

The Northern Cities Shift: A Sociolinguistic Gift that Keeps Giving

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The sound patterns associated with the Northern Cities Shift (NCS) have kept sociolinguists busy for nearly half a century. Given its scale, it's no wonder that the NCS has drawn so much attention. The Shift involves changes to six phonemes, most of which represent the historically rather stable class of short vowels. Moreover, the main trajectories of these changes suggest an interlinking series, and the NCS is commonly examined through the model of chain shifting. Despite decades of research, the NCS continues to pose a number of challenging questions.

The papers in this panel take up a variety of these questions. We look at issues related to the origins of the NCS, drawing on archival and modern recordings to explore when the Shift started and the relative chronology of the changes. We also examine how the NCS spreads within and beyond its home territory. In keeping with the tradition of NCS scholarship, the conversation will range from discussions of vowel-space dynamics to considerations of broad sociocultural trends.

Another Look at the Short-a System of Late 19th and Early 20th Century Chicago in Pederson's *PEMC* Data, *DARE*, and *LANCS*

David Durian (*Northern Illinois University*)

This paper presents an instrumental reanalysis of older speaker vowel systems that reevaluates the inception and development of the Northern Cities Shift (NCS) in Chicago. The study looks at a large set of Chicagoans born during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (1875-1945). By employing modern methods of vowel system analysis, we find evidence of NCS that was not detected using older methods, and we are able to observe both the inception and early development of the NCS. The evidence suggests LOT-fronting precedes *extensive* TRAP-raising. However, we also find evidence that TRAP does exhibit *some* raising as LOT fronts, but in our older speakers' vowel systems raising before voiceless fricatives and nasal codas precedes the more typical NCS general raising. The implications of this finding for Labov et al's (2006) typology of short-a systems, particularly the development and relationship of those systems, will be explored. Ultimately, we find pre- and early-NCS systems in Chicago may be more similar to other dialects of late 19th Century and early 20th US English than previously thought.

A Tale of Two Inland North Cities: Implications for the History of the Northern Cities Shift

Matthew Gordon (*Univ. of Missouri*) & Christopher Strelluf (*Northwest Missouri State Univ.*)

Among the intriguing questions presented by the NCS is how such an extensive pattern of change came to characterize the speech of millions of people from western New York to Wisconsin within, it seems, a relatively brief time frame. This paper explores the history of the NCS by analyzing the speech of several people born in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. We draw on recordings made in the 1970s for oral history projects in two cities: Buffalo, NY and Grand Rapids, MI. These locations offer a useful perspective on the early history of the NCS. For example, they represent different positions in the Inland North dialect region with Buffalo

near the putative NCS homeland and Grand Rapids closer to the western edge of NCS territory. Our results confirm some of the picture of the NCS that has previously been drawn on the basis of apparent-time data. But we see no significant difference in the progress of the NCS in the two locations despite the expectation that Buffalo would be more advanced in the changes. Our discussion explores the implications of such findings for the early history of the NCS and the story of how it came to have the distribution we see today.

A Convergence of Dialects in the Saint Louis Corridor

Lauren Friedman (*University of Pennsylvania*)

The St. Louis Corridor is an area between Chicago and St. Louis which shows evidence of the diffusion of the Northern Cities Shift through Midland territory. Analysis of the vowel systems of 93 speakers in the Corridor (from new interviews, ANAE subjects, and archival sources) demonstrates that the NCS appeared and retreated in the early 20th century, coinciding with the paving of Route 66 and subsequent bypassing of cities on that route. The data show the strongest NCS influence among speakers born during the late 1920's-1940's in Springfield and St. Louis, the two largest cities and in the Corridor. That influence retreated after a generation, suggesting it was spread through exposure to outsiders in childhood. Details regarding the progression of the NCS features also give insight into speakers' relationship with the Inland North and the rest of the Midland. This new analysis of the St. Louis Corridor has general implications for dialect spread and retreat, as well as for interactions of dialects when they converge upon the same geographic space. Although the NCS influence may have historical ties, coinciding with the history of the paving of Route 66, the Midland dialect features and others show that not a single group dominated during that time. Therefore, the Corridor appears simultaneously as a single dialect area and two separate dialect areas.

What we do and do not know about the Northern Cities Shift

William Labov (*University of Pennsylvania*)

Consensus: The Northern Cities Shift is one of the most complex events so far recorded in the study of change in progress. It extends over a vast territory with little geographic differentiation internal to the region, and continues to show vigorous evidence of change in apparent time with increasing divergence from neighboring regions from which it is sharply divided.

Issues to consider:

- Phonological issues: At present, there is conflicting evidence on the ordering of NCS changes. The general raising of short-a has been proposed as the initial change, but there is reason to think that the unrounding and fronting of short-o may have preceded it.
- Geographic issues: What model of diffusion applies to the NCS? Why does the NCS not spread into Midland territory, other than in the St. Louis corridor? Does the low back merger form an absolute barrier to the diffusion of the NCS?
- Social issues: The building of the Erie Canal has been proposed as the triggering event, but avatars of the NCS appear in Southwestern New England. Moreover, evidence for social evaluation of the NCS is weak and the first solid evidence for vowel shifting is a century later than its supposed trigger. With at least three generations of change in progress, one might have expected some increase in social salience, but little has been reported so far.