

CANADIAN ENGLISH IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

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1. Introduction

Since neither one of us is a native speakers of Canadian English, we were interested in finding differences between native Canadian English speakers and speakers who did not learn English in Canada. In our class, we had learned many linguistic features that distinguish Canadian English from other dialects of English: for example, phonetic phenomena such as Canadian raising and the lower back vowel merger; orthographical phenomena such as spellings not found in other English-speaking communities (e.g. humourous, impell, manoeuverable); and vocabulary items only found in Canadian English (e.g. stickhandle [skillfully guide], Molson muscle [beer belly], dish soap [dish detergent]). In our study, we will attempt to look at the prevalence of some of these features in the speech and writing of native Canadian English speakers vs. speakers who learned English elsewhere.

2. Hypotheses

We propose that, due to the overwhelmingly unidirectional influence of American culture on Canada, the English used by younger generations of Canadians will contain more influence from American English than that of older generations. We also hypothesize that English learned in Asia will be more influenced by American English than Canadian English, since English educational materials are developed based on American English, and also because the majority of English teachers in Asia have either come from the United States or been trained in American English. As for English used in other Commonwealth countries, we expect it to show more influence from British English.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

A survey was developed for the purpose of this study, containing three categories: pronunciation preference, spelling preference, and vocabulary preference. Data were collected from 35 participants who were native speakers of Canadian English, and 24 participants who learned English elsewhere. The participant pool consisted of our

friends; our classmates in Linguistics 202; faculty members and office staff in Mackintosh-Corry Hall, Joseph S. Stauffer Library and Dupuis Hall at Queen's University.

3.2. Materials

Background information on age, first language, and experience in using English were gathered from the participants in order to group them into categories for comparison. The first section of the survey proper asked the participants to indicate their preferred pronunciation for two items: *either*, as in (a) *ice* or (b) *eat*; and *semi-*, as in (a) *tummy* or (b) *my mind*. The second section of the survey asked the participants to indicate their preferred spelling of two items: *theatre/theatre*, and *colour/color*. The third section of the survey had participants indicate their preferred word for what was depicted in two pictures: (a) a room with a sink, a toilet, and a bathtub (see **Figure 1**); and (b) a close-up of the valves that control the release of water into a fixture for washing hands or small objects (see **Figure 2**). A copy of the complete survey can be found in the **Appendix**.



Figure 1: Image used for survey question 3(a)



Figure 2: Image used for survey question 3(b)

4. Results

Of the 35 participants who were native speakers of Canadian English, the data from three of the participants were not included in our analyses because they were either

under 20 years of age or over 60. Of the 24 participants who were not native speakers of Canadian English, the data from five of the participants were not included in our analyses because they were under 20 years of age. This decision was made to avoid the difficulties we would have encountered in grouping the data.

Subjects were first divided into two groups by age: 32 participants within the age group of 20 to 39, and 19 participants within the age group of 40 to 59. For further analyses, they were then divided into "Native Speakers of Canadian English," or **EC** for short; and "English Learned Elsewhere," or **EE** for short.

4.1. Pronunciation

Comparison within EC, age group 20 to 39

For the first item, *either*: 57.14% of the participants ($n=8$) preferred the pronunciation that resembled *eat*; 35.71% ($n=5$) preferred the pronunciation that resembled *ice*; and 7.14% ($n=1$) indicated use of both interchangeably. For the second item, *semi*:-: 85.71% of the participants ($n=12$) preferred the pronunciation that resembled *tummy*; and 7.14% ($n=1$) preferred the pronunciation that resembled *my*; and 7.14% ($n=1$) used both interchangeably. Please refer to **Figure 3**, parts (a) and (b).

