

## Phonological transfer as a forerunner of merger in Upstate New York

Herold (1990) discusses three mechanisms by which phonemic merger can take place: expansion, approximation, and transfer. A fourth possibility Herold touches on but does not explore might be called **phonological transfer**: as in (lexical) transfer, words move abruptly from one phonemic class to another; but rather than one lexeme at a time being transferred, all words of a particular phonological class move simultaneously.

Dinkin (2008) found evidence of a trend in Upstate New York toward merger by approximation of /o/ (as in *lot*) and /oh/ (as in *thought*). This paper presents evidence of merger by phonological transfer in the same sample of Upstate speakers. Words containing (o)C— i.e., historical /o/ followed by /l/ plus a consonant, as in *golf* and *revolve*—are produced with /oh/ rather than /o/ in 74% of tokens; this use of /oh/ is increasing in apparent time. Many speakers using /oh/ in (o)C words have an otherwise clear phonemic distinction between /o/ and /oh/; however, the communities in which such transfer is most complete are those in which some younger speakers show evidence of merger in perception. This indicates that phonological transfer can be regarded here as an early sign of merger in progress, and that a single merger can proceed by two mechanisms simultaneously (here, approximation and phonological transfer).

Despite Labov et al. (2006)'s contention that the Northern Cities Shift (NCS) imparts “resistance” to the /o/~oh/ merger, NCS communities are just as advanced as other sampled communities (or more!) in phonological transfer and other indicators of ongoing merger. The only community in which phonological transfer was found to be absent is Poughkeepsie, which is in a different region of “resistance”. The difference between Poughkeepsie's continued resistance and NCS communities' loss of resistance is explained through Labov (to appear)'s theory of reversible and irreversible sound changes.

Dinkin, Aaron (2008). “Weakening resistance: Progress toward the low back merger in New York State”. Paper presented at NWAV 37, Houston.

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