

Abstract-Paper

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One shift, two groups: When fronting alone is not enough

Recent evidence appeared to document a fronting of the back vowels /uw/ and /ow/ in Northern Arizona that is similar to a change found in California (Hall-Lew and Yaeger-Dror, 2002; Hagiwara, 1997; Moonwomon, 1992; Luthin, 1987). This study found that young women were leading the change and older men only participated for lexical items that were marked for youth culture. The fronting was argued to be a sign of change-in-progress, and not limited to ‘valley girl’ stylization, because young men and some older women also participate in the change, which appears to be occurring from below. This sample has now been supplemented to permit more robust statistical proof for these conclusions. The current study supplies the expanded acoustical analysis of additional sociolinguistic interview data to indicate a community-level change in the vernacular of Northern Arizona. The present study will document evidence that in this community, /uw/ fronting is nearing completion, /ow/ fronting is advancing rapidly, and finally that (mostly pre-nasal) /ae/-raising is in a preliminary stage. Given that the studies of the West have been relatively sparse, this study of one Southwest regional vernacular should be of general interest.

The current paper will also elaborate on the dichotomy between two distinct European American social groups characteristic of the Northern Arizona community: the edge-of-town ranchers and the in-town mainstream. The ranchers’ /uw/ is also fronted and their /ae/ is also raised, but it will be argued that several syntactic and phonetic differences indicate that their variety is actually aligned with Southern varieties rather than with those changes exhibited by the in-town mainstream which seem to follow the Californian fronting and raising.

Further complexity is added by a class differentiation within each of these distinct groups. For example, the ranch owners are considered aristocratic within the local social system (Kroch 1996), and their workers are considered to be part of one of the lowest classes. Class correlates will be shown to suggest that the lower classes are more likely to exhibit back vowel fronting than the upper classes.

With the co-existence of two separate speech communities both characterizing themselves by vowel fronting, this study is a reminder that an analysis of more than one or two variables is essential to establishing social meaning.

Keywords: vowel fronting, vowel raising, dialect, Arizona

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