Ethnicity and the Meaning of Sound Change in Central Texas

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Texas English

- Associated with South Midland and Southern speech (Bailey & Tillery 2006; Bailey et al 1991; ANAE)
- Dallas area distinct - “Texas South” (ANAE)
- Accounts based primarily on Anglo speech
- Dialect features/changes assumed to be Anglo-led (Bailey et al., 1991)
The Texas English Project: Austin and Central Texas

- Central Texas
  - Waco, Austin, San Antonio, Houston

- Austin, Texas
  - Medium-sized urban center (<1 million)
  - In the 1990s, Austin’s population grew by 48% and between 2000 and 2006 it was rated as the 3rd most rapidly growing city in America.
  - 65% white, 10% African-American, 30% Latino (53% white, non-hispanic)
Central Texas (Underwood, 1988)
Austin, Texas

Fig. 2. Austin, Texas. Downtown Skyline c. 2002.
Austin, Texas

Fig. 3. Austin, Texas. Downtown Skyline c. 2012.
Sound Change: Ethnolects in Contact

- Importance of minorities’ roles in majority sound changes (Fought, 2002)
- Sound change can be either minority- or majority-led
  - Minority speakers assimilate to majority norms
  - Majority speakers adopt minority features for covert prestige (Preston, 1999)
- When sound changes are minority led...
  - Who has “rights” to the older variant?
  - Why does one variant get used instead of another?
Methodology

Participants
- Female speakers
- Full adults (older) & emerging adults (younger) (Arnett 2002)
- Anglo, Latino, African American
- Span of classes and educational levels
- Central Texans

Data
- Vowels: TRAP, PRICE, LOT/THOUGHT, GOOSE
- Word list recitations; interview data
- F1 and F2 measurements at five points
- Speculative statistical analysis
Central Texas Vowels
Vowel Shifts in Central Texas

- **PRICE, LOT, THOUGHT, TRAP, GOOSE** (Wells, 1982)
- **PRICE**: status of monophthongization
  - No difference among ethnicities; PRICE is now a diphthong
- **LOT~THOUGHT**: merged or distinct
  - Majority speakers leading the change to merged paradigm
- **TRAP**: fronting
  - Minority speakers leading the change to fronted TRAP
- **GOOSE**: fronted variant stability
  - Minority speakers leading the change to backed GOOSE
LOT~THOUGHT merger

Age: $p = .30$
Ethnicity: $p = .16$
Interaction: $p = .23$
GOOSE backing

“GOOSE”
- Younger Speakers
- Older Speakers

Age: $p=0.28$
Ethnicity: $p<0.01$
Interaction: $p=0.25$

African Americans
Latinos
Anglos
GOOSE backing

“GOOSE”
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African Americans
Latinos
Anglos
Variation in the GOOSE vowel

- Fronted GOOSE
  - Traditional, older, stereotypically ‘Texan’ variant

- Backed GOOSE
  - Newer, minority-led, younger variant

- But there’s a huge range of variation within individuals!
Mean F2 of GOOSE by topic

F2 of “GOOSE” tokens (interview data)
Mean F2 of GOOSE by topic
Is this variation indexical?

- 2 Hispanic women, mid-50s, from East Austin
- GOOSE tokens come from interview data
- Does their GOOSE variation index meaning?
  - YES!
- F2 of GOOSE correlates to Conversation TOPIC
Mean F2 of GOOSE by topic

Mean F2 of “GOOSE” (interviews)

Topic: $p<.01$

- Neutral
- Hearth
- Gentrification
- Change
Mean F2 of GOOSE by topic
Questions remain…

- Older, fronted, “traditional” variant = timeless topics
- Newer, backed, “young” variant = modern topics

- Reallocation of the fronted GOOSE variant?
  - I’m a True Texan, too!

- How are backed GOOSE variants perceived?
The End.

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