“You can just Google it up”
Patterns of variation in particle placement in North American English
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**AIM:** To explore how variation in particle placement patterns socially and cognitively in a single variety of English, Ontario English, from a hitherto under-research variationist perspective.

**PARTICLE PLACEMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>split</th>
<th>joined</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Oh yeah, I used to <strong>pick</strong> people <strong>up</strong> (direct object)</td>
<td>(2) And I went to the store to <strong>pick</strong> something <strong>up</strong> (direct object).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DATA**

6,047 tokens were extracted from the Ontario Dialects project (http://ontariodialects.chass.utoronto.ca/) with a focus on six speech communities: Toronto, North Bay, Temiskaming Shores, Kirkland Lake, Timmins and Thunder Bay.

**Envelope of variation**
Only variable tokens were included in the data where the other variant would be semantically equivalent and grammatically acceptable. Excluded were thus:
- tokens with a pronominal direct object, e.g. I pick it up
- locatives, e.g. we take the elevator down
- passivized tokens, e.g. get wiped out
- prepositional verbs, e.g. call on my parents
- tokens with two objects or two particles, e.g. give him his book back

![Figure 1. Proportional distribution of joined and split particle variants by place (raw frequencies in bars)](image)

**METHODOLOGY**
Each variant was coded for demographic and one language-internal factor. The demographic factors include:
- **Sex:** male vs. female
- **Age:** by group (babies = 16 yrs or under; young = 17-29; middle = 30-65; old = 65+), by age at interview
- **Occupation:** blue collar worker vs. white collar worker vs. student
- **Education:** more or less educated (binary)
- **Place:** the six speech communities in Ontario

The language-internal factor is restricted to length of the direct object in characters.

**RESULTS**

1. **Change in progress:** In all communities, the younger generations prefer the **joined** variant more than the older generations.
2. Variation is socially conditioned: by place, age and occupation (as evidenced by a glmer model)

Figure 2. (a) left: Effect of place on the probability of split variant; (b) middle: Effect of age on probability of split variant; (c) right: Effect of occupation on probability of split variant

3. Homogeneity of patterns: Cognitive constraints are cross-regionally stable

Summary of results
⇒ Joined variant is most frequent in Temiskaming and Kirkland Lake
⇒ There is a break in the late 1960s after which the joined variant increases in frequency
⇒ Toronto and Timmins are in the lead with respect to the joined variant
⇒ younger speakers in the northern towns are producing more joined variants following the lead of Toronto and Timmins
⇒ Cognitive constraints are regionally stable in their effect size

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