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Canadian Accent, Californian Accent and the Similarities Between Them

Even though they live on different ends of the North American continent, Canadians and Californians seem to have more in common than one would expect – especially in terms of pronunciation. It does not mean that the Canadian and Californian accents are completely identical. It *does*, however, mean that the two varieties of English share many similarities and therefore it can be very difficult to pinpoint the small differences.

'Standard' Canadian English as it exists today is closer to California English than to any other American variety of English. It appears that these two accents share a rather distinctive vowel shift. According to Ben Trawick-Smith's article on *Dialect Blog*, "in both accents, the vowel in 'dress' tends to shift toward the vowel in 'trap,' the vowel in 'trap' tends to move toward the vowel in 'lot', while 'lot' merges with the vowel in 'thought'" ("Canadian Vowels vs. California Vowels"). As a result, it can be hard to distinguish between people speaking with a Canadian accent and a Californian one, but the general impression still might be that the Californian accent has a slightly more laid-back and relaxed sound.

As James Harbeck writes in his article "Why It's Difficult to Tell a Canadian Accent from a Californian One": "the vowel in a word such as 'hat' is farther back in the mouth in Canada and California. This is completely different from what you'll hear in places like Buffalo and Detroit. In fact, the way Californians and Canadians say 'hat' is almost exactly the

same as the way people from the big Great Lakes cities say 'hot'." As for why it is so, no one really knows. There is no cultural, historical or geographical reason why the Californian accent should be so similar to the Canadian accent. And while it is true that Canadian actors are usually very good at faking the Californian accent, the same cannot be said about actors from California trying to imitate Canadians (although that might be due to the numerous stereotypes about Canadian English floating around). In fact, the American actors would probably be infinitely more successful at imitating Canadians if they simply used their General American accent.

And just to confuse everyone even more, there is one specific feature that is completely unique to the Canadian accent and which cannot be found among the speakers of the Californian accent: "Canadian English features something called Canadian Raising, which basically means that the diphthong in "now" is raised before t, s or other voiceless consonants (i.e. in words like about and house)" (Trawick-Smith, "Canadian Raising: Nobody says 'Aboot'"). In short, this means that the diphthong in, for example, the word 'out' is being produced a little higher in the mouth than its American counterpart. Therefore, Canadian 'about' can sound like something between *aboot* and *a-boat* to American ears while 'out' can sound a little bit like *oot*. In fact, it's a common misconception. It certainly belongs to the long list of stereotypes that the Americans love to spread about Canada. Linguists are divided on the question of origin of this myth. It is possible that the strange pronunciation of certain vowels comes from a particular region in Canada – the Atlantic Provinces (Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island). However, it is most certainly *not* how the average Canadians speak.

In conclusion, distinguishing between the Canadian accent and the Californian accent requires a lot of skill. Someone living overseas or in a different part of the United States would probably find it difficult. Although, it might be interesting to put a Canadian and someone who has lived all their life in California in the same room and let them talk. Maybe the two of them would have no trouble spotting the differences and could tell right away that the other person's English sounds a bit foreign. And maybe they would both simply end up being *very* confused.

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