

A New Perspective on the Development of the Northern Cities Shift in Chicago

Prior to any theory building or diagnosis of change (e.g., Labov, 1994; Labov, et al., 2013; Tagliamonte & Denis, 2014), analysts confront the controversial question of “What are the facts?” Here, we address that question via instrumental analyses of the vowel systems of five generations of speakers with a focus on the beginnings and development of the Northern Cities Shift (NCS) in Chicago. Unlike previous studies of the NCS in Chicago (e.g, Labov, et al., 1972; Herndobler, 1977; McCarthy, 2009, 2011), ours is the first to trace its inception and development in *both* real and apparent time *within* one study. We use interview data drawn from earlier studies (Pederson, 1965; Herndobler, 1977; *The Dictionary of American Regional English*) and data collected in the community recently. In addition, we analyze nearly 50,000 tokens in the vowel systems of 50 European-American speakers born between 1875-1990, making ours the largest acoustic study of Chicago speech to date.

Results of our series of linear mixed effects regression and vowel class correlation analyses reveal significant patterns of variation not reported previously.

First, although the NCS shows increasingly stronger usage among speakers born between 1875-1965, the order in which the NCS develops in our data across age groups differs from the model provided by Labov, et al. (2006). Like Thomas (2001) and McCarthy (2009), we find the first stage of the NCS involves the fronting of LOT, followed by TRAP fronting/raising. We also find the third stage to be DRESS-backing, followed by STRUT-backing as the fourth stage. In our data, THOUGHT-lowering, which is commonly argued to be the third stage, is only found among some speakers. Thus, we argue it is not an integrated part of a larger chain-shift, but rather is a separate vowel shift tied to LOT-fronting.

Second, although KIT-backing correlates with DRESS-backing, it does not appear to be the later stage change suggested by McCarthy (2011) and Eckert (2000). Rather it appears to occur variably among speakers of all age groups analyzed in our study. Like THOUGHT-lowering, these findings suggest that KIT-backing is also not a part of a larger integrated chain-shift. Instead, it appears to be involved in an independent parallel shift, linked to DRESS-backing.

Third, for speakers born after 1975, we find some signs of the apparent reversal of the NCS among some speakers. However, unlike some other recent studies of the NCS in Lansing and Syracuse (e.g. Wagner, et al., 2015; Driscoll & Lape, 2015), the NCS in Chicago continues to show strong signs of use among some younger blue-collar speakers. This suggests use of the NCS may not be recessing *per se*, but rather, its use is becoming more focused as a marker of blue-collar speech among post-1975 born Chicagoans than in previous generations.

To close our discussion, we explore the implications of our findings for the refinement of vowel shift models, the transmission of sound change, and the documentation of the stages of the NCS.

Keywords: Language Variation and Change; Chicago English Dialect; Northern Cities Shift; Sociophonetics; Sound Change; "Chicago Accent"

References

- Cassidy, Frederic C. (Ed.). (1985). *The Dictionary of American Regional English*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Driscoll, A. & Lape, E. (2015). "Reversal of the Northern Cities Shift in Syracuse, New York," *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics*: 21.2. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- Eckert, Penelope. (2000). *Language variation as social practice*. Oxford, Blackwell.
- Herndobler, Robin. (1977). *White working-class speech: The East side of Chicago*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Chicago.
- Labov, W. (1994). *Principles of linguistic change, volume 1: Internal factors*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Labov, W., Ash, S., & Boberg, C. (2006). *The Atlas of North American English: Phonetics, phonology, and sound change*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Labov, W., Rosenfelder, I., & Fruehwald, J. (2013). "One hundred years of sound change in Philadelphia: Linear incrementation, reversal, and re-analysis." *Language*, 89.1: 30-65.
- Labov, W., Yeager-Dror, M., & Steiner, R. (1972). *A quantitative survey of sound change in progress*. Philadelphia: US Regional Survey.
- McCarthy, Corrine. (2009). "The Northern Cities Shift in real time: Evidence from Chicago." *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics 15.2: Selected Papers from NWAV 37*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- McCarthy, Corrine. (2011). "The Northern Cities Shift in Chicago." *Journal of English Linguistics*, 39.2:166-187.
- Pederson, Lee A. (1965). *The pronunciation of English in metropolitan Chicago. Publication of the American Dialect Society 44*. University, AL: University of Alabama Press.
- Tagliamonte, S., & Denis, D. (2014). "Expanding the transmission/diffusion dichotomy: Evidence from Canada." *Language*, 90.1: 90-136.
- Thomas, E. R. (2001). *An acoustic analysis of vowel variation in New World English. Publication of the American Dialect Society 85*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Wagner, S., Mason, A., Nesbitt, M., Pevan, E., & Savage, M. (2015). "Reversal and re-organization of the Northern Cities Shift in Michigan." *Paper presented at NWAV 44*, Toronto Canada.