

The hidden dimensions of a change from below: Consequence markers in Montreal French

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Abstract

This article examines the rise of vernacular consequence marker *ça-fait-que* (CFQ), often realized as [fɛk] or [fak], at the expense of its standard counterparts *donc* and *alors* in Montreal French. The apparent-time analysis is based on a 2012 corpus of semi-directed interviews collected in Montreal. Previous studies treated the CFQ/*donc/alors* alternation as a purely lexical sociolinguistic variable. Our analysis shows how a vernacular variant (CFQ), initially associated with the working class and stigmatized, comes to compete, develop as a default form, and eventually crowd out forms at the other end of the social prestige scale (*alors* and *donc*). We rely on new socio-phonetic considerations to unveil a reconfiguration of the variable. The integration of the sociophonetic dimension sheds light on a complex process of diffusion, where a change from below is propelled by an additional change, but from above. Our article shows the key role played by women in both changes.

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Keywords: apparent time, change from below, change from above, French, consequence markers

Résumé

Cet article examine la montée du marqueur de conséquence vernaculaire *ça-fait-que* (CFQ), souvent réalisé sous la forme [fɛk] ou [fak], au détriment de ses homologues standard *donc* et *alors* en français de Montréal. Notre analyse en temps apparent est basée sur un corpus d'entretiens semi-dirigés recueillis à Montréal en 2012. Les études précédentes traitaient l'alternance CFQ/*donc*/*alors* comme une variable sociolinguistique purement lexicale. Notre analyse montre comment une variante vernaculaire (CFQ), initialement associée à la classe ouvrière et stigmatisée, en vient à se développer comme forme par défaut et à évincer les formes à l'autre bout de l'échelle du prestige social (*alors* et *donc*). Nous nous appuyons sur de nouvelles considérations sociophonétiques pour dévoiler une reconfiguration de la variable. L'intégration de la dimension sociophonétique révèle un processus de diffusion complexe, où un changement d'en-dessous est propulsé par un changement supplémentaire, mais d'en-dessus. Notre article montre le rôle clé joué par les femmes dans ces deux changements.

Mots clés: temps apparent, changement par le bas, changement par le haut, français, marqueurs de conséquence

1. INTRODUCTION

Thanks to the interrelated sociolinguistic corpora collected since the 1970s, apparent-time and real-time research on the variety of French spoken in Montreal has been fruitful in helping us to understand linguistic change, in particular the relationship between apparent-time change and real-time change (Sankoff 2018). As we will see below, the Montreal corpora are also well suited to deepening our understanding of the complex relationship between changes from below and changes from above, which are often seen as independent phenomena.

This article builds on previous research, and reports new results on language variation in Montreal French, providing further evidence of change in the use of the consequence markers *ça fait que* (CFQ), often reduced and realized as [fak], and its standard counterparts *alors* and *donc*. This linguistic variable, which was conditioned by social factors such as age and socio-economic status in the 1970s (Dessureault-Dober 1974), is carefully re-examined through an apparent-time, quantitative analysis of the variation in a corpus collected in the 2010s in the socially-diverse Hochelaga-Maisonneuve neighbourhood of Montreal (Blondeau et al. 2012).

In this article, we expand the analysis of the lexical variation of CFQ/*donc*/*alors* with the aim of better understanding the relationship between the two standard variants *donc* and *alors*, associated with a more formal level of language (Dessureault-Dober 1974), and their vernacular counterpart CFQ, typical of spoken Quebec French. We deepen our understanding of the dynamics of the change by discussing the tension between change from above and change from below. One of our objectives is to explain how the vernacular variant CFQ comes to compete, develop as a default form, and eventually crowd out forms at the other end of the social prestige scale. To do so, we use new insights to unveil the reconfiguration of the variable.

Our analysis integrates a new dimension related to the socio-phonetic realization of the markers with the aim of providing a better explanation of the diffusion of *CFQ* at the community level and the social ramifications of this change. This phonetic aspect has never been systematically and quantitatively analyzed from a variationist perspective. We show that the success of the lexical variant *CFQ* – a change from below – is intertwined with a hidden change from above, involving a vowel alternation, namely the replacement of the stigmatized variant [fæk] by the more neutral variant [fɛk].

A discussion of two longstanding issues in sociolinguistics is followed by a brief overview of previous variationist studies on consequence markers. The methodological section focusses on data collection, the description of the stratified sample, and circumscription of the variable context. The results are presented in two separate sections detailing apparent-time analyses. The first section focuses on the social configuration of the three lexical variants in competition; the second examines the socio-phonetic aspects of variation. The discussion section sheds new light on the explanation of linguistic change affecting the speech community by considering socio-phonetics in the general interpretation of the variation observed. The social conditioning of the diverse phonetic realizations of *CFQ* allows us to revisit the canonical tripartite model of the variable.

2. TWO LONGSTANDING PUZZLES IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

This section addresses two longstanding issues in sociolinguistics, namely the relation between change from above and change from below, and the gender paradox.

2.1 Change from above and change from below

Starting with Labov's pioneering work (1972), a longstanding line of research in sociolinguistics distinguishes between two types of linguistic change: change from above, and change from below. On the one hand, changes from above are characterized by a conscious process and involve the diffusion of incoming prestigious forms. The incoming forms, generally associated with the higher levels of the society, are often promoted in the community through the speech of middle-class speakers, who often use these linguistic forms to differentiate themselves from lower-class speakers. When other social classes adopt these forms, the change diffuses within the community. On the other hand, changes from below are generally characterized by a process that takes place at the subconscious level. These changes enter the language primarily through the vernacular and spread throughout the community without speakers' awareness. However, when changes from below rise to the level of awareness, they are frequently stigmatized and rejected by the higher classes (Labov 2001). At least two questions are thus raised: what makes a change from below rise to the level of awareness and how do some variants become stigmatized?

While changes from above refer to changes resulting from conscious social pressure, changes from below are initially subconscious and therefore more difficult to

perceive. Sociolinguists seek to connect the cognitive dimension of linguistic awareness (or saliency) to inter-individual social factors (social origin, age, gender, ethnicity) or intra-individual factors (style, situation, speaker agency).

The definition and the criteria used to distinguish the two concepts – change from below and change from above – remain subject to interpretation. As defined, the two types of change seem independent from each other (conscious/salient/standard/higher class vs. unconscious/non-salient/vernacular/lower class), and generally are not expected to jointly contribute towards a single outcome. In this article, we revisit this binary division between change from above and change from below. We consider a well-documented change from below (the rise of *CFQ*), and use apparent-time data to unveil a hidden change-from-above dimension to this variable.

2.2 The gender paradox

Another longstanding issue in sociolinguistics is the role played by gender in language variation and change. In sociolinguistic theory, the concept of gender is viewed as a social construct. The fact that gender differentiation of speech often plays a powerful role in linguistic change and that this social differentiation relates to sociointeractional patterns in everyday life is one of the main generalizations discussed by Labov in his early work on the social setting of language variation and change, and this pattern has remained relevant for many speech communities (Labov 1972, 2001; Meyerhoff 2006). While the original observations concerning the gender paradox (Labov 1990) continue to be an important object of inquiry in the study of linguistic variation and change (Eckert 2000), the interpretation of the role of gender, and its relation to other social factors and to social meaning have evolved. Milroy and Milroy (1993) discussed how closely gender is related to class and social network, and its role in patterns of change. In addition, further development in sociolinguistics and gender studies in linguistics have led to a critique of the traditional methodologies on gender and language (Cheshire 2002), and of the binary approach. Furthermore, according to Buchholz (2002: 33), all sociolinguists must understand gender ‘*not as a variable that transcends particular situations but as a complex and context-specific system for producing identities and ideologies*’.

In many speech communities, it has been observed that for stable sociolinguistic variables, women use the prestige variants at a higher rate than men do overall. Eckert’s interpretation (2000) suggests that symbolic resources are particularly useful for women to position themselves within or in opposition to a group. When linguistic variables are involved in a change in progress (whether a change from below or from above), women often lead the change and act as innovators.

In cases of change in progress involving an incoming variant that is positively evaluated, women tend to use the innovative variant. Such results have been shown by Lennig (1978) for the modern Paris vowel system in which speakers from the upper middle class initiated the change, followed by the lower middle class and then the working class. In this change in progress, women were about a generation ahead of the men. Since changes from above involve a degree of consciousness, speakers are aware of the prestige associated with a variant and are

consequently prone to hypercorrection. The role of women in change from above is in line with the situation for stable variation (Labov 2001): in both cases, women favour the more prestigious/formal variant.

However, women also play a crucial role in change from below, as they seem to lead men in the use of incoming non-standard variants that are below the level of consciousness. Changes from below challenge societal norms; women, especially those who are socially entrenched and involved in their community, often lead this linguistic change.

