualism						
French-dominant	16 11%	84 55%	52 34%	152	.284 .284 .431	
Balanced	6 15%	30 73%	5 12%	41	.290 .393 .317	
English-dominant	27 24%	70 63%	14 13%	111	.428 .315 .257	
Total	49 16%	184 55%	71 23%	304	input .167 .718 .115	

If we look now at the effects associated with *vais* and *m'as* in Table 2, it can be seen that the spread between the factor effects is of considerable magnitude as regards social class, but much less so for the other factor groups. The results of a subsequent binomial analysis of *vais* vs. the other two variants combined (*vas* and *m'as*) confirmed that there is a strong linear correlation between *vais* use and position on the social class scale. Also selected was the factor group sex, female speakers using *vais* significantly less often than male speakers (see Table 4).

The binomial analysis of *m'as* vs. *vais* and *vas* combined yielded analogous results (see Table 5). Only two factor groups were consistently selected on both the step-up and step-down, namely social class and sex, female and especially high class speakers showing a sharp tendency not to use *m'as*. Indeed the latter speakers almost completely avoid it.

Discussion

To anyone familiar with French as spoken in France, the findings concerning the variable under study are startling to say the least. It will be recalled (see historical section) that *vas* is a stereotype of lower-class or rural speech in France. Even when adopting a casual style of speech no educated Frenchman would ever use *vas* instead of *vais* (as main or auxiliary verb).⁹ In Canadian French (i.e. Québécois French and its offshoots), on the

contrary, *vas* is in widespread use, showing only gradient correlations with social class (when it functions as a motion verb) or with sex (when it functions as an auxiliary). Thus the social distribution of *vas* in Welland French is reminiscent of its distribution in the French of Quebec City adolescents, where it was basically even. However, because of our quantitative statistical approach, we have been able to detect its more subtle social correlations, i.e. with speaker gender in the auxiliary function.¹⁰

Table 3. VARBRUL analysis of *vas* vs. *vais* and *m'as* as auxiliaries

Factor groups	N of <i>vas</i>	N of <i>vais</i> and <i>m'as</i>	Total	% <i>vas</i>	Factor effects	
					Step-up	Step-down
Sex						
F	116	39	155	75%	.65	.65
M	68	81	149	46%	.34	.34
Social class						
High	40	23	63	63%	not	not
Mid	82	40	122	67%	sign.	sign.
Low	62	57	119	52%		
Age						
55+	49	39	88	56%	not	not
35-54	52	37	89	58%		
20-34	49	31	80	61%	sign.	sign.
14-19	34	13	47	72%		
Bilingualism						
French-dominant	84	68	152	55%	not	not
Balanced	30	11	41	73%	sign.	sign.
English-dominant	70	41	111	63%		
Total	184	120	304	61%	input .62	.62

The changing social correlations of *vas* depending on whether it functions as motion verb or auxiliary of the future is certainly noteworthy. It seems to fall out directly from the fact that in the auxiliary function there is three-way variation, the low- and mid-class speakers shifting to *m'as* in that function where they would have opted for *vas* in the main verb function, thereby lowering their frequency of use of *vas* and bringing it more in line with the high-class speakers', which is a consistent 63% (compare row 1 in Tables 1 and 2). A related explanation can be proposed for the association of auxiliary *vas* with female speakers: the male speakers show a greater shift to *m'as* and hence their use of *vas* is lowered.

M'as stands in even sharper contrast to French usage than *vas* since it hasn't survived in the popular or rural speech of France (assuming it was there in the first place—see historical section). We saw that *m'as*, unlike *vas*, evidences very sharp social stratification. As such it is not surprising that the female speakers were found to use non-standard *m'as* significantly less often than the male speakers, a by now well established sociolinguistic

pattern. These findings differ from Deshaies et al.'s which, it will be remembered, did not suggest any obvious stratification for *m'as*. Again, this may be due to the nature of their subject sample (see note 10).

