24.914

Social Variation
Age and social variation

• The GOOSE and GOAT vowels /u/ and /oU/ are fronting in the speech of white speakers in Charleston, S.C.

• But not, or less so, in the speech of most African Americans (Baranowski 2013).
  – red circles: African American, blue crosses: White

/\u/ following non-coronals /\oU/ in closed syllables
Social variation

- Different social groups in the same geographical area can have different accents
- In some cases this reflects the fact that language can change differently among different social groups
- What does this tell us about how language change operates?
Social variation

• Centralization of diphthongs on Martha’s Vineyard (Labov 1963).

• The English of Martha’s Vineyard shows variation between PRICE /ai/ and MOUTH /au/ vowels with higher or lower nuclei: [ai]~[ɐɪ]~[ɐi], [au]~[ɐu]~[ɐu]

• ‘But just as long as I draw the breath of life I’ll be down in my boat in the mornin', at six or half past six in the morning, bound somewhere, doing all that I can, as best as I can, to the best of my ability and knowledge . . . because I take a pride in doing that, somethin' I know, and I feel that I’m doing something . . . important.’

  (audio at 6:45 in Labov's Haskins Prize Lecture video.)
Martha’s Vineyard

- [ai]~[aɪ]~[eɪ], [au]~[aʊ]~[eʊ]
- Transcribed on a scale from (lowest/back) 0-4 (highest/front)
  - Verified that the scale largely reflects formant frequencies

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Age-Related Variation

- Mean of centralization levels for all tokens for each age group, multiplied by 100.
- Little centralization among the oldest speakers, steadily increases to 31-45, then drops back among the youngest speakers.
Social Variation

- There is also variation by occupation

- And ethnicity
Phonological conditioning

• There is also phonological conditioning of centralization (pp. 18-21)

  – Primarily following context:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not favoring centralization</th>
<th>Favoring centralization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sonorants</td>
<td>zero final</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nasals</td>
<td>obstruents</td>
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<tr>
<td>voiced</td>
<td>orals</td>
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<tr>
<td>velars</td>
<td>voiceless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fricatives</td>
<td>apicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stops</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

• Most favorable to least favorable following contexts:

  /t, s: p, f: d, v, z: k, θ, ð: ø: l, r: n: m/
Social Variation

• Labov’s interpretation:
  – centralization marks identification with the Vineyard as opposed to the mainland
• The more a speaker identifies as a Vineyarder, the more they centralize their diphthongs.
• Other features may serve the same purpose,
  – identification with the Vineyard tends to vary by age, ethnicity and occupation
  – the more a speaker identifies

• Adoption of variants, and hence participation in a sound change, can depend on speaker attitudes and the social meaning of those variants.
The social context on Martha’s Vineyard

• In the 1960’s it was hard to make a living on the island – no industry, fishing had declined, farming was uncompetitive, unemployment was high.

• The economy was becoming dependent on summer visitors and the tourist trade
  – the labor force ‘is heavily occupied with service trades’
  – houses are being bought up as vacation homes by mainlanders.

• ‘The gradual transition to dependence on, and outright ownership by the summer people has produced reactions varying from a fiercely defensive contempt for outsiders to enthusiastic plans for furthering the tourist economy’ (p.28)
Age-related variation on Martha’s Vineyard

• General trend to increasing centralization over the years with increasing conflict with the influence of the mainland.

• Labov claims that Vineyard identity is strongest among 30-45 age group because people from that age group who are less committed to the island have left.
  – Many young people leave the island for college.
  – Many stay on the mainland in pursuit of better jobs.
  – ‘“You know, E. didn’t always speak that way…it’s only since he came back from college. I guess he wanted to be more like the men on the docks…”’ (p.31)
Social variation on Martha’s Vineyard

• The youngest speakers vary in their commitment to the Vineyard – some are planning to leave.

• Four 15 year old students: ‘the two down-islanders who intend to leave for careers in business and finance show little or no centralization [0-40]; the two up-islanders who hope to go to college and return to make their living on the island show considerable centralization [90-119]’ p.32

• Fishermen are attempting to maintain a traditional Vineyard occupation, hence tend to wish to project an island identity.
Social variation on Martha’s Vineyard

- Labov argues that residents of Portuguese descent are different – they do not typically leave for college, they stay on the Vineyard to work.
- He identifies the main social dynamic as increasing integration into the mainstream, with accompanying convergence with the speech of residents of English descent.
Social variation on Martha’s Vineyard

• The most straightforward correlation involving centralization is with orientation towards Martha’s Vineyard.
  – Categorized based on interviews.
  – No presentation of unaggregated data, or measures of variability.

• Implications for the mechanisms of sound change and its propagation?
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