The differential role of gender clearly appears when the stages of a particular change are taken into consideration. It has been observed that ‘the mechanism of the change crucially involved the initiating role of women at the outset, and the later adoption of the change by men.’ (Labov 2001: 283). However, is the leading role of women confirmed in the case of a non-binary variable involved in a series of changes? Is it also confirmed when both types of change – from above and from below – are intertwined?

3. CONSEQUENCE MARKERS IN LAURENTIAN FRENCH

Previous studies of Quebec French and other varieties of Laurentian French¹ have considered consequence markers from the complementary perspectives of semantics, pragmatics and sociolinguistics. While some studies have provided a comparison of their semantic values and a description of their pragmatic functions (Léard 1983, Dostie 2006; see Blondeau et al. 2019 for an extensive review), other studies have examined consequence markers from the perspective of variationist sociolinguistics by treating *CFQ*, *alors* and *donc* as competing variants of a single linguistic variable.

While the forms *alors* and *donc* are used in Standard French (both written and spoken), *CFQ* is a vernacular form (Dessureault-Dober 1974). Some studies have mentioned that *CFQ* [sa fɛ kə] can be reduced to [fɛk] (Dessureault-Dober 1974) and may be phonetically realized as [fak] (Léard 1983), following a lowering process in word-final position. According to Dumas (1978), this phenomenon is restricted to a number of lexical items, such as *fait*. This type of lowering can surface as [a] or [æ] (e.g., *français* /fʁãsɛ/ can be realized as [fʁãsæ] or [fʁãsa]). The variant [fak] is the result of phonological reduction, the dropping of *ça*, and the lowering of the lower-mid vowel /ɛ/ in a word-final position as shown in (1).

- (1) a. [sa fɛ kə]
 b. [sfɛ kə] phonological reduction
 c. [fɛ kə] dropping of *ça*
 d. [fa kə] lowering
 e. [fak] final schwa deletion and resyllabification

¹Laurentian French refers to varieties of Canadian French that developed alongside the St. Lawrence River.

Because the form with lowering has been lexicalized (Dessureault-Dober 1974), it has been maintained as such in the community, despite the fact that this type of vowel lowering is in decline and characteristic of older speakers from working-class backgrounds expressing themselves in informal communication situations (Deshaies-Lafontaine 1974, Dumas 1978).

Dessureault-Dober (1974), the first sociolinguistic study to examine consequence markers, was based on a sub-sample of 24 speakers from the 1971 Sankoff-Cedergren corpus (Sankoff et al. 1976). This variationist analysis showed that the variable was socially conditioned: the *CFQ* variant was associated with the lower end of the socio-economic ladder, male speakers and youth. Adopting an apparent-time perspective, Dessureault-Dober interpreted this regular age distribution as a change in progress in favour of *CFQ* at the community level. In this analysis, *alors* was considered a declining form associated with older speakers and social prestige. Note that in Dessureault-Dober's sample, the variant *donc* was too rare to be included in the quantitative analysis.

Thirteen years later, the Montreal 1984 corpus (Thibault and Vincent 1990) provided the opportunity to follow changing sociolinguistic configurations over time. In their study of discourse markers, Thibault and Daveluy (1989) re-examined the trajectory of *alors*. Their study, based on the entirety of the 1971 (120 speakers) and 1984 corpora (72 speakers), showed an increase in the use of *alors*, which they interpreted as an age-grading phenomenon. Although they focused on only one form and thus did not take into account all three variants, their results appeared to refute Dessureault-Dober's initial hypothesis of a declining *alors* at the community level.

Recent analyses (Blondeau et al. 2019, Martineau 2019) reexamined the situation in two interrelated varieties of Laurentian French based on two sub-samples of the 2012 FRAN corpus, providing new insights on this variable. These analyses of the Montreal data reintegrated *donc* into the model, confirming the diffusion of *CFQ* and the sharp decline of *alors*, and thus challenged the age-grading interpretation (Thibault and Daveluy 1989). Furthermore, the results from Blondeau et al.'s 2019 study showed a surprising gender asymmetry. While the strong increase in the use of *CFQ* appeared to be a change initiated by women, the replacement of *alors* with *donc* was a change initiated by men from a high or intermediate socio-economic background. Additionally, this analysis demonstrated that *CFQ* had continued to develop as the default variant. These results point toward a re-shaping of the role and usage of *CFQ* by youth: social variation was observed for young male speakers, but not among young women.

Villeneuve et al. (2019) shed light the effect of style in the variation by looking at two factors: the formality of the interview, and the pronominal forms of address (*vous* vs *tu*). Comparing two sets of television interviews, they showed that *CFQ* was more frequent in the less formal interviews and among *tu* users. As for *donc* and *alors*, they were more frequent in the more formal interviews. They also established a relationship between a more frequent use of *alors* and the *vous* users, which would indicate that *alors* would be more formal than *donc*, a more 'neutral' variant. Such interpretation regarding the stylistic status of *alors* contrasts with previous claims that *donc* is considerably more formal than *alors* (Rehner and Mougeon 2003, Mougeon et al.

2009) and questions the interpretation that the stylistic formality of *alors* in spoken French is not strong enough for this form to withstand the vigorous rise of *CFQ* (Martineau 2019). Under Martineau's analysis, *alors* would be less formal than *donc* and rather an equivalent of *CFQ*. Finally, in a real-time study over more than 40 years, (Blondeau, et al., 2021a) confirmed the obsolescence of *alors* and its replacement by *donc* as a form of social prestige. Based on the entire corpus of 120 speakers from 1971, the analysis demonstrated that despite its rarity, *donc* was already part of the variable context in 1971 and that this incoming form had also already begun to develop at the expense of *alors*. It therefore seems that, despite their more or less formal status, *alors* and *donc* have been competing for a long time on the scale of social prestige, which could partially explain the variation observed by Villeneuve et al. (2019).

This linguistic variable has also been the subject of attention in other varieties of Laurentian French, namely in Ontario, where the contact with English is more intense, and *so*, a borrowing from English, is part of the variable context. In Ontario, *so* is a strong contender and competes with *CFQ*, while *alors* and *donc* compete as standard variants (Mougeon and Beniak 1991, Rehner and Mougeon 2003, Mougeon et al. 2009). Moreover, Bigot and Papen (2021) sheds new light on the variable by analyzing the effect of identity. For communities of Laurentian French differentially affected by language contact, linguistic practices and norms regarding consequence markers need to be nuanced according to the social and ethno-cultural identity of the speakers.

To summarize, research over the last forty years has shown the dynamics of consequence markers in Canada. In all communities, *CFQ* is associated with informal speech, and *donc* and *alors* with more formal speech. In Montreal, we observe the replacement of *alors*, which is becoming obsolete, by both *donc* and *CFQ*. These Montreal results are surprising for a number of reasons. First, how can we explain the rise of vernacular *CFQ* at the expense of standard *alors*? Second, while the rise of *donc* is a change from above led by men, the rise of *CFQ* is a change from below led by women. Given the traditional association of women with standard speech, the leading role of men in the diffusion of *donc* is unexpected. Finally, two changes appear to compete within the variable: a change from below (the rise of *CFQ*) and a change from above (the rise of *donc*). Why do men and women play distinct roles in the diffusion of these two changes? Can this be attributed to the tripartite nature of the variable itself, or does it reflect new gender roles in language change?

4. METHODOLOGY

This methodological section provides a description of the corpus and the variable context, as well as information regarding exclusions, coding, and analyses.

4.1 The Hochelaga-Maisonneuve sub-corpus of the corpus FRAN

The current analysis is based on speech data from sociolinguistic interviews collected in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve from 2012 to 2014 (Blondeau et al. 2012, Martineau and

	SES High		SES Intermediate		SES Low		Total
	F	M	F	M	F	M	
	Emerging Adults 18–25	2	2	2	2	2	
Younger Adults 26–39	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
Older Adults 40–60	3	2	2	2	1	2	12
Mature Adults 61+	0	1	1	5	4	2	13

Table 1: Montreal 2012 Sample (50 speakers)

Séguin 2016, Blondeau et al. 2021b), hereafter referred to as ‘Montreal 2012’. These interviews are part of the larger FRAN corpus (Martineau and Séguin 2016). The Montreal 2012 corpus was initially created to document language change in real time in Montreal (Blondeau et al. 2019). Consequently, the corpus was purposely designed using the same social categories – age, gender and socioeconomic status (SES) – as previous Montreal variationist corpora, thereby ensuring comparability. In this article, we provide an apparent-time analysis of the situation, which is based on a synchronous comparison of age groups in 2012. According to the labovian apparent-time construct, differences among generations mirror actual diachronic developments in a language (Bailey et al. 1991).

