

***Fom* and friends: Variable BAN-laxing in Multicultural Toronto English**

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Background: BAN-tensing is an allophonic process found in Normative Canadian English, such that, in pre-nasal contexts, /æ/ is advanced and raised (e.g. *man* [mæn~mɛn~mɛən]) – moving in the opposite direction of the retraction of /æ/ elsewhere (BAT) that is due to the Canadian Vowel Shift (Labov et al. 2006, Mielke et al. 2017). While Boberg (2008: 146) reports strongest tensing in Ontario, in recent years, ostensible BAN-laxing (i.e., a lowered and retracted realization) can be observed in folk spellings (i.e., *fom/fham* for ‘family’, *mon* for ‘man’) in Toronto-based social media that is linked with the ongoing enregisterment of ‘Multicultural Toronto English’ (MTE) (Denis 2016; Bigelow et al. 2020). In this paper, we explore the sociophonetics of BAN-laxing among young racialized Torontonians and its link with this emerging multiethnolect.

Present study: In an earlier analysis of BAN-tensing/laxing in word list data produced by young, mostly racialized speakers in Brampton (a diverse Toronto suburb), we found that BAN-laxing may be part of the ‘feature pool’ of MTE (cf. Cheshire et al. 2011). We also note that women produced less laxed BAN tokens than men (i.e., these racialized women aligned closer to normative CanE than the racialized men). The present study extends our earlier analysis and examines BAN variation in sociolinguistic interviews with 11 young, racialized speakers of various ethnic backgrounds from Mississauga (another suburb of Toronto). We ask: to what extent do young, racialized speakers incorporate a laxer, non-normative realization of BAN into their everyday vernacular and what are the social and linguistic factors that condition this?

Methods: Speakers ranged in age from 12 to 26; roughly half were born outside of Canada. FAVE (Rosenfelder et al. 2014) was used to force-align and extract the F1 and F2 of all vowels in a half-hour chunk of each interview. For each speaker, the Lobanov-normalized mean F1 and F2 of BAT was calculated and the Euclidean distance between each token of BAN and the mean of BAT was calculated, serving as a measure of tensing/laxing for each token. Tokens were also coded for the following nasal phoneme ([m], [n], or [ŋ]), the number of syllables in the word, and the preceding segment’s manner and place. Together with social factors – age, gender, and ethnicity of the speaker – tokens were analyzed using a mixed-effects linear regression.

Results: Speakers in the sample have a lower mean Euclidean distance between BAN and BAT than Boberg’s (2008) speakers from Southern Ontario, Eastern Ontario, and Toronto, suggesting that this innovative, non-normative realization of BAN may be part of at least some young, racialized speakers’ vernaculars in the Toronto area. Following nasal context was found to be statistically significant; tokens with following [ŋ] have tenser realizations than following [m] and [n] tokens. Furthermore, men exhibit significantly laxer realizations of BAN than women.

Conclusion: The results support our previous conclusion that a lower, backer realization of BAN is part of the feature pool of MTE. Furthermore, the gender effect not only aligns with the common finding that women are more likely to produce overtly prestigious, standard variants (Labov 2001), but moreover aligns with local gender ideologies about MTE – ideologically

spoken by the ‘*Toronto Mans*’, a race-ed, class-ed, and gender-ed characterological figure (Agha 2003) in the social landscape of contemporary Toronto (Bigelow et al. 2020).

Reference

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