Vowel Variation in Southern Illinois

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Southern Illinois (SoIL)

- Lower-most 16 counties of Illinois ("Egypt" in Frazer, 1987)
  - Part of The Ohio River Valley (Dakin, 1966)
- An understudied dialect
- A Rural Transition Zone
  - Roughly equidistant from NCS and SS urban anchors
    - NCS = St. Louis / SS = Memphis
Southern Illinois
Research Questions

- What do the vowel categories of emergent adults (Arnett, 2000) in Southern Illinois look like?
- With which major system are Southern Illinois vowels most similar?
- How can these patterns be explained?
Rural Transition Zones

- e.g., The Ohio River Valley
- Largely unexplored (esp. outside Ohio)
- Geographic diffusion models are problematic
  - too far from major dialect anchors
  - too little contact with speakers of major dialects
- Historical models aren’t significant
  - SoIl has a large “shared history”
  - Individual histories are inaccurate
- Social diffusion models are also problematic
  - greater homogeneity in rural areas (Gándara et al., 2001)
  - fewer and less distinct “communities of practice”
  - regional identities ARE social identities
Cognitive Approaches

- MOTIVATION
  - Why is one variant or set of variants chosen over another?

- ACCESS
  - How are newer dialect features, both socially-based and regionally-based, acquired?

- CATEGORIZATION
  - Where do new features and variants fit among pre-established categories?

- I focus on the MOTIVATION & CATEGORIZATION components
Methods: Speakers

- High school seniors, age 18
- 2 different schools in Southern Illinois
  - “Tigers” = large school (~900 students)
  - “Wildcats” = small school (~400 students)
  - ~45 miles apart
- Total Speaker Pool: ~225 Participants
  - 200 Surveys
    - 120 “Tigers” / 80 “Wildcats”
  - 85 Recordings
    - 30 “Tigers” / 55 “Wildcats”
Methods: Recordings

- 11 vowels, 2 contexts, 2 repetitions
  - (ɪ, ɨ, ɛ, æ, ə, ɔ, ʊ, u, θ)
  - hVd, bVt
  - ~44 vowels / speaker

- Geometric normalization (Watt & Fabricius, 2002)
  - no significant difference for TOWN or SEX

- Recordings made on a computer using Praat
  - head-mounted Sennheiser microphone
  - recorded on campus and at local cafes

- F1 and F2 measured
  - checked via spectral slice, Praat auto-formant tracking, and visual confirmation
  - Steady-state midpoints or mini/max points
Methods: Attitudes Survey

- **Likert Test:**
  - 40 statements, positive/negative balanced, 6-point scale

- **Semantic Differential Test:**
  - 82 Questions, 6-point scale
  - 21/21: “The way people talk in Region One/Two sounds…”
  - 20/20: “The people who live in Region One/Two are…”
Methods: Analysis

- 50 Recordings
  - 25 male / 25 female
  - 33 “Wildcats” / 17 “Tigers”

- 31 Surveys + Recordings
  - 21 male / 10 female
  - 17 “Wildcats” / 14 “Tigers”
Q1. SoIL Vowel Categories

- What do the vowel categories of emergent adults (Arnett, 2000) in Southern Illinois look like?
  - Southern Illinoisans have a lot of variation.
  - However, there is still a standard set of categories that speakers “work around”.
SoIL-Standard Vowel Space
gsb36129, male, Wildcat

- /a/~/ɔ/ merged & low
- /o/ back
- /u/ & /ʊ/ central
- /æ/ low
Q2. Explaining SoIL Vowel Variation (part 1)

- With which major system are Southern Illinois vowels most similar?
  - Depends on the speaker…
  - And there are other things as well…
Southern Illinois Vowels: variation gone wild!

- **Northern Cities Shift (NCS) features (Labov, 1991):**
  - /æ/ raising
  - /ɑ/~/ɔ/ merger and fronting
  - /ɛ/ lowering and/or backing
  - /ʌ/ backing

- **Southern Shift (SS) features (Labov, 1991):**
  - /u/ and /o/ fronting
  - /ɑ/ and /ɔ/ raising and unmerged
  - /i/~/ɪ/ and /e/~/ɛ/ switch

- **Other things**
  - /ɔ/ lowering
  - /o/ backing
Q3. Explaining SoIL Vowel Variation (part 2)

- How can these patterns be explained?
- Speaker’s attitudes about Southern Illinois
  - correlations between formant and survey values
  - Most speakers have mutually exclusive attitudes toward Southern Illinois (Region One) and Chicagoland (Region Two)
    - Positive association with one entails negative association with the other
    - This is not an artifact of survey design
Alignment toward Chicagoland

- Low /æ/
- Backed /ʌ/
- Lowered /ɜ/ 
- No patterns have been found among front vowel variations
NCS-System
bms88540, male, Tiger

- Low /ɑ/
- Backed /ʌ/
- Lowered /ʊ/
- /u/ & /o/ un-fronted
- /ɑ/~/ʊ/ merger
Alignment toward Southern Illinois

- Raised (and/or not-lowered) /ɔ/
- Lowered /æ/
- Fronted /u/
- Fronted /u/ (repeated)
- Fronted /o/
- Again, except /æ/, no patterns have been found for front vowel variations
SS-System
dlk38605, male, Wildcat

- Raised /ɔ/
- Fronted /u/
- Fronted /o/
- /ɑ/~ɔ/ unmerged
- /ʊ/ raised
Motivation

- Movements typical of NCS indicate positive associations with Chicagoland
- Movements typical of SS indicate positive associations with Southern Illinois
- However…
  - Only back vowels show these strong correlations
  - Why?
Categorization

- **NCS Features**

- **SS Features**

Note that vowel variants of both NCS and SS types do not enter the “territory” of another vowel.
Problems and Further Questions

- MOTIVATION and CATEGORIZATION may have been partially explained, but what about ACCESS?
  - How can speakers without daily contact with a dialect can still be said to "have" or "use" these dialect features?
- What about speakers with mixed or fudged ‘lects (Trudgill, 1986)?
Mixed-System B
nwe57584, male, Wildcat

- Backed /ʌ/
- Unfronted /u/, /o/, /ʊ/
- Raised /ɑ/
- /ɑ/~/ɔ/ unmerged
Thank You!

References