

Canadian English, *Eh?* Canadian French, *Hein?*

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Eh is widely considered to be a shibboleth of Canadian English, yet there has been surprisingly little recent research into *eh*'s functions and use. There has been even less interest in the Canadian French *hein*, nor has there been research into the comparative use of *eh* in Canadian English and *hein* in Canadian French. The similarity in their use and possible influence of *hein* on Canadian *eh* has not, however, gone unnoticed. Avis (1972:102) comments:

“*Eh?* is a common contour-carrier among French Canadians (along with *eh bien* and *hein?*), as it has been in the French language for centuries. This circumstance may have contributed to the high popularity of the interjection in Canada generally.”

This paper presents a comparison of the results of two surveys: one surveying the use of and attitudes towards *eh* among a group of anglophone students at the University of Toronto (Gold 2004) and the second surveying the use of and attitudes towards *hein* (and its alternate pronunciation *han*) among francophone students at Université Laval. The survey presents the respondent with ten different constructions with *eh* or *hein* - opinions, statements of fact, exclamations, accusations, etc. These questions are based on categories developed by Gibson (1977) and used in two surveys in 1980, the Ottawa Survey of Canadian English (Woods 1980) and the Survey of Vancouver English (Dodds de Wolff 2004).

Preliminary results suggest minor differences in usage and larger differences in attitudes between the two tags. While *hein* can be used in most of the same contexts as *eh*, it cannot be used with commands. On the other hand *hein* can be used to introduce an expression of surprise where *eh* cannot.

With respect to attitude, Canadian English speakers show a wide range of responses to the different constructions, from very positive for *eh* with opinions to overwhelmingly negative for narrative *eh?* We expect a smaller range for the francophone respondents with none of the constructions with *hein* stigmatized to the same extent+. We further note a difference between *eh* and *hein* in their function as in-group markers and so expect different comments from the two groups of students. *Eh* is strongly associated with Canadian identity and marks speakers of Canadian English as distinct from speakers of other English dialects. *Hein* doesn't perform the same function in marking Canadian French speakers.

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