

GENERAL AMERICAN vs. CANADIAN

There are many features of General American (GenAm) and Canadian (Cdn) speech that are very similar. However, as most Canadians believe that they do not *have* an accent, it is important that we look at predominant Canadian speech patterns and try to isolate them before we attempt a GenAm accent. As most Canadian actors will attest, a good GenAm accent is invaluable to a career in TV and film in this country. It is important to note that US producers working in this country have a tendency to assume that Canadian based actors have incorrect sounds, even when they do not, so some sensitivity to the fears of the producers, and the paranoia that may come with them is important for working successfully in the Made-for-US-consumption market.

A Note on Canadian Raising

Canadian Raising is the most well known feature of Cdn speech, happening both on words of the MOUTH and PRICE lexical sets. It is important to recognize that these sound changes occur *only before a voiceless consonant*, rather than before a voiced one. Examples are: *mouth, shout, out, about, house; price, right, like, ice, life, ripe*. It is useful to contrast these kinds of words with their counterpart, where the diphthong is followed by a voiced consonant:

a bow	about
bowed (bent at the waist)	bout
loud	lout
mound	mouse
mouthe (verb)	mouth
sound	south
to house	house
plow	pout

The noun, flower, sounds round in the *mouth*.*

Get *out* of town, by sundown!

The brown cow went to the *South* mound to *pout*.

A loud *shout* went *about* the *house* when the cat found a *mouse*, and pounced.

The *stout trout* swam *south about* the *mouth* of the river.

The clown found the *joust* was a *roust*, as he was pounded *about* the *mouth* and *snout* from *without* by a *louse* of a *lout*.

Dies	dice
Twine	twice
Alive	life
Lies	lice
Confide	fight
ride	right
Mine	Mike
Denied	night
Pied	pipe

* Sentences are by Diane Pitblado and John Nelles.

Irish eyes are smiling *brightly*.
 It's *nighttime*, and that's no time to be in this neighborhood!
 Mike lied *twice* that his *life* was *ripe* for *strife* and a *fight*.
 The *erudite writer's concise* diatribe was *like a knife* that *snipes* at *polite advice*.
 If you ride a *bike* on *ice* at *night*, you *might* provide a *crisis* in your *life*.

GOAT and FACE Lexical Sets

These words, in Cdn, tend to be monophthongized (made into pure vowel), especially in more rural or working class accents. Americans think of this as the "Fargo" accent of Minnesota, the Dakotas and part of Wisconsin. In GenAm, the GOAT lexical set tends to be quite unrounded, [ʌʊ] while the FACE set tends to be more open [eɪ], compared to Cdn's [eɪ].

(a) soap, boat, oak, roach, loaf, oath,
 road, loathe, coal, roam, loan, boast, coax, ...;
 note, rope, joke, both, gross,
 robe, code, rogue, grove, clothe, rose,
 hole, home, tone,
 so, no, toe, foe, don't, host,
 noble, ocean, explosion, holy, . . .
 brooch, beau, gauche, mauve

(b) bowl, own, tow, know, grow, owe, Owen, ...;
 soul, poultry, mould/mold, shoulder, ...;
 colt, holster, old, bold, soldier, ...;
 roll, scroll, control, ...;
 sew, dough, though, although.

(a) tape, late, cake, safe, case,
 babe, fade, vague, age, wave, bathe, craze,
 name, mane, vale,
 change, waste, ... ;
 taper, bacon, nature, station, lady, raven, invasion,
 bass (in music), gauge, gaol/jail,
 crêpe, fete, bouquet ;

(b) wait, faith, plaise, aitch, raid, nail, main, faint, ... ;
 day, play, way, grey/gray, ... ;
 rein, veil, beige, feint, ... ;
 they, whey, obey, ... ;
 weigh, weight, eight, straight, ... ;
 reign, campaign, deign, ... ;

(c) great, steak, break, yea.