Table 4. VARBRUL analysis of *vas* vs. *vais* and *m'as* as auxiliaries

Factor groups	N of <i>vas</i>	N of <i>vais</i> and <i>m'as</i>	Total	% <i>vas</i>	Factor effects	
					Step-up	Step-down
Social class						
High	21	42	63	33%	.75	.75
Mid	20	102	122	16%	.56	.56
Low	8	111	119	7%	.30	.30
Sex						
F	17	138	155	11%	.40	.40
M	32	117	149	21%	.61	.61
Age						
55+	8	80	88	9%	not	not
35-54	17	72	89	19%	not	not
20-34	15	65	80	19%	sign.	sign.
14-19	9	38	47	19%		
Bilingualism						
French-dominant	16	136	152	11%	not	not
Balanced	6	35	41	15%	sign.	sign.
English-dominant	27	84	111	24%		
Total	49	255	304	16%	input .14	.14

The marginal status of *vas* in Canadian French in both main verb and auxiliary functions represents another marked difference with European French. Indeed, it is striking that a form which is considered standard usage is only variably used about one third of the time by the most educated or high-class speakers of Welland French. This finding would seem to lend support to the claim of Deshaies et al. that in Canadian French *vas* is probably relegated to formal styles. As to the unexpected association of auxiliary *vas* with male speakers, we find it puzzling and at this stage are without a plausible explanation for it. One would have expected the female speakers to be the prime users of this standard variant.

The absence of an age correlation is also of importance: together with the fact that the variable is lined up with the social hierarchy, it is a confirmation that we are dealing with a long-standing case of stable sociolinguistic variation. As to the lack of correlation with degree of bilingualism, we should remark that it constitutes a departure from what we were accustomed to finding in our previous sociolinguistic research, where this factor group was pertinent whenever the variable under study involved a contrast between an archaic non-standard variant (here *m'as*) and a standard counterpart (see Mougeon, Beniak & Valois 1985). The explanation is that the Welland speech corpus, like Poplack's Ottawa-Hull corpus, was gathered with speakers who had learned French as a mother tongue (i.e. at

home) thereby ensuring acquisition of the typical features of the local vernacular. Our previous subject sample included only younger speakers, some of whom had received restricted exposure to French at home due to their having been raised by linguistically-mixed parents.

Table 5. VARBRUL analysis of *m'as* vs. *vas* and *vais* as auxiliaries

Factor groups	N of <i>m'as</i>	N of <i>vas</i> and <i>vais</i>	Total	% <i>m'as</i>	Factor effects Step-up Step-down
<i>Social class</i>					
High	2	61	63	3%	.12 .12
Mid	20	102	122	16%	.48 .48
Low	49	70	119	41%	.76 .76
<i>Sex</i>					
F	22	133	155	14%	.36 .36
M	49	100	149	33%	.64 .64
<i>Age</i>					
55+	31	57	88	35%	not not
35-54	20	69	89	22%	not not
20-34	16	64	80	20%	sign. sign.
<i>Bilingualism</i>					
French-dominant	52	100	152	34%	not not
Balanced	5	36	41	12%	sign. sign.
English-dominant	14	97	111	13%	
Total	71	233	304	23%	input .17 .17

The key to explaining the above cross-dialectal differences between Canadian and European French lies, we think, in a consideration of the sociolinguistic status of *vas*, *was* and *m'as* in precolonial French and of several aspects of the history of France and Quebec which have differentially affected the status and spread of the educated norm (see Corbett 1976). The reader will recall that in 17th c. French society *vas* was still largely socially unmarked. Used as it was by the common people as well as by the aristocracy, *vais* had started to make some inroads in educated speech and *m'as* was probably a typical feature of popular speech. Since colonization of New France took place precisely during that century (Barbaud 1984), New World French simply inherited this particular sociolinguistic situation. Those who could have played a role in the diffusion of the standard of the time and hence of the incipient normative variant *vais* at the expense of *vas* and *m'as* and in its transmission to future generations by providing models of speech which featured *vais*, namely the elite, for the most part returned to France shortly after the British Conquest of 1760. Relations between the colony and France were severed and the settlers (for the most part of rural or popular backgrounds) were largely left on their own. If we add to this reduction in social stratification that formal education remained up until very recently undeveloped in Quebec (Corbett 1976), we can understand better why *m'as* did not get eradicated from the speech of the lower classes as it must have in France and why *vas* still

has a strong foothold in the speech of the educated classes here, including teachers (see Corbett 1980).

The sociohistorical explanations just offered for *vas* also apply, we believe, to a number of other cases of differential evolution between European French and its Canadian descendant. For instance, the use of auxiliary *avoir* instead of *être* in the compound past (e.g. *il venait* 'I came'), the use of temporal *à* (e.g. *à tous les jours* 'every day'), the double conditional (e.g. *si j'avais su, j'avais pas venu* 'if I would have known I wouldn't have come'), etc. are all features which were socioculturally unmarked in 17th c. French. Like *vas*, they still enjoy a wide social distribution in Canadian French whereas in France they have been relegated to popular or regional varieties.

