

Change and overlap in /ay/ and /oy/ among Barbadians in Southeast England

We consider patterns of change in progress for the vowel systems of two ethnic groups, of European and Barbadian origin, both local to Ipswich (a city of 100,000 in SE England between London and Norwich). The study employs instrumental phonetic analysis to describe 8 reference vowels, with special attention to the nuclei of PRICE /ay/ and CHOICE /oy/. Speakers fall into 3 generations (aged 15–26, 40–59 and 60+); the oldest Barbadians, the immigrant generation, are all of 40+ years' residence (Straw *fc*).

Ipswich Anglo speakers' back vowels appear to be participating in a process resembling the Southern Shift (Labov 1994, Fridland 1999): fronting of GOOSE /uw/ and FOOT /ʊ/, and raising of LOT /ɒ/. However it differs from American dialects in other respects: LOT /ɒ/ and THOUGHT /ɔ/ are not merging, NORTH has moved into high-back position, and PRICE is certainly not fronting. In comparable British dialects NORTH, LOT, CHOICE and PRICE have typically not risen, or not as much as in Ipswich (Altendorf & Watt *fc.*, Foulkes & Docherty 1999, Patrick *fc*, Williams & Kerswill 1999, Wells 1982 'Diphthong Shift').

We document these reference vowels across three generations. We focus on movements involving PRICE /ay/ and CHOICE /oy/. Both older Anglo and Barbadian speakers show overlap (*cf.* Wells 1982 for Barbados, Labov 1994 on near-merger in nearby Essex). This overlap is a regional marker which hardly occurs north, in Norfolk ("very recessive", Trudgill 1999:130), or south, in London (Labov 1994, Tollfree 1999).

Ethnic comparison across three generations shows processes of long-term accommodation, dialect acquisition, and differential phonological change, simultaneously at work in Ipswich. Older Barbadian speakers however have only one low vowel, and do not participate in the Southern Shift. Our research asks: (1) Do the younger Barbadian-ethnicity speakers reorganise their vowel system to converge with Ipswich patterns?, and (2) Are the youngest Barbadian speakers identical to, lagging, or leading change vis-à-vis Ipswich Anglos?

Preliminary indications suggest that younger Ipswich Barbadians are clearly participating in local shift patterns. For both groups of young adults, CHOICE is

higher than PRICE (though it was not for the older Barbadians), but the young Barbadians have a higher degree of overlap. This resembles earlier findings of consonantal variation for /t/ (Straw & Patrick fc), in which Barbadian-origin speakers matched a unique local distribution for one word-final variant, but diverged from it word-medially – accommodating to key local patterns, yet retaining distinctive identifying features.

(396 words)

References

- Altendorf, Ulrike & Dominic Watt. Fc. The dialects of the South of England. To appear in *A Handbook of Varieties of English. Vol. 1: Phonology*, ed. B Kortmann, EW Schneider, C Upton, R Mesthrie, K Burridge. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Foulkes, Paul & Gerard Docherty, eds. 1999. *Urban Voices: Accent studies in the British Isles*. London: Arnold.
- Labov, William. 1994. *Principles of linguistic change, vol. 1: Internal factors*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Patrick, Peter L. Fc. British Creole phonology. To appear in *A Handbook of Varieties of English. Vol. 1: Phonology*, ed. B Kortmann, EW Schneider, C Upton, R Mesthrie, K Burridge. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Straw, Michelle C. Fc. Dialect acquisition and ethnic boundary maintenance: Barbadians in Ipswich. PhD thesis, University of Essex.
- Straw, Michelle C. & Peter L. Patrick. 2005. Dialect acquisition by Barbadians in Ipswich: Acoustic analysis of t-glottalisation. To appear in *Language Sciences*.
- Tollfree, Laura. 1999. South East London English: Discrete versus continuous modelling of consonantal reduction. In P Foulkes & G Docherty, eds., *Urban voices: Accent studies in the British Isles*. London: Arnold, 163–184.
- Trudgill, Peter. 1999. Norwich: Endogenous and exogenous linguistic change. In Foulkes & Docherty, 124–140.
- Wells, John C. 1982 (3 vols.). Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, Ann & Paul Kerswill. 1999. Dialect levelling: Change and continuity in Milton Keynes, Reading and Hull. In Foulkes & Docherty, 141–162.