

## **Apparent-Time Low Vowels among Mexican-Americans and Anglos in Austin, Texas**

The low vowel paradigm (i.e., the interaction of the LOT, THOUGHT, PRICE, and TRAP vowels) may be regarded as key to the most distinctive changes of North America dialect systems (Labov, Ash, & Boberg, 2006). Though the majority of research on vowel shifts in North American English has focused on the speech of Anglos or African Americans, research into Texas and Western English (e.g., Bailey, et al., 2004; Fought, 2003; Thomas, 2001) repeatedly demonstrates the importance of considering Mexican-American speech as well. For example, previous research on the speech on Mexican-Americans has shown complete merger of LOT and THOUGHT to an [α]-like form, a TRAP vowel that remains front and low even pre-nasally, and full glide retention in forms of the PRICE vowel. In contrast, Anglo speakers merge LOT and THOUGHT to a more back [ɔ]-like form, raise pre-nasal TRAP, and participate in PRICE-monophthongization.

Analyzing data from 24 speakers, we find that whereas the distinctions between Mexican-American and Anglo vowels are generally upheld for older speakers, younger speakers show a much more entropic system where both ethnically- and regionally-based distinctions are disappearing. That is, among both younger Mexican-American and younger Anglo speakers, the merger of LOT and THOUGHT has become more variable (with both LOT-class and THOUGHT-class words taking on both [α]-like and [ɔ]-like forms), TRAP has split into raised pre-nasal and retracted pre-oral forms, and PRICE is only rarely monophthongal. Not only are these forms a shift away from previous vowel patterns in Texas English, but they are remarkably similar to vowel patterns found in the so-called “California Shift” (Eckert, 2004). These findings provide further support to Fought’s (1999) suggestion that we consider the implications of supposed majority-based sound changes on minority speakers and look more closely at the interactions between speaker groups when discussing sound change in a community.