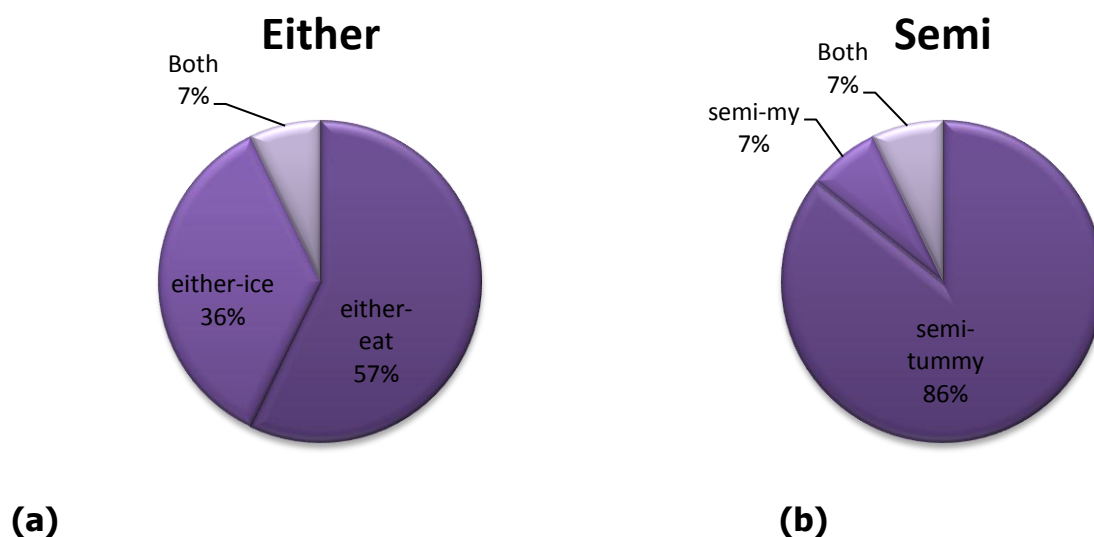
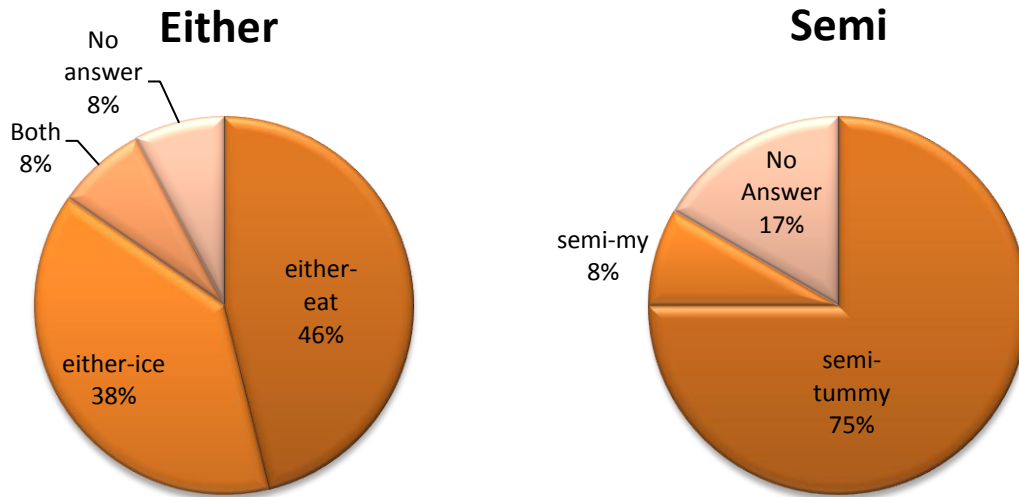


Figure 3. Comparison within EC, age group 20 to 39: (a) either (b) semi-

Comparison within EC, age group 40 to 59

For the first item, *either*: 50.00% of the participants ($n=6$) preferred the pronunciation that resembled *eat*; and 41.66% ($n=5$) preferred *ice*; 8.33% ($n=1$) used both interchangeably. For the second item, *semi*:-: 75.00% of the participants ($n=9$)

preferred the pronunciation that resembled *tummy*; 8.33% ($n=1$) preferred *my*; and 16.66% ($n=2$) did not answer. Please refer to **Figure 4**, parts (a) and (b).



(a)

(b)

Figure 4. Comparison within EC, age group 40 to 59: (a) either (b) semi-

Comparison across different "Englishes", EC

For the first item, *either*: 53.84% of the participants ($n=14$) preferred the pronunciation that resembled *eat*; 38.46% ($n=10$) preferred *ice*; and 7.69% ($n=2$) used both interchangeably. For the second item, *semi*-. 80.76% ($n=21$) of the participants preferred the pronunciation that resembled *tummy*; 7.69% ($n=2$) preferred *my*; 3.84% ($n=1$) used both; and 7.69% ($n=2$) had no answer. Please refer to **Figure 5**.