While the greater Montreal area still bears the evidence of the traditional split between Francophone and Anglophone communities, most neighbourhoods are increasingly culturally and socially diverse. Hochelaga-Maisonneuve is one of the neighbourhoods that best lends itself to comparison with previous corpora; it is a predominantly French-speaking, socially diverse urban neighbourhood. Situated in the eastern part of the city where Francophones constitute a majority, Hochelaga-Maisonneuve is a working-class neighbourhood that has become gentrified, leading to social mixing (Germain and Rose 2010). This cohabitation of populations from different social backgrounds has allowed the collection of a socially stratified corpus, which facilitates comparisons with the former socially-stratified 1971 Montreal French corpus. (Sankoff et al. 1976).

Data was collected from 50 participants of whom 23 were female and 27 were male. Participants ranged from 18 to 89 years of age: 13 participants (18–25), 12 participants (26–39), 12 participants (40–60), and 13 participants (61+). They were required to have grown up in the Great Plain area of Montreal, to have been educated in French and to have been living in the neighbourhood for at least five years. For the purposes of comparability, the SES categories were based on the Montreal-1984 categorization scheme (Thibault and Vincent 1990), according to the occupational history of the speakers or their families: SES High (Liberal profession/ Business Person/Bachelor Degree/Intellectual), SES Intermediate (Technician /Supervisor/ White-collar/Office worker), and SES Low (Blue-collar/Manual worker/History of no stable employment). As shown in Table 1, the construction of a socially-balanced

speaker sample was somewhat hampered by the fact that it was difficult to recruit older participants situated at the higher end of the social hierarchy in the oldest age group, particularly among women.

The data was collected via face-to-face sociolinguistic interviews. All 50 interviews were transcribed and audio-aligned. Thirty-eight of the interviews were transcribed using ELAN at the Université de Montréal under the supervision of M. Tremblay, and the remaining 12 interviews were transcribed using PRAAT at the University of Ottawa, under the supervision of F. Martineau.

4.2 The variable context

This study focuses on three variants, *alors* and *donc*, and their vernacular counterpart *CFQ*. These connectors can fulfill grammatical and discursive functions. While their grammatical function corresponds to the expression of a consecutive relationship between two propositions, as in (2–4), their discursive function corresponds to cases where the connector is used to engage a turn of speech or introduce a new topic (5) or to mark the end of a speech turn (6–8).

- (2) *on ramassait pas la neige alors les bancs de neige, on sautait du balcon du deuxième là on sautait dans le banc de neige en bas.* (FRAN-Montréal HOMA13_911M67)
‘they didn’t collect the snow so, (there were) the snow banks, we jumped off the balcony of the second floor, we jumped into the snow bank below.’
- (3) *La ruelle euh la la neige ils la ramassaient pas donc il y avait plein de neige l’hiver* (FRAN-Montréal HOMA13_027F60)
‘The alley, uh, the snow, they didn’t collect it so there was a lot of snow in the winter.’
- (4) *nous on a pas Les p’tits déjeuners fait-que c’est un autre service qui est offert.* (FRAN-Montréal HOMA13_012F53)
‘We don’t have the Breakfast Club so another service is offered.’
- (5) *fait-que c’est ça pis tu vois le/ donc le primaire ou le secondaire c’est pas loin là sixième secondaire un.* (FRAN-Montréal HOMA13_012F53)
‘So, that’s it and you see the/so primary and secondary school are not far apart. It’s not far grade 6 secondary 1 (= grade 7).’
- (6) *Pis il y a des gens la région de Beauharnois même et cetera alors euh oui en tout cas bref euh.* (FRAN-Montréal HOMA13_911M67)
‘And there are people even [from] the Beauharnois region et cetera so uh, yeah, anyway, anyway, uh.’
- (7) *Euh et tout ça tu-sais donc euh.* (FRAN-Montréal HOMA13_002F52)
‘Uh and all that you-know so uh.’
- (8) Participant: *je m’entendais pas bien avec le prof fait-que...*
Interviewer: *ah oui hein* (FRAN-Montréal HOMA13_013F27)
Participant: ‘I wasn’t getting along with the teacher, so...’
Interviewer: ‘oh yeah’

In section 6, we will consider how phonetic variation is intertwined with lexical variation and further refine the variable context.

4.3 Exclusions, coding and analyses

Only the forms that can be used interchangeably to fulfill both grammatical and discursive functions were included in the analysis, resulting in a total of 4120 tokens (with an average of 82.4 tokens per participant). We excluded other uses such as *alors que* ‘while’ and the intensifier *donc* [d5] in (9) (Bertrand 2014).

- (9) *Wow. C’est donc bien beau.*
 ‘Wow. It’s so beautiful.’ (FRAN-Montréal HOMA13_012F53)

We also excluded the one token of the form *du coup* (10), frequent in Hexagonal French, due to its rarity.

- (10) *Ben on dirait que du coup je suis comme gêné fait-que j’ai comme de la misère.*
 ‘Well it seems like I’m like embarrassed so I have like a hard time.’ (FRAN-Montréal HOMA13_015M18)

All tokens were coded for three social factors: age, gender and SES (high (SES 1+2), intermediate (SES 3+4) and low (SES 5+6)) as well as for consequential or discursive function. We present the results of multivariate analyses conducted with the variable rule program GoldVarb X (Sankoff, Tagliamonte and Smith 2005) and further explore the source of the variation by contrasting gender, age and socio-economic status based on cross-tabulations of the results. Similar analyses were conducted on the phonetic realization of the three variants for a subset² of the corpus, comprising the 37 speakers aged 18–60 as displayed in Table 1 (3679 tokens, with an average 99.4 tokens per participant).

5. RESULTS: LEXICAL VARIATION

This section focuses on the results of the lexical variation between *alors*, *CFQ* and *donc*.

5.1 General tendencies

The following analyses are based on a total of 4120 tokens of the three connectors from the 50 speakers of the 2012 corpus.³ Table 2 provides the distribution of each of the three variants.

While *alors* is rare, barely reaching a rate of 2.6%, *donc* is used 18.4% of the time. Neither of the two variants associated with Standard French (*alors* and *donc*) reaches the 20% threshold. *CFQ*, generally associated with vernacular speech, is by far the most common, with a rate of 78.9%. These results confirm a previous analysis based on a sub-sample of the corpus suggesting a change from below (Blondeau

²One of the limitations of this study is that we were unable to conduct an analysis of the phonetic realization of each variant, since we do not have access to the sound files and transcriptions of the 12 older speakers interviewed by France Martineau and Yves Frenette. These older speaker data are only searchable online for lexical items via a search engine.

³Unlike previous work on consequence markers in Montreal 2012, which were based on sub-samples (Blondeau et al. 2019, Martineau 2019), this study considers the corpus in its entirety.

Standard variants				Vernacular variant		TOTAL
<i>Alors</i>		<i>Donc</i>		<i>(Ça) fait (que)</i>		
N	%	N	%	N	%	N
109	2,6	760	18,4	3251	78,9	4120

Table 2: General tendencies (50 speakers)

et al. 2019) and validate the initial 1971 apparent-time predictions regarding the rise of *CFQ* and the decline of *alors* in the speech community (Dessureault–Dober 1974).

The distribution of *donc* in the 2012 corpus is higher than in the 1971 data: it appears to have benefited from the decline of *alors* and progressed within the speech community. However, this rise requires closer scrutiny, beginning with the role of pragmatic function.

5.2 Pragmatic function

As previously discussed, *alors*, *donc* and *CFQ* are considered functionally equivalent and can be used as consequence markers or discursive markers. Table 3 shows the distribution of the variants according to the pragmatic function. While *CFQ* favours a discursive function, the two others do not, possibly indicating that the more frequent a form, the closer it is associated with a discursive function. This suggests that the spread of *CFQ* can be explained by its inclination to fulfill a discursive function.

Connector	<i>discursive</i>		<i>consequence</i>		N total
	N	%	N	%	
<i>Alors</i>	41	1,8	68	3,8	109
<i>Donc</i>	372	15,9	388	21,8	760
<i>CFQ</i>	1929	82,4	1322	74,4	3 251
Total	2342	100	1778	100	4120

Table 3: Frequency of connectors according to pragmatic function

The next section examines the social configurations of the variation through the lens of apparent time. We first examine the decline of *alors* (section 5.3), and then the two progressing forms: *donc* and *CFQ* (section 5.4).

