I DWELL IN POSSIBILITY:

VARIABLE (ay) IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

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This article is intended a a contribution to the literature of 'Canadian Raising'. It concerns a phenomenon in the English of Prince Edward Island which I will call - with at least equal justification - 'Island Rounding'. This is the tendency for /ay/ before voiceless consonants to be realized by some Islanders not as [ʌy], the general Canadian pronunciation, but with a rounded and backed onset.[1] That /ay/ is a variable - hereafter (ay)[2] - on P.E.I. needs no proof; any alert listener 'from away' may note that realizations vary considerably. Nor are these ethnic predictable. We might expect persons of Irish descent (about 25% of the population) to use Island Rounding more frequently than others, but among the sixty informants reported on here this is simply not the case. Given the settlement history of the province, Ireland is almost certainly where this variant came from (cf. Gregg, 1973:138), but a full explanation for its contemporary distribution must include other factors. The present account draws no conclusions but raises several possibilities intended to be tantalizing. Its immediate impetus was a conversation with an observant Summerside teacher who reported that only the third of his six daughters was an Island Rounder.

The question is a sociolinguistic one, and hence it was put to four students in a sociolinguistics class at the University of Prince Edward Island in the fall of 1981: Wallena Higgins, Anne Nicholson, Dawn Riley, and Anne Scyner. Each made a project of it, testing one or more hypotheses in a community and sample of her own selection. However, in order that the results might be profitably compared and pooled, a number of common features were worked out for the interviews. A description of these follows.

To begin with, informants were told that the interviews were 'part of Professor Pratt's study of Island words and expressions'. This was false, but since the word study had been thoroughly publicized, it was a convenient starting point; moreover the trouble of distinguishing the two surveys seemed not to be worth it.[3] The true point - pronunciation of (ay) - was made clear at the end. Thus the interviews began with some version of the following questions, the answers to which were not of great interest. They are, however, questions whose familiarity might put informants at their ease:

1. What do you call the piece of playground equipment where two children sit on either end of a board and go up and down? Have you ever heard other words for this?

2. Have you ever heard the word stog? Like 'Quit stogging your face with food!' or 'Now that it's winter, we'll have to stog something in this crack.' Is this an older word that younger people don't know?

3. Speaking of winter, have you ever been stormstayed? Do people ever use this word for being stuck at home?

4. Do you ever use the word slippy instead of slippery in winter?

5. Have you ever noticed that people just talk about this province as the Island - as if it was the only one in the world?

6. What about from away - like 'He's not an Islander; he's from away' - is that an Island expression?

From here it was an easy transition to the following list of 'expressions' which informants were asked to read and comment on, the implication being that we were interested in the general spread of these sayings around the province:

1. A stitch in time saves nine.

2. There's a light at the end of the tunnel.

3. Strike while the iron is hot.

4. Time and tide wait for no man.

5. The devil is beating his wife.

6. Early to bed and early to rise
Makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.

7. Red sky at night: Sailors delight.

8. A wife is just trouble and strife.

9. I was fit to be tied.

10. Shake hands and come out fighting.

11. A short life and a merry one.

12. If a first you don't succeed, try, try , try again.

13. Girls are made of sugar and spice.

14. Ride a cock horse to Bunbury Cross.

15. It's as tight as a bull's hole in fly time.

16. Cockles and mussels, alive, alive - oh.

17. He's riding high.

18. Put your finger in the dike.

19. It's a wise child that knows his own father.

20. I don't know the why's and wherefore's.

The discerning reader will note that every expression elicits at least one example of (ay), some before voiceless consonants, some not. Perhaps the one solid finding of these interviews should be given here: Canadian Raising on Prince Edward Island is invariable for this diphthong, whatever the degree of backing.[4] When this became clear it was no longer necessary or interesting to watch for either failures to raise or unexpected raising. The student investigators were therefore free to improve on the above list, and on the one that follows, deleting some items and building in more with the precise conditiond for Island Rounding.

