



“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

split
joined

(1) Oh yeah, I used to pick_[verb] people_[direct object] up_[particle].

(2) And I went to the store to pick_[verb] up_[particle] something_[direct object].

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*

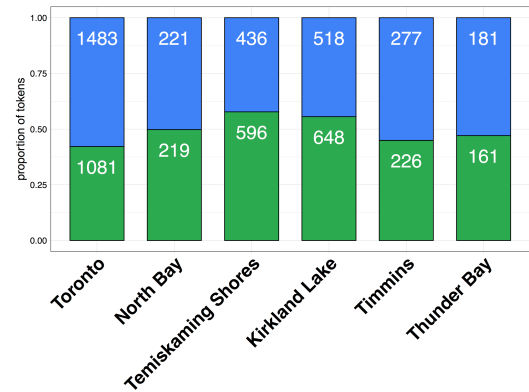


Figure 1. Proportional distribution of **joined** and **split** particle variants by place (raw frequencies in bars)

METHODOLOGY

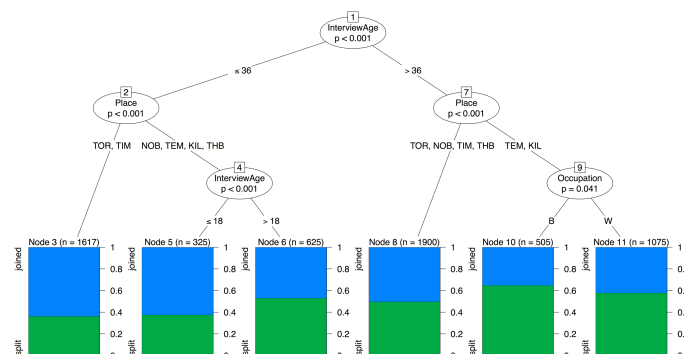
Each variant was coded for demographic and one language-internal factor. The demographic factors include:

- 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

- 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)

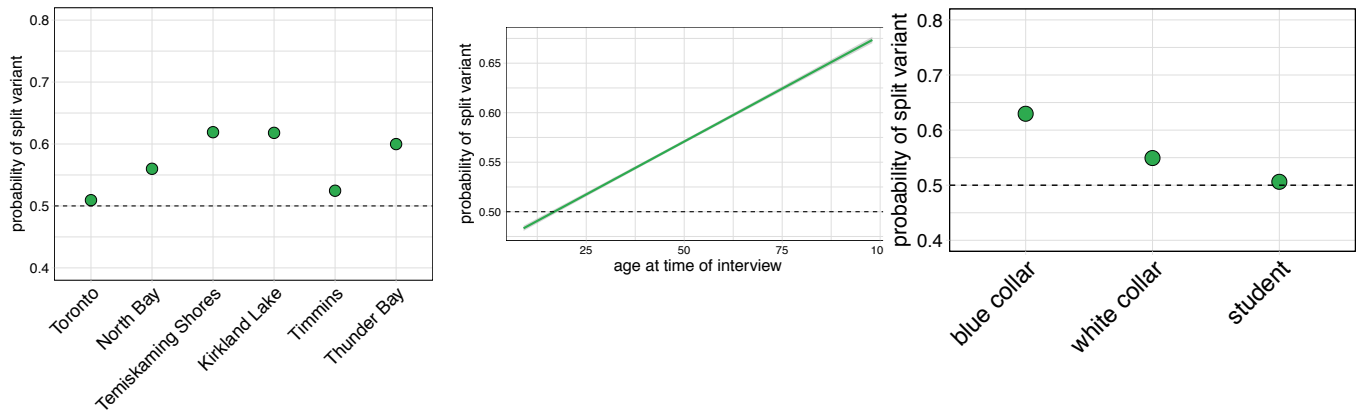
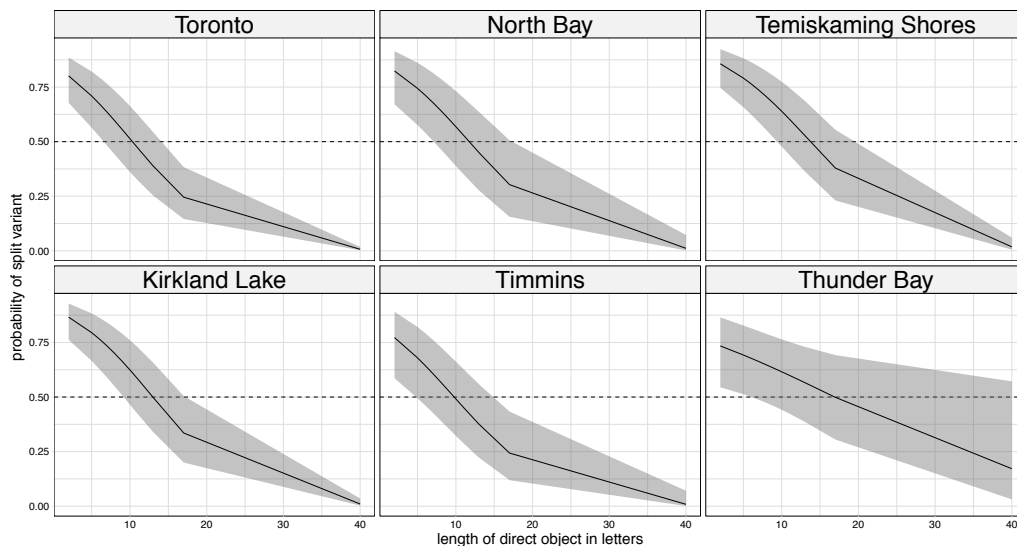


Figure 2. (a) left: Effect of place on the probability of split variant; (b) middle: Effect of age on probability of split variant; (c) right: Effect of occupation on probability of split variant

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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