5.3 *Alors*: A dying star

As shown in Table 2, in 2012, *alors* only represents 2.6% of the variable context (N = 109), and is therefore too rare to sustain a multivariate analysis. However, an examination contrasting gender with age based on cross-tabulations of the results is

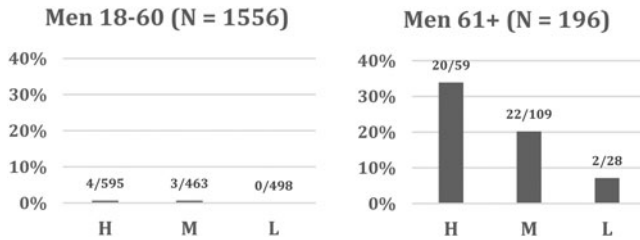


Figure 1: Rate of *alors* according to age group and socio-economic status (men only)

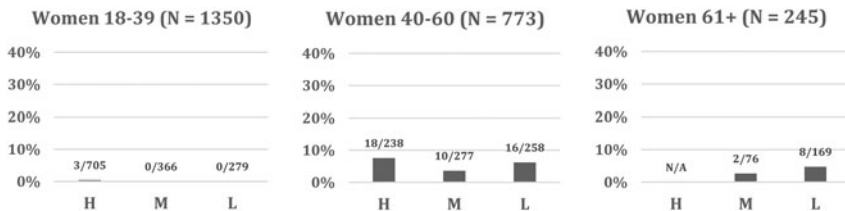


Figure 2: Rate of *alors* according to age group and socio-economic status (women only)

informative. In Figures 1 and 2, we present the use of *alors* in comparison with the other variants combined. Note that while each cell represents a small number of participants (usually two), the number of tokens considered is relatively high. Taken together, these results are revealing of community trends.

As shown in Figure 1, the use of *alors* is retained only by men belonging to the oldest age group, and, among this group, its usage is socially stratified. Moreover, *alors* is practically absent from the speech of men in the 18–60 age group, and no social stratification is observed. It is also worth noting that in the 61+ age group, *alors* is only used by speakers of the high (H) and intermediate (M) SES, and almost absent from the speech of the speakers with a low (L) SES status.

In contrast, Figure 2 shows that older female speakers seldom use the variant *alors* and no evidence of social stratification is detectable, as is the case for males (18–60). For women, the use of *alors* is also rare in the oldest age group.⁴ It is slightly more present in the speech of the 40–60 age group, but there is no sign of SES stratification. In the younger group (18–39), *alors* is almost completely absent.

Previous studies have debated whether the use of *alors* by older speakers was a sign of language change or an age-grading phenomenon. The 2012 apparent-time analysis sheds light on this issue. With a community rate below 3%, *alors* appears

⁴Unfortunately, the corpus comprises no female speakers of the higher SES in the oldest age group.

Factor groups	Input = 0.135 Log likelihood = -1707.133 Significance = 0.000 N = 4120			Input = 0.833 Log likelihood = -1850.640 Significance = 0.000 N = 4120		
	% <i>donc</i>	N total	Weight	% <i>CFQ</i>	N total	Weight
Gender						
Female	12.8	2 368	.391	84.8	2 368	.598
Male	26.1	1 752	.646	71.0	1 752	.370
Range			26			23
Age						
18–25	13.6	1 035	.379	86.3	1 035	.665
26–39	19.7	1 324	.488	79.9	1 324	.557
40–60	23.6	1 320	.652	72.7	1 320	.343
61+	10.4	441	.359	77.3	441	.413
Range			29			33
SES						
High	26.3	1597	.696	70.8	1597	.304
Intermediate	22.0	1 291	.601	75.1	1 291	.431
Low	4.5	1 232	.183	93.3	1 232	.796
Range			52			50

Table 4: Influence of extralinguistic factors on the use of *donc* and *CFQ*

to have become obsolete.⁵ In colloquial French, *alors* is only retained by the oldest male speakers and only in this age group is regular social stratification apparent. We propose that this association of *alors* with older male speakers with a high or mid SES exemplifies the vestiges of its use as a historically prestigious variant. Two solid contenders – standard *donc* and vernacular *CFQ* – are competing to fill the void left by the decline of *alors*.

5.4 Two variants on the rise

Table 4 contrasts the results of two GV multivariate analyses on the effect of social factors in the choice of *donc* vs the other two variants, and the choice of *CFQ* vs the other two variants. The variant selection is influenced by gender, age and socio-economic status. While *CFQ* is favoured by female speakers, low SES speakers, and those under 40, *donc* is favoured by male speakers, high and intermediate SES speakers, and speakers from the 40–60 age group. In the next two sections, we examine the progression of each variant in detail.

⁵Note that *alors* is not obsolete in other varieties of French, including other varieties of Laurentian French (Blondeau et al. 2019, Bigot and Papen 2021). Moreover, Villeneuve et al. (2019) report an important rate of *alors* (above 30%) in television interviews.

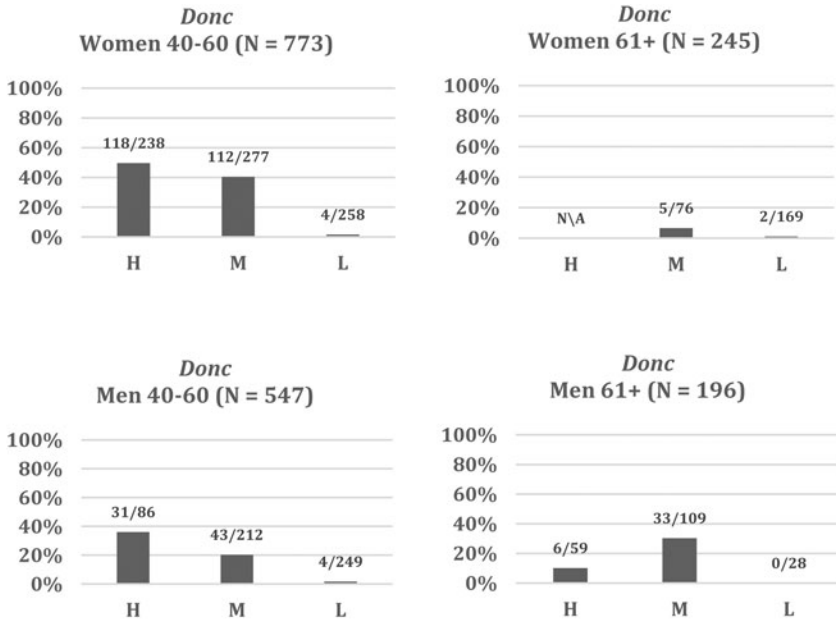


Figure 3: Rate of *donc* according to age group and SES (men and women 40+)

5.4.1 *Donc: A shooting star*

Table 4 shows a sharp contrast between speakers over the age of 60, who use *donc* only 10.4% of the time, and speakers in the 40–60 age group, who use *donc* 23.6% of the time. This difference, together with the link between *donc* and a high SES, would support the claim that *donc* is replacing *alors* as the prestigious variant. This is additionally supported by Figure 3, which shows similar social stratification around the use of *donc* by both male and female speakers in the 40–60 and 61+ age groups, though this is less apparent in the latter.

While Table 4 showed an association between male speakers and the use of *donc*, it is worth noting that in the 40–60 age group, this variant is associated with female speakers, who use *donc* at a rate of 30%, while men from the same age group use *donc* at a rate of 14%. Within this age group, *donc* clearly appears to be replacing *alors* as the prestigious form; its association with female speakers and its social stratification are indications of a change from above led by women.

This contrasts sharply with the use of *donc* by speakers between the ages of 18 and 40. Figure 4 shows that, in comparison with female speakers (40+), female speakers (18–39) abruptly abandon *donc* in favour of *CFQ*, most notably in the 26–39 age group.

Surprisingly, unlike women of the same age group (18–39), men have increased their use of *donc*. Comparing Figures 3 and 5, we see that male speakers from the high SES between the ages of 26 and 39 use *donc* at a much higher rate (63%)

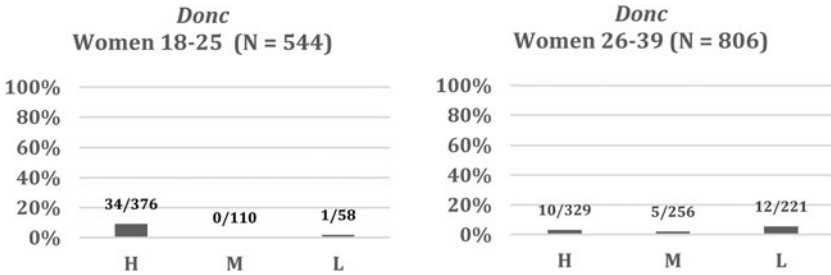


Figure 4: Rate of *donc* according to age-group and SES (women 18–39)

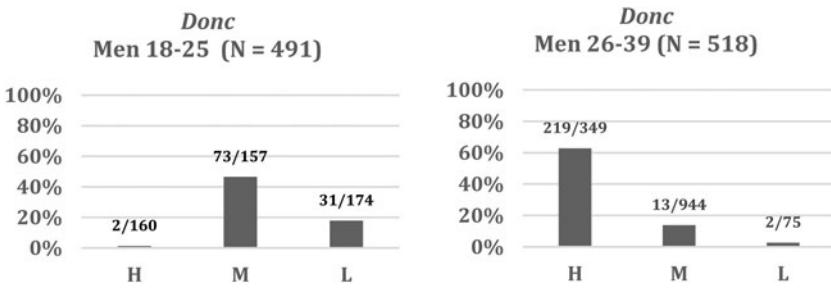


Figure 5: Rate of *donc* according to age-group and socio-economic status (men 18–39)

than male speakers from the 40–60 age group (36%). Comparing the 18–25 age group with the 26–39 age group, we see an increase from 14% to 46% (intermediate SES), and from 3% to 18% (low SES). In the 18–25 age group, the social stratification of *donc* becomes irregular as the higher SES group discards this form⁶ and selects the same form (*CFQ*) as female speakers in the same age range.

