

## **Beyond TELSUR: The regionalization of Charleston, S.C.**

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In his presentation showcasing the Atlas of North American English at NWAVE 30, Charles Boberg urged that it should be used as a springboard for more detailed research into the many communities that the TELSUR project has only touched upon. This project uses the insight provided by the TELSUR project and delves further into the phonological development of the dialect of Charleston, S.C. and in particular its relation to the regional dialect of Southern States English. It was expected that by interviewing more people and by increasing the breadth of the investigation by means of rapid and anonymous surveys, it should be possible to gain a more accurate picture of the city's dialect and the process of its regionalization, and also to see how successful the TELSUR project has been in providing the linguistic picture of a mid-sized city such as Charleston with a sample of just four speakers.

Ten people were interviewed in Charleston in March 2002 using the format of the short sociolinguistic event. The interviews lasted from 20 to 30 minutes and included spontaneous speech, semantic differentials, the reading of a wordlist and minimal pairs. In addition, a series of rapid and anonymous studies were conducted in downtown Charleston, testing the degree of r-lessness in the city and the extent of /ay/ monophthongization. The speech of all the speakers was analysed impressionistically and acoustically.

The results of this project for the most part confirm the findings of the TELSUR project in that Charleston is a transitional dialect, which is rapidly losing, though it has not lost it completely, the distinctiveness for which it has always been known. At the same time, it does not yet have most of the features characterizing the South as a dialect region, most importantly, the Southern Shift, though it does have some, such as the pin-pen merger. The new data confirm that Charleston is undergoing the low back merger and the merger of short front vowels before /r/, that the fronting of /aw/ and /ow/ is very advanced, and that the dialect is largely r-full.

One feature absent in the TELSUR data that appears in the speech of some of the speakers is the realization of /ay/ with a shortened glide before a voiced consonant and word-finally, which may indicate the beginning of /ay/ monophthongization in Charleston, though this realization is still fairly rare. Another traditional Charleston feature completely absent from the TELSUR data was the merger of /iyr/ and /eyr/. Interestingly, it occurs variably in the speech of most of the speakers in this study, suggesting a possible lexical distribution.

This project uncovers some of the age and social class variation that the TELSUR project could not have detected. It turns out that the oldest speakers may still have some of the distinctive Charleston features, such as ingliding long mid vowels and Canadian raising for /ay/ and /aw/ (found in the speech of two of the oldest speakers) and that the traditional Charleston features will most likely be found in the speech of the city's upper class, which is also likely to oppose the regional Southern pattern most strongly.