

Where education and salience meet, local dialects retreat

Two recent studies document the retreat from salient local dialect features. Labov et al. (2013) identify a retreat from several well-established Philadelphia sound changes, while Dodsworth and Kohn (2012) find a reversal of the Southern Vowel Shift (SVS) in Raleigh. This study investigates the role of education in these reversals; specifically, we test a recent hypothesis (Prichard and Tamminga 2012) that education interacts with salience in predicting speakers' retreat from local features.

We adopt Prichard and Tamminga's novel four-level education variable—high school or less, local community colleges, larger regional colleges, and prestigious national universities—to analyze subsets of both cities' large sociolinguistic corpora ($n=195$ from the Philadelphia Neighborhood Corpus, $n=105$ from the Raleigh Corpus). For Philadelphia, three socially-salient local vowel variables were investigated: fronted and raised *bad* and *bout*, and raised *bought* (Labov 2001). These were compared to two less salient changes: raised *bait* and *bite*. For Raleigh, the variables are the five front vowels implicated in the SVS, all salient (Fridland 2004): retracted *beet* and *bait*, and raised and fronted *bit*, *bet*, and *bat*.

Figure 1 shows the Philadelphia results. While college-educated speakers retreat from the three socially-salient vowels, led by national university educated speakers, they move in lockstep with the community for the two changes which are still below the level of awareness. Linear mixed-effects modeling with random intercepts for speaker and word supports this finding; education is a significant main effect only for *bad*, *bout*, and *bought*. In Raleigh (Figure 2), national and regional college speakers retreat from all the SVS features more quickly than local college and HS speakers. Mixed models for each variable, with by-speaker random intercepts, return significant main effects of education and significant interactions with birth year. The exception is *bat*, where education is significant only for tokens occurring before voiceless stops.

Thus we find that speakers educated at national colleges lead the retreat from socially-salient features in both Philadelphia and Raleigh, but they do not reverse changes below the level of awareness. This confirms the hypothesis that a fine-grained measure of education can successfully predict speakers' retreat from salient local features.

References

- Dodsworth, Robin, and Mary Kohn. 2012. Urban rejection of the vernacular: The SVS undone. *Language Variation and Change* 24:221–245.
- Fridland, Valerie, Kathryn Bartlett, and Roger Kreuz. 2004. Do you hear what I hear? Experimental measurement of the perceptual salience of acoustically manipulated vowel variants by Southern speakers in Memphis, TN. *Language Variation and Change* 16:1–16.
- Labov, William. 2001. *Principles of Linguistic Change: Social Factors*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Labov, William, Ingrid Rosenfelder, and Josef Fruehwald. 2013. One hundred years of sound change in Philadelphia: linear incrementation, reversal and re-analysis. *Language* 89:30–65.
- Prichard, Hilary, and Meredith Tamminga. 2012. The impact of higher education on Philadelphia vowels. In *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics 18.2: Selected Papers from NAW 40*, 87–95.