The sudden (and surprising) abandonment of *donc* in favour of *CFQ* is seen in female speakers aged 18 to 39 - who represent an age group that has never exhibited high rates of use of *alors* - and in male speakers aged 18 to 25 with a high SES.

To summarize, *donc* appeared to be a good candidate for the replacement of *alors* as the prestigious variant. However, our apparent-time analysis shows that its usage was of short duration, favoured by speakers aged 40–60 with high SES and mainly women. A closer look at the younger age groups suggests a rapid abandonment of *donc* by female speakers. The success of *donc* was very limited in scope and this can only be understood in light of the story of *CFQ*.

⁶An anonymous reviewer remarks that discourse marker use can be highly speaker-specific and that it is possible that there is something particular about the two speakers. We agree that one limitation of the present analysis is that each cell represents a small number of participants (2). However, the number of tokens considered in the high SES 18-25-year-old males category is relatively high (N = 160), and the near-categorical use of *CFQ* by these two speakers is consistent with the apparent-time data which show that gradual abandonment of *donc* in the community.

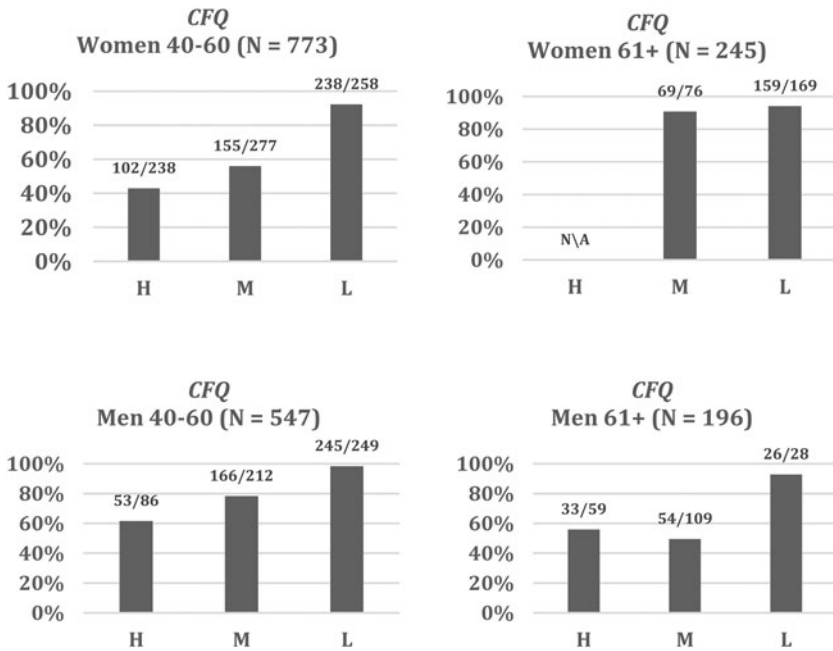


Figure 6: Rate of *CFQ* according to age-group and SES (women and men 40+)

5.4.2 *CFQ: A rising star*

We saw in [Table 2](#) that in 2012, *CFQ* was used 79% of the time. This is an increase of 26% from the 1971 data reported in [Blondeau et al. \(2021b\)](#). The multivariate analysis provided in [Table 4](#) shows that in 2012, as in 1971, this form is favoured by female speakers, young speakers, and individuals with a low SES. However, a closer look at the use of *CFQ* shows that its association with low SES individuals is limited to older speakers. [Figure 6](#) shows that for speakers aged 40 to 60 and 61+, this form is strongly favoured by speakers with low SES.

[Figure 6](#) shows that male speakers of the 40–60 age group use *CFQ* systematically more frequently than women (Men: H (62%) M (78%), L (98%); Women: H (43%), M (56%), L (92%). However, [Figure 7](#) shows the reverse situation for female speakers aged 18–25 and 26–39. *CFQ* is favoured by women, who display a near-categorical selection of *CFQ*; consequently, neither of the two groups (women 18–25 and 26–39) shows social stratification related to their use of the vernacular variant. In contrast, men between the ages of 18–25 and 26–39 still demonstrate variation in their use of *CFQ*. In the 26–39 age group, men with high SES continue to eschew *CFQ*. However, the change observed in female speakers aged 18 to 39 appears to be spreading to young male speakers, in particular those with a high SES, who use of *CFQ* 99% of the time.

To summarize, the results of our apparent-time data analyses indicate that women were at the forefront of two successive linguistic changes. Female speakers first initiated a change from above with the replacement of standard form *alors* by

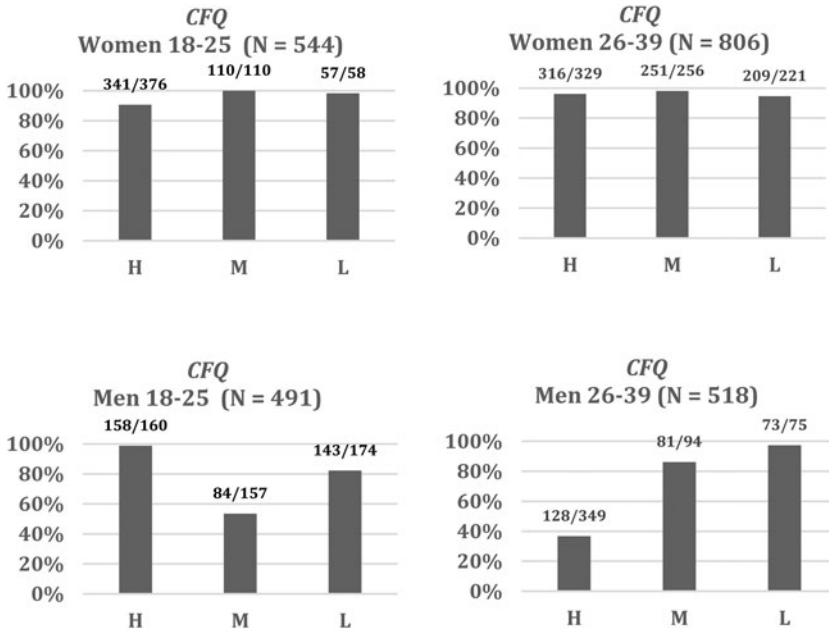


Figure 7: Rate of *CFQ* according to age-group and SES (women and men 18–39)

standard form *donc*. *Donc* was then quickly abandoned and replaced through a change from below in the form of the vernacular *CFQ*. Male speakers also contributed to the replacement of *alors* with *donc*. Despite being slower in their adoption of *donc*, they continued to use it after the form was abandoned by women in favour of *CFQ*. This delayed change in male speaker behavior accounts for the link between men and the use of *donc* visible in the multivariate analysis provided in Table 4.

The rise of *CFQ* and the decline of *alors* and *donc* raise questions regarding the socio-stylistic value of the *CFQ* variant. If the vernacular form extends across all social groups, then this also raises the question of the sociolinguistic status of this variant. Is the spread of the vernacular variant *CFQ* to all social groups truly the result of a change from below? The next section addresses these questions by considering the socio-phonetic variation in the use of *CFQ*.

6. SOCIO-PHONETIC VARIATION

In this section, we show how phonetic variation is intertwined with lexical variation to convey both linguistic and social information. We begin by describing the sub-corpus used for the analyses, examine the different phonetic realizations of all three lexical variants, and finish with a focused analysis of the impact of linguistic and social factors on the choice between two of the primary phonetic variants of *CFQ*, [fak] and [fæk].

6.1 The sub-corpus

The transcription of the interviews with software that provided time-aligned annotations allowed further coding of socio-phonetic variation in the use of the three lexical variants. In this section, we focus on the 37 speakers, ages 18–60, and study the 3,679 tokens from the available sound-aligned transcriptions.⁷ As seen in Table 5, the distribution of the three lexical variants in the sub-corpus (37 speakers) is similar to that of the main corpus (50 speakers).

