

## ***Le futur commence après la fin de cette phrase: the future of French future***

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This study is the first quantitative variationist investigation of Future temporal reference in Continental French. In all varieties of French, future temporal reference can be realised via three different variants: the inflected future (je mangerai ‘I will eat’), the periphrastic future (je vais aller ‘I am going to go’) and the futurate present (je pars ‘I leave’). Prescriptive grammarians have long posited that the principle conditioning factor motivating variant selection is the temporal distance between the speech act and the time at which the verbal action is to occur (see Fleischman 1982). Variationist studies – all of which are based on Canadian French data – have set out to test this claim quantitatively. Poplack and Turpin (1999) show that whilst the inflected future occurs almost exclusively in negative contexts, the periphrastic form seems to have become the default variant in spoken Canadian French (Poplack & Turpin 1999, Poplack & Dion 2009, Grimm 2010 and Grimm & Nadasdi to appear). Additionally, King and Nadasdi (2004) have demonstrated that temporal reference, certainty and the presence of the wh-term *quand* affect variation in Acadian French, whereas other intralinguistic factors, like contingency, grammatical person/number and negation, do not constrain variant selection to the same degree.

It is widely accepted that the grammar of spoken European French differs markedly from that of Canadian French (Hewson 2000 and Coveney 2007). Consequently, a study examining strategies of encoding future time in European French warrants scholarly attention. The present study reports on variation in the Beeching Corpus (Beeching 2001), an online database containing spontaneous Hexagonal French speech recorded between 1980 and 1990.

A sub-sample of 80 informants stratified by age, educational level and gender was identified and quantitative variationist analysis of 433 tokens of future temporal reference was undertaken with a view to addressing three main research questions: (1) How variable is the future temporal reference in Hexagonal French? (2) What significant linguistic and extralinguistic constraints affect variability? (3) To what extent do the results corroborate findings reported in the extant French Canadian literature?

The results of this investigation suggest that the inflected future is used with greater frequency in Hexagonal French than in its Canadian counterpart. Chi-square and multinomial regression analyses furthermore reveal a complex set of constraints which only partially overlap with the results reported for Canadian French. Thus, while certain constraints governing variation are operative in both Canadian and Hexagonal varieties, a range of other factors also condition future temporal reference variability in the French language.