

**(Que)-Deletion in Quebec and Europe**  
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Variable (that)-deletion, particularly in English, has been a topic of interest within the field of Sociolinguistics for decades. While (que) ‘that’ -deletion is not a part of standard French, it has been attested in spoken French in Quebec for more than three decades. One such example is found in (1).

- (1) *Je pense (que) c’était toi.*  
I think (that) it was you

The earliest studies on (que)-deletion focused on linguistic factors. Connors (1975) found that (que)-deletion is syntactically conditioned with the context /\_\_ *pronoun* favoring deletion. Sankoff, Sarrasin & Cedergren (1971), whose main results appear in Sankoff (1980), found it to be phonologically conditioned with sibilant consonants favoring deletion the most followed by other consonants and then vowels. In later studies, Martineau (1985 & 1993) demonstrated that many different factors simultaneously contribute to (que)-deletion, including age, social class, formality, the phonological and syntactic context following (que) and discursive factors. In comparing this phenomenon in circumstantial clauses, relative clauses and as a complementizer, Martineau (1985) found (que)-deletion to be much more prevalent when used as a complementizer.

The aims of this study are to determine if there has been change in Quebec French with regard to the frequency of (que)-deletion when used as a complementizer, to test some of the possible contributing factors as identified in previous studies and to compare this phenomenon in two francophone regions, Quebec and Europe. The hypotheses are that the rate of deletion in Quebec will be consistent with or greater than that found in previous studies (23% Sankoff, Sarrasin & Cedergren 1971; 32% Martineau 1985), that there will be a higher rate of deletion in Quebec than Europe, that there will be a greater influence of linguistic factors than sociological ones and that (que)-deletion will pattern similarly in Quebec and Europe, especially concerning linguistic factors.

For this study I used the corpora *Phonologie du Français Contemporain (PFC)* and *Corpus de français parlé au Québec*. Both corpora provide transcriptions of conversational speech in an informal context at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The first-person forms of the verbs *penser* ‘think’, *dire* ‘say’ and *croire* ‘believe’ were targeted for extraction from the corpora due to the fact that all three verbs have been shown to favor deletion in Quebec as well as in Old French (Martineau 1993). Examples of the target verbs that contained direct discourse, more than one possible placement of omitted (que), false starts and corrections, uncertainty of transcription and use that could be considered a discourse marker were excluded. The sociological factors of gender, age, education and geography were tested alongside the linguistic factors of verb, phonological and syntactic context following (que) and intervening material using logistic regression analysis in Rbrul.

The results show a rate of (que)-deletion in Quebec that falls between the rates observed in previous studies. The overall rate of deletion in the Quebec sample is 23.9% (N=63/264) while

it is 11% (N=15/136) in Europe. Factors with a significant p-value ( $<0.05$ ) are gender, geography, verb, phonological context following (que) and intervening material in the matrix clause. The two regions exhibit the same pattern for all statistically significant factors with the exception of one of the three phonological groups. While age is not statistically significant, the results diverge from those of Martineau (1985) and suggest possible age grading.

The results of this study provide a recent snapshot of deletion rates of the complementizer (que) and show how the phenomenon behaves in two francophone regions. These results point to the same conditioning factors for both regions and suggest possible age grading. The similar patterning in Quebec and Europe supports the claim that English influence does not cause this deletion even though it may play a role by reinforcing natural tendencies (Connors 1975; Martineau 1985). This study brings us closer to determining the relative influence of French language structure with regard to this phenomenon.

### References

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