	Standard variants				Vernacular variant		TOTAL N
	<i>Alors</i>		<i>Donc</i>		<i>(Ça) fait (que)</i>		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Main corpus	109	2.6	760	18.4	3 251	78.9	4 120
Subcorpus	55	1.5	714	19.4	2 910	79.1	3 679

Table 5: General tendencies: Main corpus vs subcorpus

6.2 Phonetic realizations of *alors*, *donc* and *CFQ*

In the sub-corpus, *alors* is found to have two different phonetic realizations: [alɔʁ] and [alɔʁə]. *Donc* has five different phonetic realizations, of which two are primary forms [dɔ̃k] and [dɔ̃kə], and three are marginal [ɔ̃k], [dɔ], and [dɔ̃g]. In sharp contrast, *CFQ* has a total of 21 different phonetic realizations, the details of which are discussed separately below. Interestingly, all three variants can occur with a word-final schwa: [alɔʁ]/[alɔʁə], [dɔ̃k]/[dɔ̃kə], and [safɛk]/[safɛkə]. Table 6 shows the results of a GV analysis on the effect of the presence of a word-final schwa on the selection of the variant for consequential or discursive function.⁸

In Table 6, it is evident that the final schwa is more frequently present when the form in question is functionally discursive, a phenomenon also observed by Dessureault-Dober (1974). This slight association of the final schwa with *CFQ* is

⁷The socio-phonetic study is based on auditory phonetic transcriptions. The different phonetic realizations of *alors*, *donc* and *CFQ* were coded by two native speakers of Montreal French, with undergraduate training in phonetics. After searching the orthographic transcriptions for the relevant forms, each token was then associated with a broad auditory phonetic transcription.

⁸A reviewer suggests also considering the phonetic context as a conditioning factor for presence of a word-final schwa. This is not an unreasonable suggestion, given that schwa is often inserted to break up or avoid complex consonant clusters in French. However, word-final schwa can also be inserted to signal turn of speech, change of topic or the end of a speech turn, which accounts for its association with the discursive function of consequence markers.

Input 0.367 Log likelihood = -2332.331 Significance = 0.010 N = 3679			
Factor groups	% final [ə] <i>schwa</i>	N total	Weight
Function			
Consequence	24.0	1 464	.355
Discursive	46.4	2 215	.597
Range			24
Variant			
<i>Alors</i>	32.7	55	.430
<i>Donc</i>	31.2	714	.448
<i>CFQ</i> ⁹	39.1	2 910	.514
Range			6

Table 6: Distribution of final schwa according to connector and function

Form	%	N
[fak]	31.7	923
[fɛk]	26.0	758
[fɛkə]	19.9	579
[fakə]	13.8	403
[safɛkə]	2.9	84
[kə]	1.2	36
[safɛk]	1.0	30
Other ¹⁰	3.3	97
TOTAL		2910

Table 7: Phonetic variants of *CFQ* in the sub-corpus

epiphenomenal and reflects the fact that discursive function favours *CFQ* (as seen in Table 3).

As mentioned previously, there is considerable variation in the phonetic realization of *CFQ*. Table 7 displays the distribution of the different phonetic realizations of *CFQ* which occur at least 1% of the time in the sub-corpus.

Examples (11) and (12) illustrate the two most common forms of *CFQ*: the phonetically-reduced [fak] and [fɛk].

⁹Phonological context was not considered as a factor, despite the fact that, as an anonymous reviewer pointed out, in written French, final schwa in *ça fait que* is deleted before a vowel as in *ça fait qu'elle...* vs *ça fait que la femme...* Spoken French differs from written French in that final schwa deletion can also occur before a consonant: *ça fait que la femme* is generally

- (11) *au besoin il y a les taxis pis tout est proche à Montréal fait-que [fak] si jamais on a besoin d'un taxi on s'en sort à dix piastres.* (FRAN-Montréal HOMA13_001M29)
 'if necessary there are taxis and everything is close by in Montreal so if we ever need a taxi we can get by at ten bucks.'
- (12) *pis sa fille a accepté fait-que [fek] on est parti ensemble.* (FRAN-Montréal HOMA13_002F52)
 'and his daughter accepted so we left together.'

Slightly less frequent are the partially reduced [fakə] and [fəkə] associated with a discursive function. The fully articulated forms [safək] and [safəkə] appear marginally at 3.9%. Together *fak/fakə* variants and *fek/fekə* variants account for 45.5% and 45.9% of the data, respectively. Given the association of vowel lowering from [ɛ] to [a] with older speakers from working-class backgrounds in Quebec French (see section 3), we wondered whether the choice of vowel in *CFQ* is a potential sociolinguistic variable, a possibility supported by the fact that both *fak* and *fek* are found in informal writing, such as text messages (13) (from Blondeau and Tremblay, to appear).

- (13) a. *Tasaccess mais faut que tu aille un compte fakjaidemande au gars de ten faire un.*
 T'as accès mais faut que tu aies un compte fak j'ai demandé au gars de t'en faire un.
 'You have access but you need an account so I asked the guy to create one for you.'
 (Texto4Science, user_110250)
- b. *jc pas akelle heure jva revenir fekfie toi pas sur moi pour faire de koi*
 Je sais pas à quelle heure je vais revenir fek fie toi pas sur moi pour faire de quoi.
 'I don't know when I'll come back so don't count on me if you want to do something.'
 (Texto4Science, user_111030)

The next section examines the linguistic and social conditioning of this vowel alternation.

6.3 Defining a new variable context: The [a]/[ɛ] alternation in *CFQ*

This section focuses on the vowel alternation between [a] and [ɛ] in *CFQ*. Both vowel options appear frequently in the sub-corpus, making them good candidates for sociolinguistic analysis. All *CFQ* forms were coded by two native speakers. Each *CFQ* was searched in the audio-aligned orthographic transcription and matched to a possible phonetic representation from a list, which was adapted as needed. Given the saliency of the [a]/[ɛ] alternation in Quebec French (Riverain-Coutlée 2014), and consequently the *fak/fek* alternation, this coding process was straightforward, and no particular difficulty was reported. Reliability tests were not conducted. However, unclear cases were discussed between the two coders and in doubt, ambiguous tokens were excluded from the analysis.

pronounced *ça fait qu'la femme* [safəkɫafam]. Moreover, final schwa deletion in *ça fait que* is not obligatory before a vowel and thus in Quebec French *ça fait qu'elle* can be realized as [safəka] or [safəkəa].

[a]	[ɛ]	Other
[fak]	[fɛk]	[kə]
[fakə]	[fɛkə]	[fkə]
[fa]	[fɛ]	[fəkə]
[ak]	[safɛk]	
[safakə]	[safɛkə]	
[sfak]	[sfɛk]	
[sfakə]	[sfɛkə]	
	[sa:fɛtkə]	
	[safɛ]	
	[sækə]	
	[sæɛk]	

Table 8: Distribution of phonetic realizations of *CFQ*

<i>Ça fait que</i>		<i>Ø Fait que</i>		TOTAL
N	%	N	%	N
163	5.6	2 747	94.4	2910

Table 9: Distribution of *ça fait que* vs *Ø fait que*

Table 8 summarizes the phonetic realizations of *CFQ*. Only three forms did not exhibit [a]/[ɛ] alternation. The 57 tokens with no full vowel such as [fkə] and [kə], or those using the reduced vowel [ə], such as in [fəkə], were excluded.¹¹

As shown in Table 7, the reduced phonetic realizations of *CFQ* [fak]/[fakə]/[fɛk]/[fɛkə] account for 91.4% of the data. Together the fully articulated forms [safɛk] and [safɛkə] only account for 3.9% of the tokens, but combined with other marginal phonetic realizations such as [sfak], [sfakə] and [sa:fɛtkə], the total percentage of forms containing *ça* [sa] or its reduced form [s] is 5.6% (Table 9). This result is much lower than the 13.4% reported by Dessureault-Dober (1974: 6). This is an indication that the reduced form has continued to progress on the path to lexicalization.

Table 10 shows that the presence of [sa] or its reduced form [s] is not associated with the consequential or discursive function of the variant.

Table 11 presents the frequency of [ɛ] according to the presence vs absence of *ça*. The 57 tokens which did not present [a]/[ɛ] alternation were excluded from this analysis. This table reveals a strong effect of this factor: in the absence of *ça*, the speakers in our corpus select [a] and [ɛ] equally frequently. However, the

¹¹Interestingly, all three forms occurred with a final schwa, and represent different stages of phonological attrition: vowel reduction to schwa [fəkə], schwa deletion [fkə], and [fə] deletion [kə].

Factor groups	% ζa	N total
Function		
Consequence	5.6	1 102
Discourse	5.6	1 808
TOTAL		2 910

Table 10: Effects of function on the presence of ζa in *CFQ*.

Factor groups	% [ɛ]	N total
Without ζa	50.0	2 690
With ζa	93.3	163
TOTAL		2 853

Table 11: Effects of the presence of ζa on vowel quality in *CFQ*: [a] vs [ɛ]

presence of ζa triggers a near-categorical selection of [ɛ] forms, which justifies the exclusion of ζa forms from the analysis. The final sub-corpus comprises 2 690 tokens representing 92% of the occurrences of the *CFQ* variant.

