

## A Look at Three Oklahoma Dialect Features

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The lexical dialect usage of Oklahoma has been well-studied in the past by the Survey of Oklahoma Dialects (SOD), but the acoustic speech production of the state has received little attention. Apart from two people from Tulsa and Oklahoma City that were interviewed for the Atlas of North American English (ANAE) and three residents of Yale interviewed by Erik Thomas, no other acoustic work has been performed within the state.

This work begins to fill in these gaps by presenting twelve respondents interviewed by the Research on Dialects of English in Oklahoma (RODEO) project. While the ANAE included only wordlist data and Thomas only data from reading passages, this study compares results from both tasks simultaneously. This allows a look at variation between the two contexts, both among speakers and within an individual respondent's speech.

This presentation will consider three particular dialect features – the Southern Shift, back vowel fronting, and the caught/cot merger. All of these have been observed previously in the state by the researchers cited above – this work examines their occurrence in the present day, with paired reading passage and wordlist data from each respondent.

Some dialect features of the RODEO respondents appear universal, with all speakers fronting the GOOSE vowel and no one using shifted forms of FLEECE/KIT. Other features show variation, but not always across traditional sociolinguistic boundaries such as age and sex.

For example, although studies such as Koops et al (2008) have suggested that younger speakers may be unmerging *pin* and *pen* in an attempt to back away from stigmatized Southern features, the RODEO respondents' use of the Southern Shift appears to be weighted more by geography than age. Young and old respondents in the western panhandle avoid a Southern inversion of FACE and DRESS, while speakers closer to Arkansas (even those in the major cities) display a more Southern pattern. This pattern appears dependent on context, however, as many speakers will invert FACE/DRESS in a reading passage task but not during a wordlist.

Respondents' fronting of FOOT appears to similarly be a factor of location rather than Age or Sex. In the Reading Passage (RP) context, half of the respondents use a fronted FOOT vowel. This group is an even split of men and women and includes speakers from age 18 to 56. However, all of them are from small towns, whereas respondents from the Tulsa and Oklahoma City metro areas show less fronting. This suggests that there is more than just personal demographics at work.

This paper will provide acoustic plots and discussion to examine variation within Oklahoma and offers a guide to future research within the state and elsewhere. By comparing the RODEO respondents to the work that has come before (and including multiple speech contexts), we can gain a clearer impression of where variation may be occurring in the state, and what factors are spurring change.

## Works Cited

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