



Microvariation in Inner Circle Englishes: COVID-19 Metaphors in Canadian and American English

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Overview

- Canadian English and metaphor studies
- Comparison of Canadian and American Englishes
- Study goal and predictions
- Study methodology
- Findings
 - Cultural variation
 - Variation in use frequency
 - Variation in lexical expression
- Discussion and future directions

Canadian English as a distinct dialect

- One of the 'Inner Circle' World Englishes
- Influences from British and American English (Dollinger 2020)
- Status of Canadian English as a distinct dialect has been in dispute (Dollinger 2017)
- Research typically focuses on sociolinguistic variation in:
 - Morphosyntax (e.g., the BE+*done* construction; Yerastov 2012)
 - Phonetics and phonology (e.g. Canadian Raising, the Canadian vowel shift; Boberg 2010)
 - Lexicography and lexical variation (Boberg 2010; Dollinger & Fee 2017)



Canadian "toque"



American "toque"

Status of Canadian English metaphor studies

- Very little work has been done on metaphor specific to Canadian English
- 2 studies on literary metaphor:
 - Comparison of metaphors in popular song lyrics in Canadian, Austrian, and American Englishes (Colston & Rasse 2021)
 - Weather metaphors in short stories (Nagy 2011)
- We expect to see differences between Canadian and American English metaphor systems
 - Kövecses (2005) identifies regional variation as a source of variation in metaphor
 - Differences in linguistic context
 - Differences in sociopolitical context

Canadian vs. American context: Language status

- Canada is officially bilingual in English and French
- USA has no official language, but de-facto federal language is English
- 56% of Canadians are monolingual English speakers (Dollinger 2020)
- 78% of Americans are monolingual English speakers (United States Census Bureau 2019)



Canadian vs. American context: COVID response

As of March 2022, in comparison to the US, Canada had...

- a higher vaccination rate
 - 80% vs. 64% fully vaccinated
- fewer cumulative COVID cases
 - 82,700/million vs. 231,000/million
- fewer COVID-related deaths
 - 919/million vs. 2,730/million
- a consistently more stringent response
 - Out of the G10 countries, Canada ranked 2nd most stringent (after Italy)
 - The US ranked 7th
 - Canada had the most consistent and sustained restrictions in the G10



The current study

- Part of larger multilingual project documenting metaphors for COVID-19 (see earlier RaAM talk by Stickles et al.)
- Goal: Study variation in metaphors for COVID-19 between Canadian and American English
- Predictions:
 - Shared metaphors commonly attested for Disease: *War, Journey*
 - Variation reflective of difference in attitudes towards the pandemic and responses to the pandemic

Study methodology

- Manual data collection, followed by corpus investigation
 1. Manually collected data from news sources and coded for region
 2. Identified potential points of variation from data inspection and native speaker introspection
 3. Corpus frequency analysis
 - a. Calculate overall use frequency in GloWbE (Davies 2013) for each dialect
 - b. Calculate metaphoric use frequency in Coronavirus Corpus (Davies 2019-) for each dialect
 - c. Compare overall vs. metaphoric use frequency

Overview of findings

- Conceptual metaphors are largely shared between the two varieties
- (Non-COVID) Cultural variation is one source of variation
- Some specific metaphors are used more *frequently* by one variety than another
- Variation occurs at the level of *lexical expression* of conceptual metaphors

Findings: Cultural variation

- Both varieties commonly use the metaphor COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE IS A WAR
- Expression of the actual *type* of War reflects culturally-specific referents

Opinion in *The Globe and Mail* (Tim Cook, May 7, 2020):

*Today, in the midst of this pandemic and the 75th anniversary of **the end of the war**, we continue to wonder where we are in the **long fight**. We have come through our equivalent of **the fall of France in 1940**. We are mobilizing with grim determination. And yet **our D-Day** is still some time ahead in an unknowable future.*

Article in *The Columbia Missourian* (Ethan Colbert, December 15, 2020):

*The hospital's chief of staff, Dr. Thomas Riechers, equated the vaccine's deployment to **D-Day**, a pivotal turning point in **World War II**.*

*"This is **our D-Day**. This is our day in the **war** against COVID-19 that, just like with **D-Day** in **World War II**, where the **war** shifts. Now, we are on **offense** instead of **defense**," he said.*

Findings: Cultural variation

- Both varieties commonly use the metaphor COVID-19 IS A WAR
- Expression of the actual *type* of War reflects culturally-specific referents

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (April 12, 2020):

But as a country, we've been through tough times before.