The next elicitation excerise was a word list including both (ay) and the phoneme /ɔy/, the latter for contrastive purposes:

Who will buy the boy's bike?

lie lied light life live reply

tie tied tight tile type tiger tyke tie

rider writer typewriter

rye ride right

I eyes ice

Roy rye

buy bide bite

pie pint point

buoy boy buy

It's <u>mighty</u>. It's <u>my</u> tea.

why wife wive

my mind might

rise rice

advise advice a voice

knives knife deny

annoys a noise a nice noice

It's an oyster! It's an ice stir.

loiter lighter

hoist it heist it

By the end of this exercise, with the tape-recorder of course still going, informants generally knew we were after pronunciation, but - surprisingly - nothing more specific. Island Rounding for most Islanders is not at the level of awareness. This was confirmed by questions towards the end of the interview, like 'Have you ever noticed that some people say [nʌyt] and some say [nɔyt]?' For this reason, and those immediately following, it was possible to regard the interviews as being in a single style: There was little formality of any kind. The warm-up questions were memorized and presented conversationally, while the expressions and word list were generally written carelessly in pencil on grubby pieces of paper that had to be fished out of a pocket or purse when thought of. The old saws among the expressions drew much comment, and the word list turned out to be an amusing tongue-twister, leading to jokes and laughter. Other cues noted by the investigators included the readiness of informants to read and to speak, and the casual articulation of other variables such as (ng). Moreover, most of the informants were their friends. On the other hand, no one could be indifferent to the presence of the tape recorder or to the fact that the interviews were indeed about language. Accordingly, I classify the single style of all the interviews as 'informal', but not 'causal'.

To provide yet more tokens of (ay), the investigators added further elicitation exercise of their own, again in the same style. These included the usual kind of reading passage, silly homilies ('The type of life you lead is determined by the amount of rice they throw at your wedding.'), word pairs ('point - pint'[5]), and further tongue-twisters ('It's a right nice night for an ice cream fight.'). The number of tokens elicited per interview was generally between forty and fifty. As there were sixty informants, the grand total is in excess of 2,400. This number allows for considerable margin of error in the scoring. It cannot be denied, however, that to have four different people analyzing the tapes was a weakness in this study. Another weakness, possibly, is that only one degree of backing for the onset in question was recognized; all utterances were either [ʌy] or [ɔy]. While not true to the phonetic facts, this radical decision simplified the scoring (the

student investigators being relatively untrained), and probably obscured nothing important. Several training sessions were held with example tapes before the analysis began. The Island Rounding scores mentioned below are simple percentages of the total times that [ɔy] might have occurred.

Two final aspects of the interviews remain to be dealt with: free conversation and biographical data. The penultimate part of each session was a relatively free conversation about Island speech, prompted by such attitudinal questions as 'Do you think Islanders speak good English?' or 'Do you think there is an Island way of talking?' At the end of this conversation the point of the interview was revealed, and permission was asked for some biographical information. This was invariably granted. It should be noted here that two of the investigators were testing hypotheses concerning attitudes towards the Island itself, and that questions of this kind were worked in during the 'free' conversation.

The biographical information was gathered according to a set format - the only formal aspect of the interview (and not counted in the scoring) - in order to ensure comparable data. The questions established the informant's age, ancestry, education, usual locality, and occupation, as well as the occupation of his or her spouse and father. There is only one point of any complexity, and that is that the education level was related to age, as in the following table:

Level	18-35	35-60	60+
1	secondary graduation or lower	pre-secondary graduation	pre grade 10
2	some post-secondary	secondary graduation	grade 10
3	degree	any post-secondary	post grade 10

The harder it is to reach a certain level of education, the more status it has, and education in this study is regarded as a feature of status. The table reflects the growing accessibility of education for most Islanders during this century.

I now turn to presenting the individual findings. As none of the samples were large enough in themselves to be compelling, I do not present them as proof of anything. Nevertheless the results, to my mind, are extremely provocative. Dawn Riley did eighteen interviews in Montague (population: 1,827). These were with nine men and nine women spread evenly through the three age groups and the three education levels above. Her chief finding was that Island Rounding decreased regularly as education rose, the one anomaly being a well-educated man of Irish descent. She also found

that Rounding increased regularly with age among men. Middle-aged women, however, had higher scores than their older counterparts; it was thought that certain attitudinal factors may have affected the speech of the three women in this category.

Anne Nicholson went to Murray River (population: 463) to interview seven men and nine women, again with attention to a spread of education levels and age. In this sample the education hypothesis worked for women, but not for men since level-three scores for the latter were higher than lever-two scores. As for age, Nicholson's finding was remarkably similar to that in Montague, with the middle-aged women higher than any other group, and the overall average quite regular.