6.4 *fɛk* variants vs *fak* variants: Social factors

The following analyses were performed on 2,690 tokens across 37 speakers aged 18–60. The [a] variant groups four phonetic realizations of *fak* - [fak], [fakə], [fa], and [ak] - and the [ɛ] variant includes three phonetic realizations of *fɛk* variants - [fɛk] [fɛkə] and [fɛ]. Table 12 displays the results of a GV analysis on the effects of social factors on the *fɛk* realization and the *fak* realization of the reduced forms (without ζa). The application value is the *fɛk* variants.

The three factor groups considered were selected as significant. With a range of 42, the age factor plays the most important role in the variation. The variable is characterized by a regular age distribution where the *fɛk* variants are favoured by younger speakers. The SES factor group is also significant with a range of 23: the *fɛk* variants are favoured by speakers from the intermediate SES and disfavoured by the other two groups. Gender is also selected as significant, with a range of 9: female speakers slightly favour the *fɛk* variants.

Given the role of gender in lexical variation discussed in section 5, separate GV analyses were performed for each gender group in order to better understand the socio-phonetic variation at play. Table 13 provides the results of the analysis based on 1,712 tokens for female speakers, and 978 tokens for male speakers.

Both analyses identify age as the most important factor for both female and male speakers. The *fɛk* variants are clearly preferred by younger speakers of both genders. However, for the two other age groups, female and male speakers behave differently.

Input = 0.503 Log likelihood = -1670.596 Signification = 0.000 N = 2 690			
Factor groups	% [ε]	N total	Weight
Gender			
Female	52.0	1 712	.533
Male	46.3	978	.442
Range			9
Age			
18–25	73.3	821	.749
26–39	44.3	1 040	.423
40–60	33.9	829	.333
Range			42
SES			
High	53.9	1 051	.473
Intermediate	58.2	795	.637
Low	37.2	844	.403
Range			23

Table 12: Influence of social factors on the use of *fɛk* variants vs *fak* variants.

Input = 0.519 Log likelihood = -970.015 Signification = 0.000 N = 1712							Input = 0.444 Log likelihood = -552.042 Signification = 0.000 N = 978		
Factor groups	FEMALES			MALES					
	% /ε/	N total	Weight	% /ε/	N total	Weight			
Age									
18–25	73.5	475	.742	73.1	346	.765			
26–39	55.2	761	.524	14.7	279	.165			
40–60	25.6	476	.230	45.0	353	.531			
Range			51	60					
SES									
High	55.8	744	.451	49.5	307	.578			
Intermediate	73.3	468	.767	36.7	327	.394			
Low	26.6	500	.305	52.6	344	.532			
Range			46	19					

Table 13: Influence of social factors on the use of *fɛk* vs *fak* variants in women and men

Among female speakers, the variation follows a regular distribution across all three age groups; among male speakers the distribution across age groups is not regular: the 26–39 age group displays the lowest relative weight, an aspect we will discuss in section 6.4.2. In terms of socioeconomic distribution, women with intermediate SES highly favour the *fɛk* variants, while women with low or high SES do not. This preference for the *fɛk* variants demonstrated by female speakers of the intermediate SES could be associated with a pattern of hypercorrection (Labov 1972). The situation for male speakers provides the reverse portrait. Men from the intermediate SES group do not favour the *fɛk* variants, while speakers with a high SES or low SES favour it. Note that the order of the percentage values and corresponding factor weights are inverted, as a result of interactions discussed below in the cross-tabulation analysis.

6.4.1 *Women as leaders of the change in favour of the fɛk variants*

To clarify the relationship between gender and SES, cross-tabulations were performed. Figure 8 shows cross-tabulations of the results for the female speakers by age group. Comparing results across three age groups provides a better apparent-time perspective on the introduction of the *fɛk* variants and its diffusion among the female speakers.

In the 40–60 group, the *fɛk* variants are almost entirely absent for low SES speakers and marginally present for speakers with high SES. However, they are clearly associated with intermediate SES speakers. For the 26–39 group, the *fɛk* variants are used by all three socioeconomic groups, and again we observe the propensity for intermediate SES speakers to use these forms. This suggests that the middle-class women 40–60 are the leaders of the change. Finally, among the younger age group (18–25), all social groups are users of the *fɛk* variants, and there is no longer a clear social stratification.¹²

6.4.2 *Men*

Similar analyses were performed on data gathered from male speakers. Figure 9 is based on cross-tabulations of the results for the male speakers by age group.

Young male speakers aged 18 to 25 from the high and intermediate SES are strong users of the *fɛk* variants. However, the other two age groups exhibit a very different behavior. The *fɛk* variants do not reflect a regular socioeconomic distribution within the 40–60 age group. In particular, the use of *fɛk* by low SES is restricted to the older male speakers and remains puzzling, and is probably the source of the discrepancy identified in Table 13. For speakers from the 26–39 age group, the *fɛk* variants are used infrequently and again without a visible regular socioeconomic distribution.

To summarize, the results of lexical variation presented in section 5 confirmed the rise of *CFQ* – a change from below – but left unexplained the sudden adoption

¹²The relatively low rate of the mid-SES 18-25-year-old females category in figure 8 (51%) reflects the fact that one of the two participants was a categorical user of the *fak* variant (26/26). The other participant displays a rate of 76% (41/54), which is in line with other speakers of the same age group.

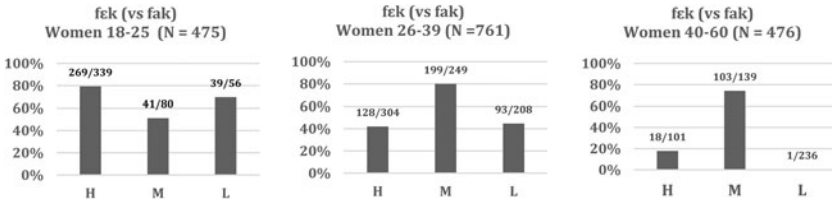


Figure 8: Rate of *fek* vs *fak* according to age-group and SES (women 18–60)

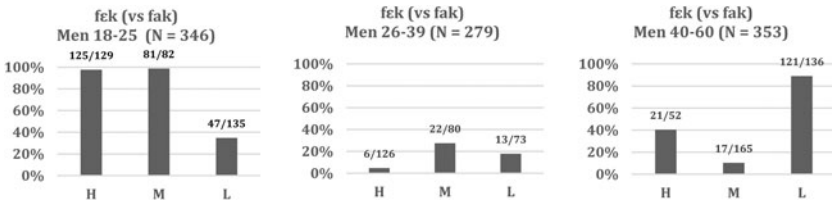


Figure 9: Rate of *fek* vs *fak* according to age-group and SES (men 18–60)

of a vernacular form by speakers with high SES. To resolve this issue, we further examined in section 6 the distribution of two phonological forms of *CFQ* – the *fak* variants and the *fek* variants – and demonstrated the social conditioning of the variable: *fek* variants are favoured by women and youth, while *fak* variants are associated with speakers with a low SES. In the next section, we propose a new model which reintegrates the variants *alors* and *donc* and combines them with the *fek* forms of the *CFQ* variant, which we label the ‘All’ variant.

7. THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC STATUS OF *FĒK* VARIANTS

The ultimate success of *CFQ* is attributed to the rise of the *fek* forms. As shown in Table 14, *alors* and *donc* are standard language forms. *Fak* forms are both vernacular and stigmatized, especially among women. The ultimate success of *CFQ* is really the ultimate success of *fek* variants, which represent non-stigmatized vernacular forms. *Fek* first replaced *donc* as a prestigious variant, but then spread to speakers with low SES. *Fek* is not socially restricted because it is more neutral, which explains its spread across all levels of SES.

	Standard	Vernacular	Stigmatized
<i>alors</i>	+	-	-
<i>donc</i>	+	-	-
<i>fek</i>	-	+	-
<i>fak</i>	-	+	+

Table 14: Contrasting features of consequence markers in Montreal French

In the analysis of lexical variation in section 5, we observed that the speakers who were previously users of *donc* or *alors* abandoned these two standard variants in favour of the *CFQ* variant. A clearer picture can be obtained by opposing the new All variant (i.e., *alors + donc + fek*) with the *fak* variant. In particular, this allows for a better understanding of the situation observed for male speakers (section 6.4.2). The analyses provided here are based on 3,459 tokens across 37 speakers aged 18–60, of which 1,403 tokens were from male speakers and 2,056 tokens were from female speakers. Figures 10 and 11 illustrate the inclusion of the other variants and offer interesting insights into these situations.