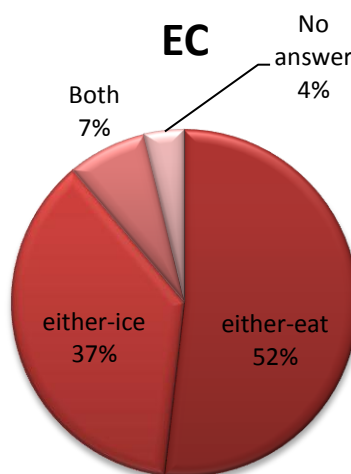


Figure 5. Results from all EC speakers

Comparison across different "Englishes", EE

For the first item, *either*: 58.33% of the participants ($n=24$) preferred the pronunciation that resembled *eat*; 37.50% ($n=9$) preferred *ice*; and 4.16 ($n=1$) used both. For the second item, *semi-*: 70.83% ($n=17$) of the participants preferred the pronunciation that resembled *tummy*; and 29.16% ($n=7$) preferred *my*. Please refer to **Figure 6**.

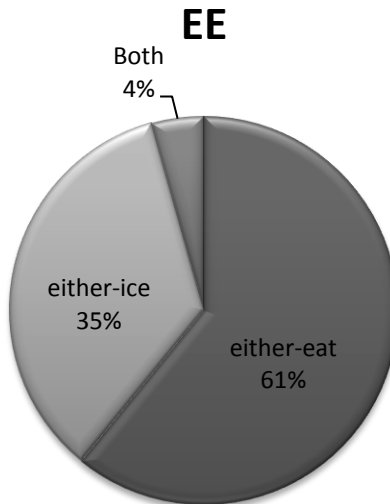


Figure 6. Results from all EE speakers

4.2. Orthography

Comparison within EC, age group 20 to 39

For the first item, 92.85% of the participants ($n=13$) preferred the spelling *theatre*; and 7.14% ($n=1$) preferred the spelling *theater*. For the second item, 100% of the participants ($n=14$) preferred the spelling *colour*; and none of the participants preferred the spelling *color*. Please refer to **Figure 7**, parts (a) and (b), below.

Comparison within EC, age group 40 to 59

For the first item, 91.66% of the participants ($n=11$) preferred the spelling *theatre*; and 8.33% ($n=1$) preferred the spelling *theater*. For the second item: 91.66% of the participants ($n=11$) preferred the spelling *colour*; and 8.33% ($n=1$) preferred the spelling *color*. Please refer to **Figure 8**, parts (a) and (b), below.

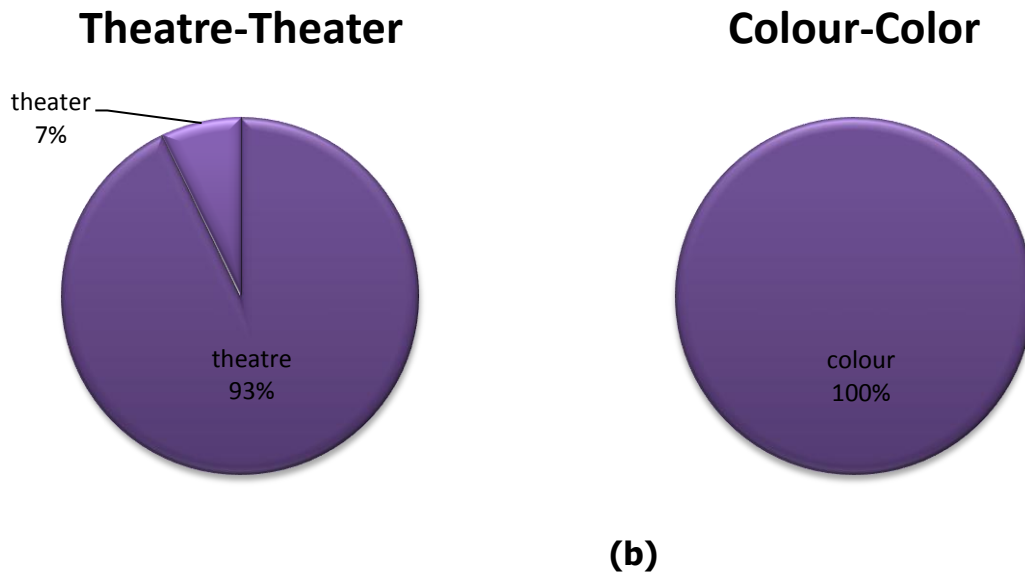


Figure 7. Comparison within EC, age group 20 to 39: (a) theatre-theatre (b) colour-color