*Just think of what it was like on **Easter Monday in 1917**.*

*Think about the thousands of **soldiers** from across Canada who ran uphill through sleet and mud at **Vimy Ridge**, into **enemy fire** to defend the values we hold dear.*

Many made the ultimate sacrifice that day. But their bravery and courage live on.

In our nurses, doctors, paramedics, and custodial workers. In our truckers, cashiers, and all front line workers.

They are our heroes now, standing on the shoulders of those who came before.

*And today, we are all being called upon to join them, and to **serve**.*

*The Greatest Generation showed us how to **fight** for what we believe in and how to make sacrifices for what we hold dear. Well, they are precisely the ones most at risk now.*

*For them, without reservation, without pause, we must **fight for every inch of ground** against this disease.*

Findings: Cultural variation

- Both varieties commonly use the metaphor COVID-19 IS A WAR
- Expression of the actual *type* of War reflects culturally-specific referents

Former American President Donald Trump (May 7, 2020):

*We went through the worst **attack** we've ever had on our country, this is worst **attack** we've ever had. This is worse than **Pearl Harbor**, this is worse than the **World Trade Center**. There's never been an **attack** like this. And it should have never happened. Could've been stopped at the source. Could've been stopped in China. It should've been stopped right at the source. And it wasn't. [...]*

*I view the invisible **enemy** as a **war**. I don't like how it got here, because it could have been stopped, but no, I view the invisible **enemy** like a **war**.*

Findings: Variation in use frequency

- Both varieties use the metaphor VARIATION IN COVID RESPONSE IS VARIATION IN FABRIC PATTERN, as lexically expressed by the phrase *patchwork of*

*With a **patchwork of provincial pandemic restrictions** across Canada changing daily, many holiday season activities have either been scaled back or cancelled for the second year in a row. (Prince George Citizen, December 27, 2021)*

*The result has been a **patchwork of COVID-19 policies** around the country that has left parents feeling exhausted and bewildered. (Reuters, January 4, 2022)*

Coding variation in use frequency

- Searched the Canadian and American Coronavirus Corpus data for *patchwork of*
- Coded each entry as response-related or not response-related
- Results fell into three broad categories:
 - COVID response-related:
a patchwork of mandates, a patchwork of travel measures
 - COVID, not response-related:
a patchwork of immunity, a patchwork of vaccine uptake
 - Not COVID-related:
the election system in the U.S. is a complicated patchwork of rules

Findings: Variation in use frequency

- Overall American English *patchwork* of use frequency is slightly lower than Canadian English
 - 0.56 per million words vs. 0.62 per million words in GloWbE
- Coronavirus Corpus American English *patchwork* of *{restrictions}* use frequency is much greater than Canadian English
 - 56% of *patchwork* of entries vs. 37%
- This use frequency variation is likely a reflection of greater variation in American COVID restriction policies



Findings: Variation in lexical expression

- Both varieties commonly use the metaphor CHANGE IN LOCKDOWN STATUS IS MOVEMENT BETWEEN LOCATIONS
 - A specific extension of the general conceptual metaphor CHANGE IN STATE IS CHANGE OF LOCATION
- Identified two different lexical expressions of the metaphor:

*the **yo-yo repetition** of business openings and closings* (Ottawa Citizen, March 27, 2021)

*a **yo-yo effect** of ongoing closures, reopenings, closures, reopenings* (MSN, Sept 9, 2020)

*a **roadmap out of** lockdown for Ontario* (National Post, October 14, 2020)