Conclusion

The present study has illustrated the fact that if an examination of 17th c. French can shed some light on the starting point of New World French, it has obvious limitations since it has been pointed out by Valli (n.d.), the historical sources that have been exploited by language historians are mostly literary works or the observations of the prescriptive grammarians of that century. This probably accounts for the fact that *m'as* is not recorded in such historical sources. Given their high degree of conservatism and popular origins, colonial varieties of French—including Canadian French—constitute a potentially rich and still underused source of information on a neglected side of the history of French, namely that of the popular language (see the pioneering works of Chaudenson 1973 and Portier 1979 in this respect). Pending the exploitation of non-literary historical sources (i.e. documents written by individuals with limited education), present-day colonial varieties of French constitute a key element in the development of what Valli (n.d.) has called a 'socio-linguistic history' of French. That Romane (1982) has made a similar call in relation to the history of English is perhaps symptomatic of a more general dissatisfaction which sociolinguists experience when they want to delve into the history of the contemporary varieties of spoken language that they are studying, only to find that the work of language historians has the limitations noted above.

Notes

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²The examples are taken from our speech corpus. The alphanumeric code following each identifies the speaker and the line number of the example in the interview transcript.

³The analogical process which historically gave rise to 1sg. *vas* can still be observed today in child language (Clark, in press; Martinet 1969:96) and in the (re)acquisition of L2 learners (Harley & Swan 1978:55). But as Deshaies, Martin & Noël (1981:416) point out, De la Chaussée (1977) has rightly wondered why, if 1sg. *vas* was formed by analogy with 2sg. *vas* and 3sg. *va*, 1sg. **as* wasn't formed from 2sg. *as* and 3sg. *a* in the case of *avoir* 'have'. By the same token, we may ask, along with Frei (1979:32), why 1sg. **es* is not attested for the 1sg. pres. ind. of *être* 'be', given the possible analogy with 2sg. *es* and 3sg. *est*. Yet both these regularized forms are once again typical of 1st and 2nd language acquisition. Following Martinet (1969), it may be that analogical regularizations are blocked from vernacularizing when the irregularity to which they would normally apply is highly recurrent (which is the case for *sas* and *ai*, *être* and *avoir* being the two most frequent French verbs, respectively 4 and 3 times more

frequent than *aller*, judging for example by Beauchemin, Martel & Théoret's 1983 frequency list).

⁴There were in fact still other forms of *aller* in the 1sg. ind. pres., but according to Brunot (1909:317) these were probably just orthographic variants of *vais* (e.g. *voÿ*), of *vais* (e.g. *voÿ*) and of *vas* (e.g. *voÿ*). In any case, Brunot confirms Fouché's view that by the 17th c. only two variants remained: *vais* and *vas*.

⁵*vas* has been reported alongside *mas* in the local French of Old Mines, Missouri, apparently an offshoot of early 18th c. Québécois French. While this might mean that the parent dialect once had *'as*, a more plausible explanation is that of Louisiana Creole influence (see Thogmartin 1979).

⁶An alternative explanation would be to say *m'as* derives from subjectless *m'en vas* rather than *m'en vas*. The 1sg. of reflexive verbs does seem to occasionally display pro-dropping as Valli (n.d.) has observed. The few instances of *m'en vas* in our corpus are an illustration of this: the derivational sequence posited under this hypothesis would be: *m'en vas* > *m'en vas* > *m'as*. However, this explanation is hard to reconcile with the great preponderance of *mas* over *m'as* in our corpus.

⁷We are indebted to Susan Pintzuk for kindly making the IBM PC version of the VARBRUL program available to us and for providing useful guidance regarding its use.

⁸Social class was established using information on level of education and type of occupation. The 14-19 year-olds were assigned to the occupational group of the head of household and coded as having a secondary level education since they comprised 9th and 12th graders. Degree of bilingualism was arrived at on the basis of speaker self-reports concerning speaking, writing, listening and reading skills in both languages.

⁹We unfortunately are not familiar with any quantitative study that could back this claim. We are relying here on our intuitions as educated native speakers of Europan French and on the repeated allusions in the literature to *vas* as a feature of popular or rural speech in France (Frei 1971:32, 163; Marinet 1969:96; Rey 1986:259, etc.).

¹⁰On the other hand, it could be argued that the young age of the Quebec City speakers (10-17 year-olds) is a factor which favors homogeneity of the vernacular given the fact that they have not yet taken their place in the linguistic market and so are under no real pressure to conform to the adult middle-class norm of speech (which in any case, as we have seen, is only quantitatively rather than qualitatively different from the speech norms of the lower-class groups).

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