

Douglas S. Bigham
University of Texas at Austin

Vowel Variation in Southern Illinois

This work shows how approaches from social psychology can expound upon sociophonetic approaches to regional and social linguistic variation.

Data collected from 50 students in Southern Illinois ('Egypt' in Frazer, 1987) show not only the "mixed" or "fudged-lects" (Chambers and Trudgill, 1998) one might expect in a transitional region but also what appear to be both coherent Northern Cities and Southern Vowel shift patterns, varying from one speaker to the next.

Vowel plots for speakers are compared to responses on an attitudes survey regarding the "kinds of people" and the "ways people talk" in both Southern Illinois and the Chicagoland area. Using this survey data in connection with the vowel data, I show that the ways in which a speaker uses her or his vowel space is more predictive of attitudes about 'the north' and 'the south' than sociohistorical trends. This finding, in turn, may call into question issues of dialect diffusion, dialect acquisition, and language change.