

Short Front Vowel Lowering in Dublin English

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This paper considers the most recent developments in emerging varieties of advanced non-local Dublin English (Hickey 1999, 2005). The purpose is to track the innovations in the short front vowel system, specifically in the KIT, DRESS and TRAP lexical sets. In the past few years short front vowels have been showing increasingly lowered realisations among young females, going on annual recordings made by the author from 2010-2014. The vowels most affected are DRESS and TRAP which show realisations close to [æ] and [a] respectively. The lowering is clearest in the environment of liquids, e.g. *dress, left; trap, rat* but is attested in other contexts, notably before velars, e.g. *beg, check* with [æ] and *bag, back* with [a], and before voiceless fricatives, e.g. *yes, west, definitely*, all with [æ]. The KIT vowel seems unaffected by the lowering, unless in the environment of [r], e.g. *riddle* with [ɛ]. These observations would imply that the lowering affected mid to low front vowels first and primarily in the environments of liquids. The lowering in the context of /r/ is understandable given the general lowering affect of this sound on adjacent vowels (Hickey 2014). As syllable-final /l/ in non-local Dublin English is pharygealised, e.g. *hotel* [həʊ¹tæ¹l], the lowering in the context of liquids, at least for the DRESS vowel, can be traced to this environment (Hickey 2013).

As yet, short front vowel lowering does not seem to affect the positions of the LOT and STRUT sets in the vowel space of Dublin English. The LOT vowel is still a relatively low back vowel, i.e. [ɫɒt], but with rounding while the STRUT vowel is centralised, perhaps with a degree of rounding, i.e. [ɫ̘ ~ ɔ̘] (Hickey 1999, 2005).

An important additional focus of this paper will be to compare short front vowel lowering in Dublin English with the situation in New World varieties, specifically California (Eckert 2008) and Canada (Boberg 2005, 2008, 2010) but also the Midland region (Bigham 2008, Durian 2011, 2012 - 'Third Dialect Shift') and to compare the conditioning of specific realisations in different scenarios. In particular the retraction of DRESS and KIT as well as the merger of COT and CAUGHT will be considered as will the possible role of MOUTH-fronting in short front vowel lowering.

References

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