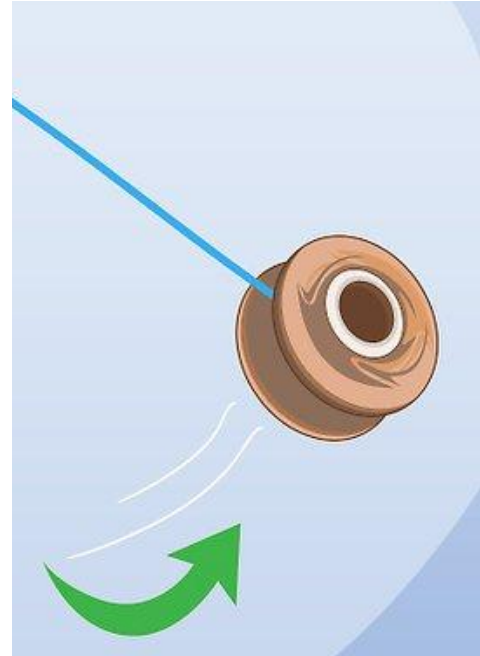
*a **roadmap for** relaxing coronavirus lockdown measures* (San Francisco Chronicle, April 13, 2021)

Coding variation in use frequency

- Searched the Canadian and American Coronavirus Corpus data for *yo-yo* (and *yo yo*) and 500 random samples of *roadmap*
- Coded each entry as lockdown status-related or not lockdown status-related
- Results fell into three broad categories:
 - COVID lockdown status-related
*the **yo-yo** of lockdowns*
*the reopening **roadmap***
 - (Broadly) COVID-related, but not lockdown status-related:
***roadmap** to economic recovery*
 - Not COVID-related:
*Famed cellist **Yo-Yo** Ma performed at Berkshire Community College accelerating our innovation **roadmap***

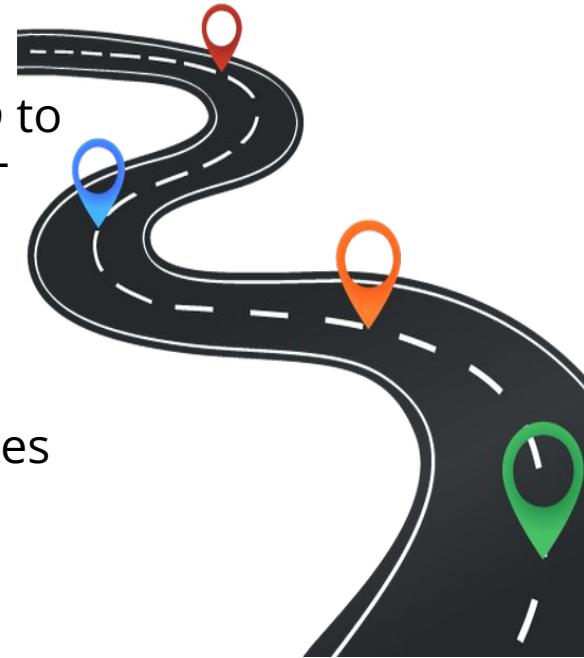
Findings: Variation in lexical expression - *yo-yo*

- Overall American English *yo-yo* use frequency is slightly higher than Canadian English
 - 0.57 per million vs. 0.39 per million in GloWbE
- Coronavirus Corpus Canadian English use of *yo-yo* to evoke CHANGE IN LOCKDOWN STATUS IS MOVEMENT BETWEEN LOCATIONS is more frequent than American English
 - 85% of Canadian *yo-yo* entries vs. 40% of American
- This use frequency variation likely reflects:
 - repeated changes in lockdown policy localized to Quebec
 - rarity of *return* to lockdown in the United States



Findings: Variation in lexical expression - *roadmap*

- Overall American English *roadmap* use frequency is slightly higher than Canadian English
 - 2.58 per million vs. 2.38 per million in GloWbE
- Coronavirus Corpus Canadian English use of *roadmap* to evoke CHANGE IN LOCKDOWN STATUS IS MOVEMENT BETWEEN LOCATIONS is slightly more frequent than American English
 - 52% of Canadian entries vs. 42% of American
- The relative lack of difference between the two varieties likely reflects the fact that both countries are overall “moving forward” toward reopening



Conclusion and future directions

- Overall findings:
 - Variation is driven by cultural variation:
 - Variation in cultural reference (e.g. different War Source domains)
 - Variation in COVID experience (e.g. different COVID Target domains)
- Future directions:
 - Within-country regional variation
 - Longitudinal analysis:
 - Predict change over time due to change in perceptions of the pandemic
 - Predict change reflecting change in American leadership
 - Predict influence of American media on Canadian dialect
 - Corpus analysis of other COVID metaphors, such as vaccine-related

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Thank you!