FATHER, LOT, THOUGHT Merger

The back vowels in Cdn speech are merged into one sound, using the [ɑ] vowel. There may be some usage of a mild version of [ɔ] in words like "throng," but this is very mild. Compare "thaw, thought, throng, throb" – do they all share the same vowel? GenAm is inconsistent on this one; dialecticians argue that no one can agree on what defines GenAm partly because of this variability. It is easiest for Canadians working in GenAm to merely maintain their merged lexical sets, and not worry about it. However, it is important to know that Americans from Eastern states generally have at least two sets here, typically a merge of FATHER and LOT, with a more rounded, but still fairly open THOUGHT group.

R-Coloured Diphthongs

Cdn may differ from GenAm by having more closed versions of these diphthongs, though this is typically a more rural or working class version of the Cdn accent. Contrast:

LexSet	GenAm	Cdn
NEAR	iə	iə
SQUARE	eə	eə
CAR	ɑə	ɑə (Atlantic Canada only)
FORCE/NORTH	ɔə	oə
CURE	ʊ ə ɔə uə	oə uə ɜ

(*sure, pure, dour, lure, tourist, etc.* are frequently merged with FORCE/NORTH or NURSE)

TRAP

Cdn and GenAm speakers need to be wary of nasalization, especially when TRAP words end in a nasal vowel, such as: *can, can't, jam, bam, handle, sandwich, sample, angle, bang, rang, sang*. In these words, there is a tendency towards ongliding from [ɪ], resulting in [ɪ̃æ], a sound similar to the woman taking speech lessons in *Singin' in the Rain*: "I can't stand bim".

"-orr" WORDS

A subset of the NORTH lexical set for Canadians are words like "*sorry, tomorrow, borrow, horrible, etc.*" In GenAm, these words are in the LOT lexical set. Since Canadians have a tendency to apologize a lot, mastering the pronunciation of *sorry* so that it sounds like "sari" can make a big difference in a Canadian actor's life. Note that there are some words, like "*orange, oracle, horrid, florid, Florida, torid, etc.*" that don't *always* take the LOT sound change. Typically these pronunciations occur in the Eastern part of the US. This can be frustrating to a Cdn actor, as a US director and producer team might disagree on the correct way to pronounce these words. Very confusing.

(c) origin, Oregon, oratory, orator, orange, authority,
borrow, categorical, correlate, coroner, coral,
florid, Florida, florist, florin, historic(al),
horrid, horrible, majority, *horrify, horror*,
metaphoric(al), morrow,
Morris, moral, Norwich,¹ *porridge*, rhetorical, *sorrel*,
moribund,... ;
sorrow, tomorrow, sorry,
Laurence/Lawrence, laurel, laureate,²
quarrel, quarry, warrant, warren, warrior, Warwick.¹

Other Word traps

Naturally, there are many words that Americans use which are different in Canada. Aside from the use of "huh" instead of "eh", there are many expressions that are hard to pick up. One stands "on line" rather than "in line," in a "line" never in a "line up" (unless the police have pulled you in).

Some words in Canada have a British traditional pronunciation, some words depend on the speaker.

Missile, agile, mobile, etc.	[mɪsɪl]	['mɪsaɪl]
Schedule	[skɛdʒəʔ]	[ʃɛdʒuʔ]
Really	[ɹɪli]	[ɹɪli] (stressed form), [ɹɪli] (unstressed)
Been	[bɪn, bɛn]	[bɪn] (stressed form), [bɪn] (unstressed)
Again -st	[ə'geɪn]	[ə'geɪn] (stressed form), [ə'geɪn] (unstressed)
Neither	[niðə]	[naɪðə]
News	[nuz]	[niuz]
Mom	[mɑm]	[mʌm]
Sure	[ʃɜ]	[ʃʊə] (stressed form), [ʃə] (unstressed)

Pasta, garage, drama, Mazda, aqua, plaza, mafia all use an [ɑ] sound as in *father*, not an [æ] like *pat*.