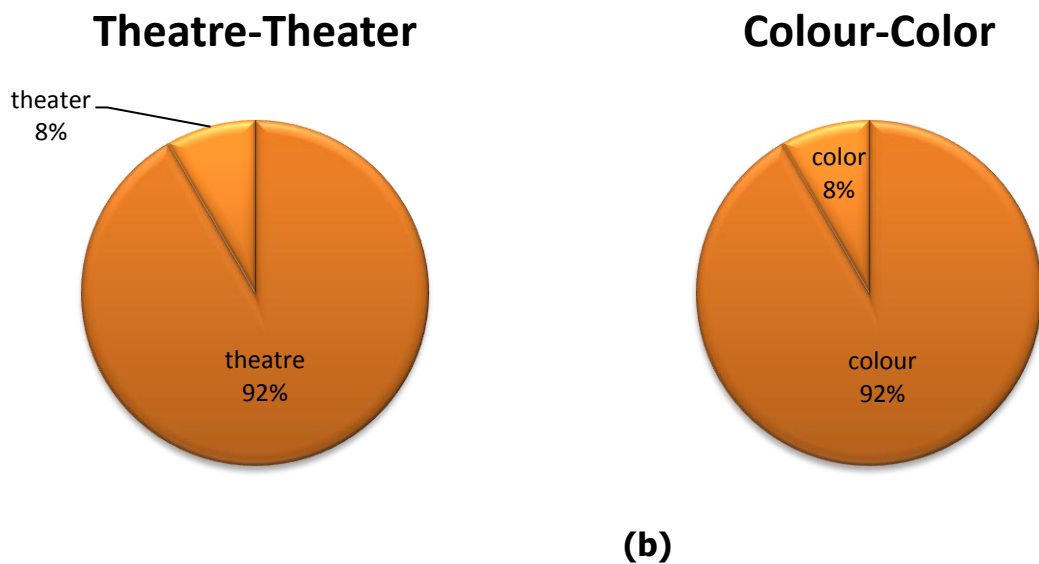


Figure 8. Comparison within EC, age group 40 to 59: (a) theatre-theater (b) colour-color

Comparison across different "Englishes", EC

For the first item, 92.30% of the participants ($n=24$) preferred the spelling *theatre*; and 7.69% ($n=2$) preferred the spelling *theater*. For the second item, 96.15% of the participants ($n=25$) preferred the spelling *colour*; and 3.84% of the participants ($n=1$) preferred the spelling *color*. Please refer to **Figure 9** below.

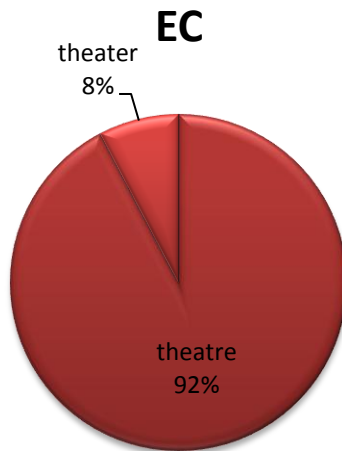


Figure 9. Results from all EC speakers

Comparison across different "Englishes", EE

For the first item, 62.50% of the participants ($n=15$) preferred the spelling *theatre*; and 37.50% ($n=9$) preferred the spelling *theater*. For the second item, 70.83% of the participants ($n=17$) preferred the spelling *colour*; and 29.16% of the participants ($n=7$) preferred the spelling *color*. Please refer to **Figure 10**.

