

## **Ignorant and annoying: Inland Northerners' attitudes towards NCS short-o**

Recent studies of the Northern Cities Shift (NCS) have observed its retreat in some localities (e.g. McCarthy 2011 for Chicago; Driscoll & Lape 2014 for Syracuse). This is surprising, since the NCS had been understood to be a change in progress, characterized as comprising “indicators rather than markers, with little style-shifting...and no evidence of conscious awareness” (Labov 2010:194). In this paper we examine possible motivations for the recession of the NCS.

We conducted a between-group matched guise test, fielded online to 173 participants recruited via the researchers' social networks in Lansing, MI. Since recently collected sociolinguistic interviews indicated that in Lansing -- as in Chicago and Syracuse -- short /o/ (BOT) is experiencing rapid retraction in apparent time, we hypothesized that it would be a fruitful locus for attitudes research. Participants heard a short spontaneous speech recording of a young woman. Tokens of BOT were digitally manipulated to create two guises: conservative (mean F2 = 1350 Hz) and NCS (mean F2 = 1710 Hz). Each participant was exposed to only one guise. These were respectively similar to the mean F2 values for /o/ for all speakers recorded in the Atlas of North American English (Labov, Ash, & Boberg, 2006) and for all Atlas speakers in the Inland North.

Participants rated the recording for 63 descriptors derived from earlier focus group discussions, following Campbell- Kibler (2006). The online task included Likert-scale ratings of adjectives such as *annoying* and *friendly*, selection of discrete descriptors such as *from the city* and *redneck*, as well as open-ended questions. In this paper, we report our findings for the 27 Likert-scale descriptors, reduced to 6 parameters when subjected to factor analysis: *rude*, *dull*, *annoying*, *confident*, *liberal*, *accented*.

Of the 114 Inland North participants in our survey, 47 (41%) were exposed to the fronted BOT guise. Overall, this guise was rated as significantly more *annoying* ( $p < 0.001$ ) and *accented* ( $p < 0.05$ ) than was the conservative guise. However, when respondents were grouped binarily by age, we found that fronted BOT and the conservative BOT were significantly different for these parameters only among young people ( $n = 31$ , age  $< 40$  years). Older respondents did not find the fronted guise significantly more annoying or accented than its conservative counterpart.

Although our focus group discussions and the survey's open-ended questions support Labov's assertion that there is little conscious awareness of the NCS, our experiment shows that Inland Northerners exhibit unconscious awareness of BOT-fronting. BOT-fronting carries negative social meanings in the Inland North, especially for young people. This is in line with evidence from local production, in which young, college- educated speakers are leading the retraction of BOT. It remains to be determined whether other NCS vowels below conscious awareness are also subject to relatively unconscious negative evaluation. We suggest however that in the post-industrial Inland North, young people are increasingly orienting toward national rather than regional norms.

## References

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