

WELCOME TO THE PROFESSIONAL WEBPAGE OF

DR. CHARLES S. BOBERG

Associate Professor
Department of Linguistics
McGill University
1085 Dr. Penfield Ave.
Montreal, QC
H3A 1A7
Canada

Tel.: 514-398-4869

Fax: 514-398-7088

E-mail: charles.boberg@mcgill.ca



Below, you will find information relating to my [research](#) and [teaching](#) activities, as well as a brief [biography](#).

Current research interests and activities:

After a year of undergraduate study in Linguistics at the University of Alberta, I did my Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, under William Labov, graduating in 1997. Since graduation, I have been a member of the Department of Linguistics at McGill University in Montreal. My training and current research are in the areas of dialectology, sociolinguistics and language change, with a focus on contemporary varieties of North American English. Most of my work involves acoustic phonetic

analysis, but I have also developed and reported on a survey of lexical (vocabulary) variation. My publications address four main topics:

1) Canadian English: Variation and change

Boberg, Charles. In press. "Standard Canadian English." In Raymond Hickey, ed., *Standards of English: Codified Varieties around the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[Boberg, Charles. 2010. *The English Language in Canada: Status, History and Comparative Analysis*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.](#)

Boberg, Charles. 2008. "Canadian English vocabulary: National and regional variants." *Anglistik* 19/2: 65-79.

Boberg, Charles. 2008. "Regional phonetic differentiation in Standard Canadian English." *Journal of English Linguistics* 36/2: 129-154.

Boberg, Charles. 2004. "Canadian English." In Bernd Kortmann and Edgar W. Schneider, eds., *A Handbook of varieties of English: the Americas and the Caribbean*. Berlin: Mouton/de Gruyter. 351-365.

2) North American English: Variation and change

Boberg, Charles. In preparation. "Ethnic dialects in North American English." In Terttu Nevalainen and Elizabeth Traugott, eds., *Rethinking Approaches to the History of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Labov, William, Sharon Ash, and Charles Boberg. 2006. *Atlas of North American English: Phonetics, Phonology and Sound Change*. Berlin: Mouton/de Gruyter.

Boberg, Charles. 2005. "The North American Regional Vocabulary Survey: Renewing the study of lexical variation in North American English." *American Speech* 80/1: 22-60.

Boberg, Charles. 2001. "The Phonological Status of Western New England." *American Speech* 76: 3-29.

Guy, Gregory, and Charles Boberg. 1997. "Inherent variability and the obligatory contour principle." *Language Variation and Change* 9: 149-164.

3) 'Foreign-a' (*pasta, lava, etc.*): Variation and change

Boberg, Charles. 2009. "The Emergence of a new phoneme: Foreign (a) in Canadian English." *Language Variation and Change* 21/3: 355-380.

Boberg, Charles. 2000. "Geolinguistic diffusion and the U.S.-Canada border." *Language Variation and Change* 12: 1-24.

Boberg, Charles. 1999. "The attitudinal component of variation in American English foreign (a) nativization." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 18: 49-61.

Boberg, Charles. 1997. *Variation and change in the nativization of foreign (a) in English*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.

4) Montreal English: Ethnicity; variation and change

Boberg, Charles. 2005. "The Canadian Shift in Montreal." *Language Variation and Change* 17/2: 133-154.

Boberg, Charles. 2004. "Ethnic Patterns in the Phonetics of Montreal English." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 8/4: 538-568.

Boberg, Charles. 2004. "The Dialect Topography of Montreal." *English World-Wide* 25/2: 171-198.

Boberg, Charles. 2004. "Real and apparent time in language change: Late adoption of changes in Montreal English." *American Speech* 79/4: 250-269.

Teaching at McGill University:

I have been an instructor in McGill University's Department of Linguistics since 1997. In 2004, I was awarded the Principal's Prize for Excellence in Teaching. My regular course offerings are:

LING 320 (Sociolinguistics 1). This is a general introduction to language variation and change, focused mainly on sociolinguistics (the study of the relations between language and society) but also including about a week of lectures on each of dialectology (the study of regional variation in language) and historical linguistics (the study of language change) as well. The sociolinguistics component includes both quantitative or correlational sociolinguistics (investigating correlations between linguistic behavior and social

categories, like age, sex or social class) and "macro-sociolinguistics", which includes a wide range of topics dealing with the social context of language, from contact among languages to linguistic anthropology, the sociology of language and language planning. The textbook for this course is Ronald Wardhaugh's *Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Wiley-Blackwell).

LING 425 (Historical Linguistics). This is an introduction to the study of language change, focusing on the comparative method of historical reconstruction, that is, how historical linguists compare the earliest available data on sets of languages they believe to be "genetically" related, in order to reconstruct the original, prehistoric "proto-language" from which the languages developed, and to identify the changes that occurred in each "daughter" language. By way of example, special attention is given to the best-known example of reconstruction, Proto-Indo-European, and the Indo-European family of languages that developed from it (Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, Gothic, and most of the modern languages of Iran, northern India and Europe, including English). The textbook for this course is Lyle Campbell's *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction* (MIT Press).