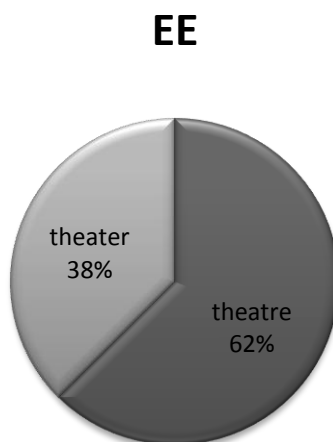


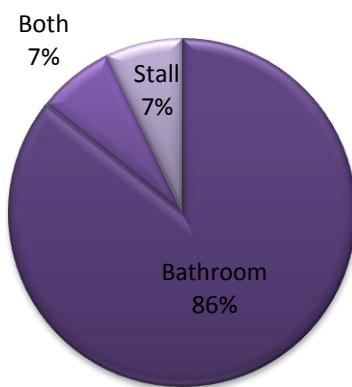
Figure 10. Results from all EE speakers

4.3. Lexicon

Comparison within EC, age group 20 to 39

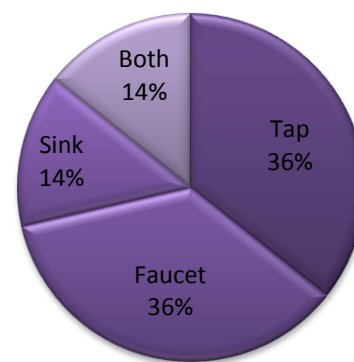
For the first picture, 85.71% of the participants ($n=12$) wrote down *bathroom*; 7.14% ($n=1$) wrote down both *bathroom* and *washroom*; and 7.14% ($n=1$) wrote down *stall*. For the second picture, 35.71% of the participants ($n=5$) wrote down *tap*; 35.71% ($n=5$) wrote down *faucet*; 14.28% ($n=2$) wrote down *sink*; and 14.28% ($n=2$) wrote down both *tap* and *faucet*. Please refer to **Figure 11**, parts (a) and (b).

Bathroom-Washroom



(a)

Tap - Faucet



(b)

Figure 11. Comparison within EC, age group 20 to 39: (a) bathroom-washroom (b) tap-faucet

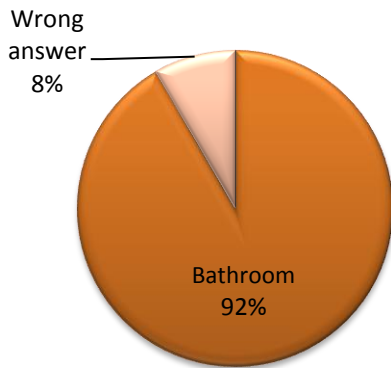
Comparison within EC, age group 40 to 59

For the first picture, 91.66% of the participants ($n=11$) wrote down *bathroom*; and 8.33% ($n=1$) misunderstood the question and gave an irrelevant answer. For the second picture, 50.00% of the participants ($n=6$) wrote down *tap*; 33.33% ($n=4$) wrote down *faucet*; 8.33% ($n=1$) wrote down both *tap* and *faucet*; and 8.33% ($n=1$) once again gave an irrelevant answer. Please refer to **Figure 12**, parts (a) and (b) below.

Comparison across different "Englishes", EC

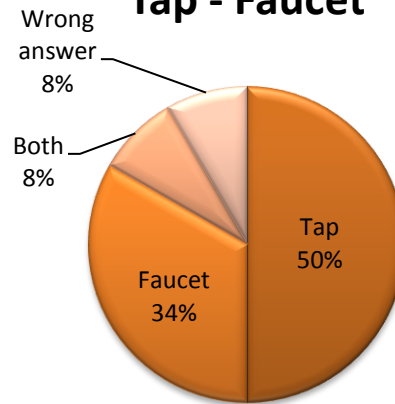
For the first picture, 88.46% of the participants ($n=23$) wrote down *bathroom*; 3.84% ($n=1$) wrote down both *bathroom* and *washroom*; 3.84% ($n=1$) wrote down *stall*; and 3.84% ($n=1$) gave an irrelevant answer. For the second picture, 42.30% of the participants ($n=11$) wrote down *tap*; 34.61% ($n=9$) wrote down *faucet*; 7.69% ($n=2$) wrote down *sink*; 11.53% ($n=3$) wrote down both *tap* and *faucet*; and 3.84% ($n=1$) gave an irrelevant answer. Please refer to **Figure 13** below.

Bathroom-Washroom



(a)

Tap - Faucet



(b)

Figure 12. Comparison within EC, age group 40 to 59: (a) bathroom-washroom (b) colour-color

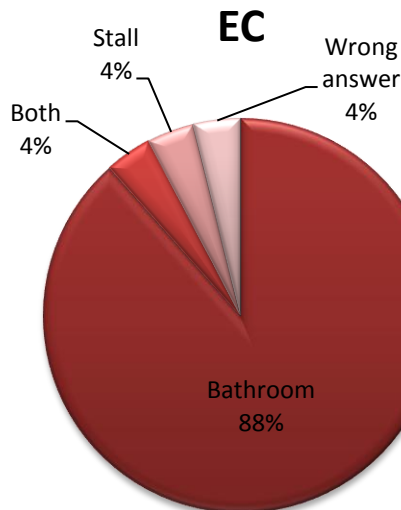


Figure 13. Results from all EC speakers

Comparison across different "Englishes", EE

For the first picture, 54.16% of the participants ($n=13$) wrote down *bathroom*; 33.33% ($n=8$) wrote down *washroom*; 4.16% ($n=1$) wrote down both; 4.16% ($n=1$) wrote down *toilet*; and 4.16% ($n=1$) gave an irrelevant answer. For the second picture, 41.66% of the participants ($n=10$) wrote down *tap*; 37.5% ($n=9$) wrote down *faucet*;

12.5% ($n=3$) wrote down *sink*; 4.16% ($n=1$) wrote down both *tap* and *faucet*; and 4.16% ($n=1$) gave an irrelevant answer. Please refer to **Figure 14**.

