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 <https://doi.org/10.1075/slcs.97.04abo>

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New-Dialect Formation in Canada: Evidence from the English modal auxiliaries

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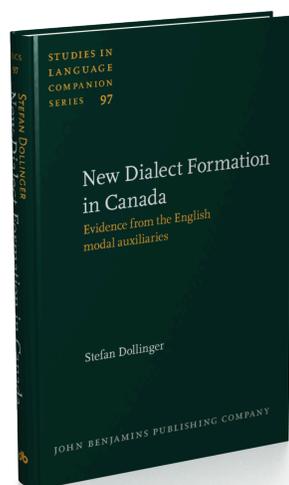
[Studies in Language Companion Series, 97]

2008. xxii, 355 pp.

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About this book

*New-dialect formation in Canada:
Evidence from the English modal auxiliaries*
Stefan Dollinger

The present volume investigates the development of eleven modal auxiliaries in early Ontario English in relation to major British and American varieties. The main focus of the study is the time frame from 1776 to 1850, which serves as a test case for new-dialect formation theory (Trudgill 2004). Beyond the Late Modern English focus, the variables' developments are traced from the mid-19th century to the present day in order to reveal long-term trends.

An analysis of early Ontario English, as the socially and historically dominant variety of Canadian English, offers a first historical account of the early stages of the variety that was to become Standard Canadian English. Based on a socio-historical, variationist approach that is grounded on language-internal data from three corpora, the study explicitly includes insights from the external language history. The data come from the *Corpus of Early Ontario English, pre-Confederation section*, the first machine-readable corpus of historical Canadian English, while *ARCHER-1* and *A Corpus of Late 18th-Century Prose* provide contemporary benchmarks for cross-dialectal comparisons. The findings are based on the genres of newspapers, diaries, and letters, of which the latter offer a particularly intriguing window into the Canadian vernacular of the past. By extending the diachronic scope, the study complements in important ways available apparent-time scenarios of Canadian English, which reach back to the 1920s (e.g. Chambers 1995a, Tagliamonte 2006).

The study's theoretical underpinning, new-dialect formation, was originally developed with phonological data, making this one of the first attempts to test the theory systematically in the area of morphosyntax. While the data suggest that new-dialect formation offers an adequate account for dialect-mixing scenarios in colonial settings, it proposes three modifications and extensions in the area of morphosyntax. These adaptations pertain to a layering of the new-dialect formation into a (slower) rural and a (faster paced) urban layer, the exclusion of very slowly proceeding, long-term changes (drift) from the three-stage model of new-dialect formation and the extension of the first stage of the new-dialect formation process with one process.

The evidential base for the findings are syntactic, semantic and functional analyses of more than 4,350 modal tokens of CAN/MAY, COULD/MIGHT,

SHALL/WILL, SHOULD/WOULD, MUST, OUGHT TO and HAVE TO in a total of 19 contexts. The aggregate data allow a comprehensive characterization of the Late Modern English modal auxiliary complex in Ontario and, backed up by post-Late Modern English developments, assessments of theoretical phenomena beyond the new-dialect formation scenario. These include the notions of colonial lag, the founder principle and the focussing process of newly-formed colonial varieties.

The study provides an empirical assessment of four major types of influence on early Canadian English in form of a ranking: drift (parallel development) is the most prevalent factor operating on the modal auxiliaries in early Ontario, followed by early American English influence, with Canadian independent developments in third place, and BrE import features as the fourth most dominant factor.

As a prerequisite to the empirical, corpus-based part of the study, the different input varieties contributing to the dialect mixing scenario are assessed in detail and matched with available corpus material. The findings are used to review the classic contributions by M. Bloomfield (1948) and Scargill (1957) on the origin of Canadian English, who both argue from the external history. The two accounts are compared with the linguistic data, and a synthesis between both views is offered.