Anne Scyner interviewed six men and six women, all of middle age, in Crapaud and nearby Victoria (combined population: 1,342), being careful to choose three each with a 'rural orientation' and three each with an 'urban orientation' (the criterion being that, although equally native to the area, the urban-oriented informants commuted to Charlottetown or Summerside to work). Very interestingly, she discovered the mean Island Rounding score in the former groups to be more than double that in the latter (49.0 versus 23.8)[6]. Scyner also searched for a correlation with ancestry - she had four each of Scots, Irish, and 'Other' - but found nothing remarkable.

Finally, Wallena Higgins interviewed twelve fellow students at U.P.E.I. (full-time population: 1,390), six men and six women from various parts of the Island. Her hypothesis, similar to Labov's on Martha's Vineyard (1972), was that students with a positive set towards P.E.I., intending to make the Island their permanent home, would score higher than those intending to leave, or not caring. As it turned out, the mean for the former was 33.8, and for the latter 13.8. Considering that the variable in question is largely below the level of awareness, this too is a finding of some interest.

This concludes my presentation of the individual results. But what happens if these studies are pooled? As it turns out, not much. The mean of the whole group is 29.7, and most of the possible sub-groups tend to cluster annoyingly around this mean:

Sex	
Men	Women
33.5	26.0

Education

One	Two	Three
40.9	23.6	24.8

Age

16-30	31-45	46-60	60+
27.1	33.6	30.8	28.4

Ethnicity

Scots	Irish	English	French (4)	Other (4)
27.9	25.7	30.1	41.8	39.3

Geographical regions of P.E.I. could not be meaningfully compared in this uneven sample, nor were there enough true urbanites to put beside the ruralites. However, it will be recalled that the biographical information included the informants' occupations, as well as those of their spouses and fathers. If these three occupations are each coded along a four-point scale, and the three values obtained for each informant added to his or her education level (with some appropriate weighting[7]), we can produce four social classes. Their scores are as follows:

Class		Informants	Score
Lower Working Class	(7-10)	14	39.2
Upper Working Class	(11-14)	10	29.5
Lower Middle Class	(15-19)	23	28.4
Upper Middle Class	(20-25)	13	19.3

This result looks satisfying, but unfortunately, it is not statistically significant.[8] There is in fact a one in five chance that <u>any</u> four sub-groups would achieve the same scores. Given the unevenness of the sample, the multiple scoring, and the obvious shortcomings of the class index used, one in five is simply not good enough.

Yet the results, both from the individual studies and even from the group as a whole, are certainly intriguing. Indeed they cry out to be tested again, in a larger study with a proper, Island-wide sample. Of course it would be a criminal waste not to work in other variables while we were at it. One might instance

among Islanders the devoicing of medial /z/ other devoicings, as well as the substitution of /ʔ/ for medial /t/, the raising of /ʌ/ to /ʊ/, and the insertion of schwa before nasals and /l/, among others. Such a study would require more money and time that this author can command at present. But if we are ever to add Prince Edward Island to the linguistic map of Canada, it must be done at last.

NOTES

1. As might be expected, there are degrees of backing, but even at its furthest back, lighter, for example, is never quite homophonous with loiter.

2. I follow Labov's (1972:11) use of parentheses for variables, that is, phonetic substances whose internal variation is thought to carry sociolinguistic information. Labov's list (1972:8) of 'the most usefull properties of a linguistic variable' is highly relevant to Prince Edward Island (ay):

> First we want an item that is frequent, which occurs so often in the course of undirected natural conversation that its behavior can be charted from unstructured conversations and brief interviews. Secondly, it should be structural: the more the item is integrated into a larger system of functioning units, the greater will be the intrinsic linguistic interest of our study. Third, the distribution of the feature should be highly stratified: that is, our preliminary explorations should suggest an asymmetric distribution over a wide range of age levels or other ordered strata of society.

3. It is necessary here, oddly, to be clear that this work is not supported by S.S.H.R.C.C., since my other work is, most generously.

4. This finding is also that of Chambers (1980:4) in North Toronto. It contrasts with Léon and Martin (1979:5) in Toronto and with Woods (1979:132) in Ottawa.

5. Pint, referring to alcohol but not to milk, often comes out as [pɔʏnt]. I have no explanation for this at present.

6. This finding accords with my own respecting dialect vocabulary in rural and urban areas on P.E.I. See Pratt 1980-81 and forthcoming.

7. The informant's own occupation was multiplied by 2, and his or

her education by 3. The highest possible score was then 25, the lowest 7.

8. I thank Professor James MacDougall of U.P.E.I. for help with the statistics.

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