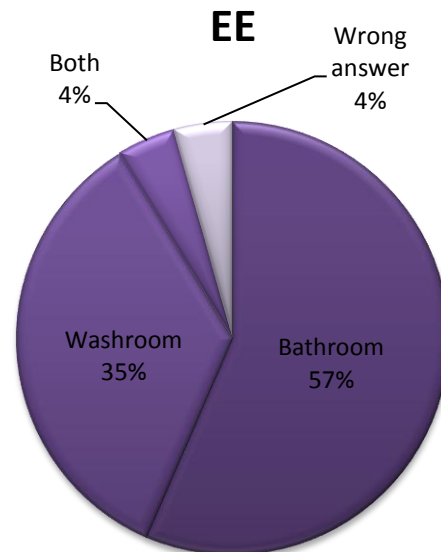


Figure 14. Results from all EE speakers

5. Problems

Since the participants were not randomly selected, our subject pool was not representative of the general population; thus our results would have been subject to sampling bias. The wording of one of the survey questions also posed a small problem for us. Item three stated, "Please indicate the word you would use to describe the following pictures," which some participants interpreted as a prompt for an adjective to describe the pictures, instead of the name for what is depicted in the pictures. Luckily, the misunderstanding was cleared up with all but one participant before they handed back the survey to us. Although a few participants missed one of the sections of the survey (for reasons unknown to us), we decided to include their other answers anyway so the statistics would be more uniform and representative.

6. Discussion of Results

6.1. Pronunciation

As can be seen from the results, there are variations in pronunciation preference, depending on the word. Canadians from *both age groups* seems to prefer the pronunciation that resembles *tummy* for the word *semi-*, while their preference is split for the word *either*. This did not support our hypothesis of a shift to American pronunciations (*semi-*, *my*; and *either*, *eat*) in the younger generation.

When comparing Canadian English to English learned elsewhere, we see slightly more American influence in the English learned outside of Canada, but the difference is very slight. Therefore, this result neither supports nor disproves our hypothesis. Further studies need to be conducted in this area, perhaps separating non-Canadian English speakers into more specific categories.

6.2. Orthography

When it comes to spelling, Canadians in both age groups preferred the British spelling of *theatre* and *colour*. Again this result does not support our age-related hypothesis. We expected the younger Canadian cohort to be split between American and British spellings. When we look at non-Canadian English, spelling choices appear to support our hypothesis: they are more influenced by American spelling.

6.3. Lexicon

For the picture of the bathroom/washroom, it is very important to note something about its components. The picture used in the survey (see **Figure 1**) contains a bathtub in addition to a toilet. We suspect that more Canadians would have written down *washroom* if the bathtub had not been included, but further research needs to be done in this area. Also, as noted in "Toilet Euphemisms," (Brown and Franklin, 2007), some people use different words for this room depending on the social context or formality of the situation. The responses from non-Canadian English speakers were divided more evenly, which we imagine could be due to the fact that a large number of them speak English as a second or third language, and thus use one word to refer to all rooms with similar functions.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, our hypothesis on the intergenerational differences in native speakers of Canadian English was not supported by our data. As for our hypothesis on the differences between native Canadian English speakers and those who learned English outside of Canada, only in the data from the orthography section was there significant evidence of an American influence.

References

Brown, K. & Franklin, L. (2007). Toilet Euphemisms. In E. Gold & J. McAlpine (Eds.), *Strathy Undergraduate Working Papers on Canadian English* (Vol. 6, pp. 56-68). Kingston, Ontario: Queen's University, Strathy Language Unit.

Appendix

Lexical Variation Survey

This is a survey on Canadian English for our Linguistics 202 course at Queen's University, and we would appreciate your participation.*

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can stop any time you wish to, if you decide halfway through that you don't want to finish it.

This survey is anonymous. We do not ask for your name, but we do ask for some general information about you.

First language: _____ (the language you first learned and still know)

If your first language is not English, where did you start using/learning English?

And for how long have you been using English regularly?

Please indicate where you spent your teenage years:

_____ (*city, province or country* if not Canada)

Please circle one:

Age under 20
 20-29
 30-39
 40-59
 60 and over

Sex: M or F

I've completed high school. yes no

I continued to college or university. yes no