LING 520 (Sociolinguistics 2). This is an advanced, seminar-type course focusing on quantitative, correlational sociolinguistics, for upper-level undergraduate and graduate students. The course has two components, theoretical and practical. In the theoretical component, students read a selection of the most important primary literature on quantitative sociolinguistics. This naturally includes the work of William Labov, but also influential papers by Bell, Cheshire, Eckert, Fischer, Kroch, Laferriere and Milroy & Milroy. In the practical component, students conceive, plan, carry out and write up an independent research project, involving original data collection and quantitative analysis and focusing on social differences in linguistic behavior (e.g., linguistic variation associated with age, ethnicity, sex or socio-economic status). The textbook for this course is William Labov's *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (U. of Pennsylvania Press) and a coursepack of other readings.

LING 521 (Dialectology). This is an advanced, seminar-type course focusing on various approaches to the study of regional differences in language, for upper-level undergraduate and graduate students. The course has two components, theoretical and practical. In the theoretical component, students read a selection of the most important primary literature on dialectology. Topics covered include the atlas tradition (Bottiglioni, Atwood), structural dialectology (Weinreich, Moulton, Labov), quantitative methods (Kretzschmar), diffusion (Trudgill, Callary, G. Bailey), leveling (Kerswill & Williams), and a wide range of approaches to Canadian English (Joos, Bloomfield, Scargill, Avis, Gregg, Chambers, Clarke et al., among others). In the practical component, students conceive, plan, carry out and write up an independent research project, involving original data collection and quantitative analysis and focusing on regional differences in linguistic behavior. The textbook for this course is a coursepack of readings, though J.K.

Chambers' and Peter Trudgill's *Dialectology* (Cambridge U. Press) is also suggested as a supplementary text.

Other courses. In addition to these regular offerings, I have occasionally taught LING 330 (Phonetics), LING 480 (Honors Thesis), LING 481 (Joint-Honors Thesis) and LING 488 (Independent Study). A new course focusing on Canadian English is under development and should be offered for the first time in Fall, 2011.

Biography

I was born in 1964 in Northfield, Minnesota, to a Canadian father and a British mother. The mixture of American English in the community and Canadian and British English at home during my early childhood may have had something to do with my lifelong interest in dialect variation.

From the age of 7, I grew up in Edmonton, Alberta, where my father, Einer Boberg, was a professor of speech pathology at the University of Alberta (an expert on the treatment of stuttering). I attended public schools in Edmonton, then enrolled as a Romance Languages major (Honors French and Spanish) at the University of Alberta in 1982. My interests then shifted to politics and government, so that when I graduated in 1986, it was with a B.A. (with Distinction) in Political Science, with a minor in German.

Following graduation, I worked briefly for the Government of Alberta in Edmonton and on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, then spent three years writing strategic reports on the telecommunications industry for a small consulting company in Toronto. I liked the academic aspect of this work, but wanted to get back to my interest in language, so I decided to return to school, to study linguistics.

My first linguistic training came from the University of Alberta, where I returned for a year (1990-91) as a special student, taking courses that provided me with the equivalent of a major in Linguistics. On the basis of this work, I applied to several graduate programs. I decided to attend the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, when William Labov invited me to join his lab there in 1991.

During my time at Penn, Labov, Sharon Ash and I began the project that would dominate the early part of my career in linguistics: the *Atlas of North American English: Phonetics, Phonology and Sound Change* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter). This involved recorded telephone interviews with over 700 randomly-selected people across the continent, and acoustic analysis of about half of those. I was the primary acoustic analyst on the project, but also participated in project planning and conception, and later collaborated with Labov in writing the *Atlas*, which, when published in 2006, would provide the first

continental view of the phonetics and phonology of North American English ever produced. The special focus of the *Atlas* is on active changes in progress that differentiate the major dialect regions of North America, such as the Northern Cities Shift in the Inland North, the Southern Shift in the South, the Canadian Shift in Canada, and the Low-Back Merger in several regions, including New England, the Midland, the West and Canada. The *Atlas* was honored with the Leonard Bloomfield Book Award by the Linguistic Society of America at its 2008 annual meeting in Chicago.

I graduated from Penn in 1997, having written a dissertation on the phonological nativization of “foreign-a” words in English (how people in Britain, the U.S. and Canada vary in their pronunciation of words like *drama*, *pasta*, *nachos* or *chianti*). In the same year, I accepted a temporary teaching position in the Linguistics Department at McGill. I was appointed to a tenure track position there in 1999 and awarded tenure, as an Associate Professor, in 2005.

In 2010, I published my first sole-authored book, *The English Language in Canada: Status, History and Comparative Analysis* (Cambridge University Press). This volume provides comprehensive, up-to-date information on Canadian English, bringing together much of the research I have done on that subject over ten years, since coming to McGill.

In addition to its publication in academic books and journals, my research has been widely featured in the popular media. For instance, on Jan. 7, 2003, my work on regional variation in Canadian vocabulary was discussed on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s afternoon radio shows in thirteen cities across Canada; on Jan. 10, I talked about this research on national television, on CBC’s *Newsworld*. A year later, I was interviewed for the documentary “Talking Canadian”, in the series *The Canadian Experience*, written by Margaret Slaght and produced by Sheila Pin for the CBC, which originally aired on Jan. 29, 2004. More recently, my research on ethnic variation in Montreal English provided the basis for a five-part, week-long feature in the *Montreal Gazette*, written by Marian Scott (Feb. 12-16, 2010).