

## Sound Changes in Progress in Kentucky Speech

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Evidence presented in Atlas of North American English suggests that characteristics of Southern Phonology extend into Kentucky. Based on this evidence, Kentucky is included in regional dialect area commonly known as the South (Maps 11.6, 18.3, 18.5, 18.6, 18.7, 18.8). The data for these conclusions, however, come from the speech of only 7 speakers, representing the urban centers of Lexington and Louisville. The present study tests these claims against a larger sample of speakers (80), representing non-urban regions of the state.

While the data from this study support some of the ANAE analysis in the main, it provides counter evidence with respect to several particulars and may shed greater light on the diffusion of changes in progress in southern English. There is considerable evidence of conditioned /ay/ ungliding, the precipitating factor in the Southern Vowel shift. Consistent with Fridland's findings in Memphis, there is little evidence for the reversal of /i/ and /iy/, but there is significant evidence for the reversal of front mid-vowels /e/ and /ey/. [Note: there is clear evidence for conditioned reversal of both sets of front vowels before liquids, but these data are not included in the general analysis.] The nucleus of the diphthong /aw/ has moved forward, resulting in a reversal of the relative position of the nuclei of /aw/ and /ay/, consistent with the pattern noted in other speakers of Southern English. Evidence of /o~/oh/ merger is mixed. What in some cases appears to be merger is, in fact, /oh/ → /aw/ diphthongization, which co-occurs with the fronting of the nucleus of /aw/ as a back upglide chain shift.

The sample upon which this study is based represents largely rural, as opposed to, urban speech and reveals patterns not as strongly evidenced in urban speech in Kentucky. Whether this evidence reflects an underlying distinctive rural phonology or a pattern of diffusion different from that observed in the Northern Cities Chain Shift remains unclear. Whatever the case may prove, such evidence allows us to examine patterns of diffusion and to fine tune our maps delimiting dialect boundaries.

### References

- Fridland, Valerie. 2000. Searching for identity: Competing national and local norms in the Southern Shift. NWAV 29, Michigan State University.
- Labov, William. Atlas of North American English.  
[http://www.ling.upenn.edu/phono\\_atlas/Atlas\\_chapters](http://www.ling.upenn.edu/phono_atlas/Atlas_chapters)