

Variation and Change in Texas English

Panel proposal for NWA 39

Convener: Lars Hinrichs, University of Texas at Austin

This panel offers a forum for reports on sociolinguistic research on Texas English (TxE). With one study from a rural setting, one from the rapidly expanding Austin area, and one from metropolitan Houston, the panel provides three perspectives on current trends in TxE. The three presentations are joined by the common themes of participation vs. non-participation in the Southern Shift, and orientation towards the Western vowel system.

Returning to the Texas Bible Belt

Marianna Di Paolo
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This study, based on recordings made in 1980-81 of 65 participants in the South Plains and Piney Woods for a study of double modals, indicates that the corpus can also serve as an early 20th century baseline for rural and small-town TxE. The recordings were made using a cassette recorder and a lavalier microphone. The speech styles range from conversational interview to sentence repetition.

Five gender-, age-, and class-matched adults born between 1899-1942 were chosen for this preliminary study, focusing on FLEECE, KIT, FACE, DRESS, TRAP, PRICE, and MOUTH.

Auditory phonetic transcriptions (soon to be followed by acoustic analysis) of FLEECE-KIT-FACE-DRESS-TRAP show that the typical onset is central with fronted off-glides and there is little evidence for the Southern Rotation in non-/l/ and non-nasal environments. (The data suggests variation in THING with onsets as low as [æ].) Likewise, PIN-PEN remain distinct. In contrast, PRICE is typically monophthongal, and MOUTH is nearly monophthongal, whether the onset is central or fronted. These findings suggest that these Texas speakers were participating in the beginning stages of the Southern Vowel system (Labov 1994 and elsewhere), and support Bailey (1997) in the dating of the features of Southern American English.

Bailey, G. 1997. When did Southern American English begin? In E.W. Schneider, ed. *Englishes Around the World: Vol. 1: General Studies, British Isles, North America. Studies in honour of Manfred Görlach*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 255-275.

Labov, W. (1994) *Principles of Linguistic Change, Vol. 1: Internal Factors*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Ethnicity and the Meaning of Sound Change in Central Texas

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University of Texas at Austin

Pilot studies from the Texas English Project have shown that Central TxE is undergoing a number of possible minority-led sound shifts. Some of these changes (for example, among the DRESS and TRAP vowels) show shifts aligned with previously established sound-shift patterns; other changes, however, appear to run counter to previous work. For example, fronting of the GOOSE vowel, common among English dialects in both the South (Feagin 1986, Fridland 2006) and the West (Hagiwara 1997, Eckert 2004), appears to have reversed among the data from our Central Texas speakers. That is, our younger Central Texas speakers now have a more back GOOSE vowel than older speakers. Furthermore, African American speakers have a more back GOOSE vowel than Latinos, who in turn have a more backed GOOSE vowel than Anglos. Reasoning from the apparent time hypothesis and Fought's (1999) demonstration that minority speakers can lead general sound changes, these data appear to indicate that African American speakers are leading a shift to a more back realization of the GOOSE vowel. Additionally, we find that

the amount of variation in realizations of the GOOSE vowel is greater than among other vowels, leading us to believe that the front- or backness of GOOSE is being used in Central TxE as an identity marker with specific local meanings attached to these variable GOOSE forms. In this talk, we will present two kinds of evidence: First, we will show word-list data for 35 Central Texas speakers that establish the presence of minority-led change in the GOOSE, DRESS, and TRAP vowels. Second, we will look to interview data as a way of understanding how these changes in the GOOSE vowel are used indexically among speakers in an East Austin neighborhood, where local identity is under pressure due to the effects of gentrification.

- Eckert, P. (2004). California Vowels. Radio interview on *All Things Considered*. Feb. 24, 2004. Retrieved April 1, 2008, from: <<http://www.stanford.edu/~eckert/vowels.html>>.
- Feagin, C. (1987). A closer look at the Southern drawl: Variation taken to the extremes. In K. Denning, S. Inkelas, F. McNair-Knox, & J. Rickford (eds.), *Variation in language*. Stanford University: Department of Linguistics. 137-150.
- Fought, C. (1999). A majority sound change in a minority community: /u/-fronting in Chicano English. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 3(1), February 1999: 5-23.
- Fridland, V. & Bartlett, K. (2006). The social and linguistic conditioning of back vowel fronting across ethnic groups in Memphis, Tennessee. *English Language and Linguistics* 10:1, 1-22.
- Hagiwara, R. (1997). Dialect variation and formant frequency: The American English vowels revisited. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 102:1, 655-658.

Houston Anglo-English in Three Stages

Elizabeth Brunner, Christian Koops, Nancy Niedzielsky, and Andrew Pantos
Rice University

As Thomas (1997) showed for several other large metropolitan areas in, apparent-time trends affecting the vowels of Anglo Houstonians demonstrate a clear progression away from the Southern Shift. Moreover, as we will argue, the continuation of this trend is towards the Western Shift. Our oldest speakers' vowel spaces contain several features of the Southern English, such as the mid-front tense-lax rotation, pre-nasal merger of PIN and PEN, fronted /u/, fronted /o/, and /ay/-monophthongization. Our youngest speakers, and particularly our youngest female speakers, produce vowels indicative of the Western Shift, such as extreme backing of the low vowels, lowering of the front lax vowels, often complete merger of the low back vowels, and /u/-fronting that is phonetically different from that found in speakers who exhibit this in Southern English (Koops 2009). While there are cases of even younger speakers that retain some Southern features (such as the "hypermasculine" speaker described in Pantos 2006), they retain virtually *no* genuinely Southern features, to the point of 'un-merging' PIN and PEN (Koops, Gentry, Pantos 2008). Our middle age group, however, produces significantly less features of either of these shifts, demonstrating an intermediary stage that is neither Western nor Southern. Thus, we provide evidence for these three stages as the Houston Anglo dialect shifts from Southern to Western vowel spaces.

- Koops, C. 2009. /uw/-monophthongization and Southern style: Two types of /uw/-fronting in Houston Anglos. Paper at NWAV 38, U of Ottawa.
- Koops, C., E. Gentry and A. Pantos. 2008. The effect of perceived speaker age on the perception of PIN and PEN vowels in Houston, Texas. *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics* 34:2, 93-101.
- Pantos, A. 2006. Redefining the south: Teenaged Houstonians challenge the southern shift. Paper given at NWAV 35, Ohio State U.
- Thomas, E. 1997. A rural/metropolitan split in the speech of Texas Anglos. *Language Variation and Change* 9, 309-332.