

**“She's Vietnamese American, but she speaks in a Minnesotan accent”:
Ethnic identity and /æ/-raising**

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The adoption of local sound change among ethnic communities has been a developing question in the study of language variation and change. One stance towards this question is that ethnic minority speakers diverge from “mainstream” speakers by not adopting local features or changes (see Labov, 2001: 506). However, other research has shown that ethnic minority groups do participate in local sound change to some degree (e.g. Poplack, 1978; Hall-Lew, 2009; Cogshall & Becker, 2010; Roeder, 2010). Participation or non-participation has been correlated with social factors, such as lifestyle orientations and network affiliations (Fought, 1999; Wong, 2007).

The current paper addresses this question through a study of Vietnamese Americans in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, an area in which Southeast Asians represent the majority of the Asian population. With these speakers, focus is placed on the production of /æ/ across separate coda contexts: voiced velar (BAG), nasals (BAN), and all others (BAT). Minnesota closely borders the Inland North, a region defined by the presence of the Northern Cities Shift, and it is the raising and fronting of /æ/, regardless of coda context, that acts as a trigger for this chain shift (Labov, Ash, and Boberg, 2006). Additionally, a vowel phenomenon in which /æ/ is raised before voiced velar codas (BAG-raising) has been attested in Minnesota and Wisconsin, but BAG-raising does not necessarily co-occur with the NCS (Labov, et. al., 2006; Bauer & Parker, 2008; Benson, Fox, & Balkman, 2011). Finally, /æ/ is raised and fronted before nasals across most regions of the U.S. (Labov et. al., 2006). Given the possibilities with these different patterns, BAG, BAN, and BAT are examined here.

Data for this study come from ethnographic fieldwork conducted with speakers affiliated with a Vietnamese American student organization (VASO) at a local university during the 2013-14 academic year. Formant measures were extracted from tokens of /æ/ as well as DRESS and anchor vowels found in sociolinguistic interviews with 12 VASO speakers (N=1866). Results indicate a near categorical rate (94%) of non-raised productions of BAT, suggesting that speakers do not participate in the NCS. Speakers are divided, however, in their production of BAG with either categorically raised or canonical productions. T-tests confirm that BAG has a lower F1 ($p < 0.05$) than DRESS for BAG-raisers, but this is not the case for the others. By contrast, vowel data from a control group of 10 White speakers reveal BAG-raising across all speakers. BAN is also subject to raising among all VASO speakers, which mirrors results from another Southeast Asian group in the Twin Cities: Hmong Americans (Ito, 2010; Kaiser, 2011). While all VASO speakers are core members of this student community, their previous orientations and affiliations before joining VASO (most notably, involvement in a Vietnamese language school during adolescence) are aligned with the division for BAG-raising: stronger Vietnamese ties are related to non-adoption of BAG-raising. Metalinguistic commentary also suggests that those with a canonical production of BAG are more aware of BAG-raising, and possible indexical links are explored.

word count: 496

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