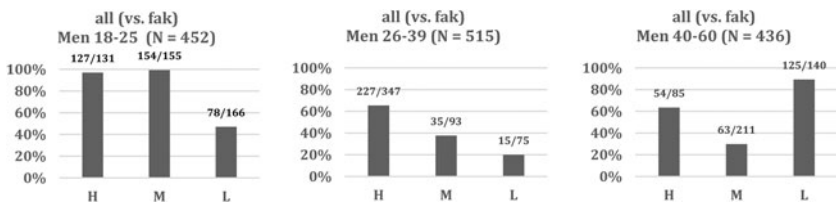


Figure 10: Use of All vs *fak* by male speakers across three age groups (18–60) (N = 1403)

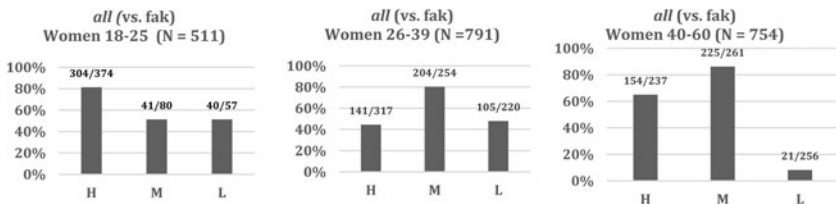


Figure 11: Use of All vs *fak* by female speakers across three age groups (18–60) (N = 2056)

7.1 Men

Figure 9 showed that for speakers from the 26–39 age group, the *fek* variants were used infrequently and without a visible regular socioeconomic distribution. As we can see in Figure 10, the All vs *fak* variant model provides a better representation of the usage of consequence markers observed in male speakers of this age group than the simple comparison between the *fak* and *fek* variants. For the 26–39 age group, the All vs *fak* variant model provides an understanding of the sociolinguistic distribution of the forms. This new level of comparison demonstrates that the non-stigmatized variant of *CFQ*, *fek*, patterns with *alors* and *donc*.

Looking at the situation from this perspective offers a better way to understand the path of the change. It also provides a framework for the interpretation of the variation from the perspective of a binary opposition between a stigmatized vernacular

variant – in this case the *fak* variant – and a series of non-stigmatized variants – in this case *alors*, *donc*, and the *fek* variant.

7.2 Women

A similar analysis is performed on the data from female speakers (Figure 11). A comparison with the data provided in Figure 8 above (section 6.4.1 Women) shows that the model provides a slightly different perspective on the change affecting consequence markers. The difference is essentially only applicable to the 40–60 age group, which is the generation of *donc* users.

Looking at this change on an age continuum from the perspective of apparent time, a clearer picture of the change emerges. For the 40–60 age group, speakers with middle or higher SES use *fek* and *donc*, while *fak* was the main choice for lower SES speakers. The disappearance of *donc* from the speech of the 26–39 age group – as observed in section 4.4.1 – made room for a binary opposition between the *fek* and the *fak* variants. Finally, the *fek* variant represents the new normal and the default variant for the younger age group.

8. DISCUSSION

This article contributes to a better understanding of the two theoretical constructs – Change from above and Change from below – by showing how the two may coexist within a given variable. Our results illustrate how a lexical form first associated with the lower SES (*CFQ*) was able to spread to the higher SES, and replace the two competing variants (*alors* and *donc*). As the vernacular variant *CFQ* can phonologically encode social variation, it blurred the distinction between change from below and change from above. Because the phonological variant /fɛk/ was less stigmatized than the traditional vernacular variant /fak/, it was massively adopted by the higher SES speakers, and then spread across all SES at the same time, possibly eliminating its old rival *fak*. Thus, the ultimate success of *CFQ* in this lexical competition can be attributed to the fact that what originated as a change from below, specifically the replacement of *alors* and *donc* by *CFQ*, ultimately became a change from above with the replacement of *fak* by *fek*. Thus, this ‘change-from-above’ component to the variable is the key to understanding the overall success of the change from below, and explains the crucial role played by the higher SES in the diffusion of *CFQ*. In the case of consequence markers in Montreal French, a change from below (the lexical change) and a change from above (the sound change) are intertwined within the same variable.¹³ Our results suggest that different components of the same change may be of a very different nature, including some parts as change from below, some as change from above.

¹³As noted by a reviewer, similar cases of phonetic change interacting with rise of a lexical variant have been documented for varieties of North-American English, such as the low back merger being driven by avoidance of stigmatized variants of the CAUGHT/THOUGHT vowel in New York City (Becker 2010). See also Irons (2007) for Kentucky English.

Another contribution of our apparent-time analyses is that they allow us to disentangle the respective roles played by men and women in the diffusion of both types of change. Counter to Blondeau et al's 2019 proposal that the replacement of *alors* with *donc* was initiated by men, we show that the cascading series of changes resulting in the diffusion of *donc* and *fɛk* was driven by female speakers. At first, *alors* competed with *fak*. Then *alors* was gradually being supplanted by *donc*. Finally, *donc* was gradually being supplanted by *fɛk*. The apparent-time analyses suggest that *fɛk* is now spreading across all SES, possibly eliminating *fak*. This could indicate that consequence markers are on the verge of losing their sociolinguistic marker status.

Alors/fak → donc/fak → fɛk /fak → fɛk

So, not only did women lead the change involving the sudden rise and fall of *donc* – a phenomenon of short duration – but they also contributed to the diffusion of CFQ by propulsing the *fɛk* variant throughout the speech community. This highlights once again the active role of women in the diffusion of innovations (Labov 1990).

In contrast, men demonstrated a delay in the adoption of the new forms. This delay explains their present use of both *donc* and *fɛk* and by extension, their deviation from the traditional push-chain pattern. As late adopters, male speakers appear to have followed a two-step process in the replacement of *donc* by *fɛk*. The first step was the introduction of *fɛk*, at which point *donc* and *fɛk* co-existed as non-stigmatized alternatives to CFQ. This was followed by the abandonment of *donc*.

Alors/fak → donc/fak → **donc/fɛk/fak** → fɛk/fak → fɛk

9. CONCLUSION

In this article, we further documented the change in the use of consequence markers in Montreal French. We made a methodological contribution by showing how circumscribing the variable context can be an analytical and dynamic process. We first considered a tripartite lexical variable consisting of the two standardized variants *alors* and *donc*, and a vernacular variant CFQ. Digging deeply into the patterns of this variation led us to unveil a hidden phonological dimension, and to divide the vernacular variant (CFQ) in two subvariants, *fak* and *fɛk*.

In basing our apparent-time analysis of the lexical variation on a 2012 corpus and by integrating a socio-phonetic dimension to the analysis of a subset of the data, we have deepened our understanding of a change in progress at the community level. The comparison between the lexical variation in 2012 and past analyses confirms that CFQ was not only the rising star but that this variant has diffused across the speech community over time. The 2012 apparent-time perspective suggests that women with intermediate SES were at the forefront of the change. Additionally, our analysis allows a reassessment of the role of *alors*. The rarity of this form in

the 2012 corpus does not support an age-grading explanation for *alors*. If *alors* played such a role before (Thibault and Daveluy 1989), its scarcity in 2012 suggests that this form is being phased out. The third variant *donc* behaved like a shooting star. Due to its association with the standard language, *donc* appeared to be a good candidate for the replacement of *alors* as the prestigious variant. Marginal in the 1970s data, its presence has increased over time. However, our apparent-time analysis of the 2012 data shows that its usage was of short duration, favoured by speakers aged 40–60 with high SES, most of whom were women. A closer look at younger age groups suggests an abandonment of this form by women aged 18–39 and men aged 18–25. The short duration of the success of *donc* can only be understood in light of the ascent of *CFQ*.

Our results confirm the rise of *CFQ* and provide an explanation for its use by speakers with low and high SES at the expense of the standard variants *alors* and *donc*. We attribute the success of *CFQ* in this lexical competition to its ability to phonologically encode social variation. A careful examination of the social distribution of the two groups of phonological variants of *CFQ* (*fak* variants and *fɛk* variants), revealed that the choice between the two was socially conditioned: *fɛk* variants are favoured by women and youth, and *fak* variants are linked with a low SES. Nowadays, the lowering of the lower-mid vowel /ɛ/ in word-final position is perceived as archaic, and stigmatized (Riverain-Coutlée 2014). This makes the lexicalized *fak* variants particularly salient, and prone to avoidance by younger and more educated speakers. After a change in the phonological realization of the lexical variant *CFQ* (*a* → *ɛ*), *CFQ* was no longer stigmatized, potentially returning the variant to subconscious status, allowing it to continue to thrive in the community. Our article shows the key role played by women in all three phases of the change: 1) the rise of *CFQ* (a change from below); 2) the phonological tweak to make it socially acceptable by the middle class (a change from above), and 3) the propulsion of the new variant, now devoid of stigmatization (a change from below).

To conclude, our results further show that traditional first wave sociolinguistic categories are still useful to track the social trajectory of changes in progress. Such community trend studies provide a necessary background for third wave sociolinguistic studies, which explore the role of lifespan change, including agency and age grading, aspects that we are currently exploring in panel studies. As directions for future research, a closer look at the intra-individual variation through the lens of style might shed light on the social meaning associated with each variant. In addition, perceptual analyses of the values associated with the sociophonetic variants of *CFQ*, as well as with *alors* and *donc*, might be informative about the sociolinguistic marker status of this variable.

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