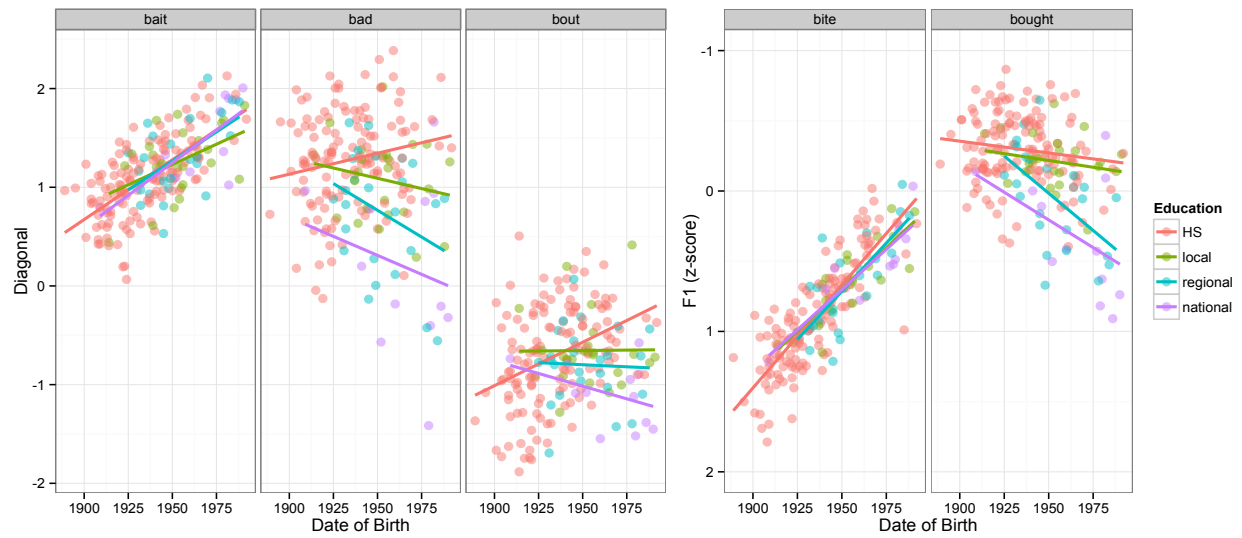


Figure 1: Speaker means for five Philadelphia vowels by date of birth & education. Vowels are Lobanov normalized. Front vowels plotted on a diagonal (Z_2-Z_1): higher diagonal = more fronted and raised.

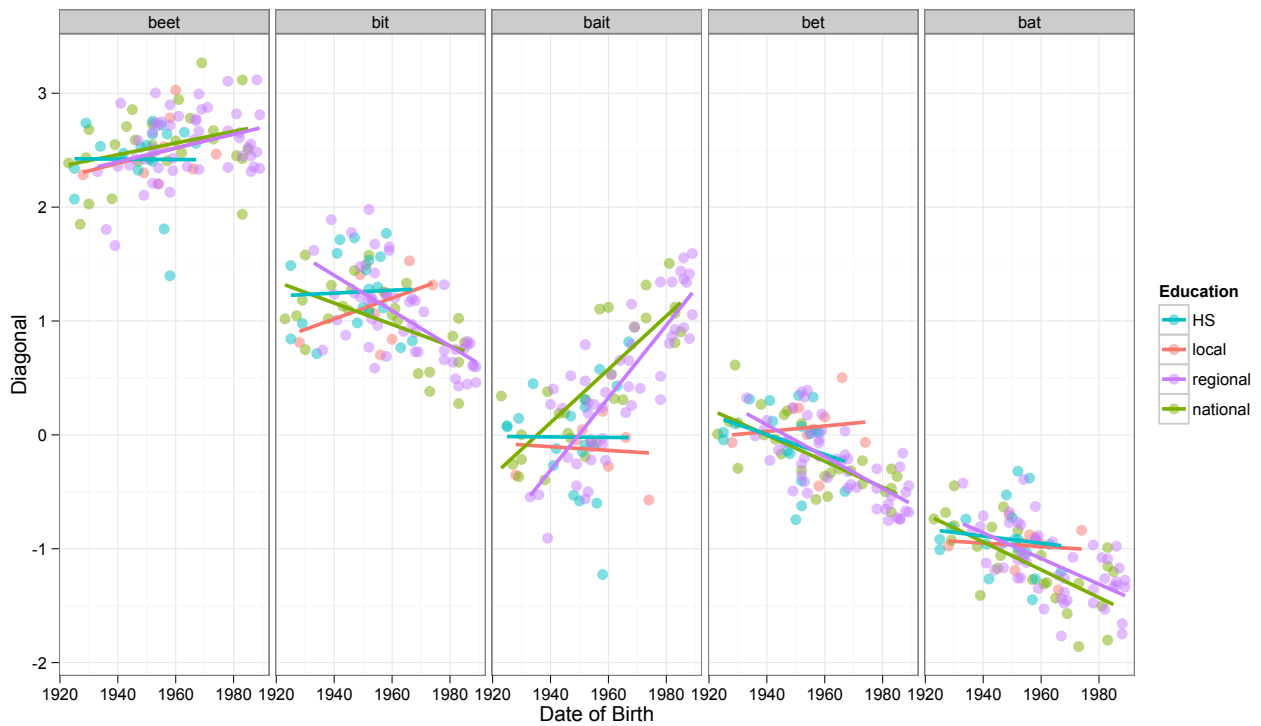


Figure 2: Speaker means for five Raleigh front vowels, by date of birth and education. Vowels are Lobanov normalized and plotted on the diagonal.