

20. The West

20.1. The definition of the West

20.1

Map 20.1 shows the borders of the West and its neighbors. This was the last dialect defined in Chapter 11 (Map 11.10); a fairly complex definition was required to separate the West from Canada, the North, the North Central region, the Midland, and the South. The heart of this definition is that the West is an area where the low back merger predominates (as distinct from the North and the South); and where /uw/ is fronted but /ow/ is not (as distinct from the Midland where both are fronted); but other restrictions were also required. The end product was a dialect area with low homogeneity (.56) and moderately low consistency (.62).

The situation can be clarified if we consider the relations of the West to each of its neighbors separately. The distinction from the South is simple and clear. There are no instances of glide deletion before obstruents among the Telsur speakers in the West.¹ The West differs from the Midland in the conservative treatment of /ow/ and in the completeness of the low back merger. However, these boundaries are not sharp. Map 20.2 shows that the centralization of /ow/ can be found variably in the West. As for the low back merger, Map 9.2 shows that there are six speakers in western Kansas who fall into the Midland area and have the low back merger in all allophones; the rest of the Midland displays in that map a predominance of the (orange) transitional symbols. The West is also distinguished from the North on the basis of the low back merger, but here again there is a sizeable intermediate area. More than a few speakers in the transitional zone between West and North show a complete low back merger.

As noted in the discussion of Map 11.13, the North Central area is specifically differentiated from the West in its conservative treatment of /uw/.

The differentiation from Canada is the most problematic because of the high degree of similarity between the varieties of English spoken in most of Canada and the western U.S. Map 11.7 showed that the Canadian Shift does not extend into the West across the Canadian border: there are no points near the Canadian border that are marked with dark red symbols in that map. There are nine dark red symbols within the isogloss defining the West in Map 11.10. Even when the dialect conditions for the West are superimposed, five of these points remain dark red – they satisfy the criteria for the Canadian Shift, but not the criteria for the West. The low homogeneity of the West as defined here is due to this tendency towards the Canadian Shift as well as speakers with incomplete low back merger. Historically, this heterogeneity results from a mixture of Northern, Midland, and Southern settlement.

The fronting of /ow/ in the West

20.2

The characterization of the West as an area where /uw/ is fronted but not /ow/ is generally valid, as our overall comparison of dialects will show. But Map 20.2 indicates that this criterion is not a homogeneous feature of the West.

The northeastern corner of the West shares the conservative treatment of /ow/ that is a property of the North, indicated by the dark blue circles: these are associ-

ated with an F2 of /ow/ that is less than 1100 Hz. There is also a slight fronting of /ow/ (F2 above 1100 and below 1200 Hz) indicated by pale-blue circles in the central area of Nevada and Utah. An even more common pattern is a moderately fronted /ow/, indicated by the turquoise circles that are keyed to an F2 of 1200 to 1300 Hz. This forms a belt in the western, southern, and eastern portions of the West. Although there is considerable variation in all three of these portions of the West, the moderate fronting pattern is heavily concentrated in this area: 16 of the 19 turquoise symbols in the West are located in the area between the oriented light blue isogloss and the turquoise isogloss. There are only three red symbols registering the full centralization characteristic of advanced speakers in the Midland and the South – in San Diego.

/aw/ in the West

20.3

The West is also differentiated from surrounding regions by the behavior of /aw/, the third back upgliding vowel, though this criterion shows the same variability as with /ow/. Map 20.3 shows that the West is characterized by a relatively conservative treatment of /aw/. Thirty-three of the Western speakers are designated by green circles, which represent a central location for the nucleus for /aw/ between 1450 and 1650 Hz. Canada and the North generally show much backer nuclei for /aw/, and the South much fronter, with some clear exceptions: Vancouver and Winnipeg in Canada show the same degree of fronting as the West, and three Western cities (Seattle, Los Angeles, and Tucson) feature at least one speaker who attains the more extreme degree of fronting seen in the South. The position of /aw/ is less useful in distinguishing the West from the Midland: although some Midland communities (like Kansas City) show extreme fronting and raising of this nucleus, other Midland speakers share the central position of /aw/ with the West. However, a central location for /aw/ is one of the most uniform features of the West, even if it is not exclusive to this region, just as glide deletion before resonants appears in the belt of South Midland territory just outside the South.

Southern features in the West

It is well known that settlement of the southwestern United States involved contributions from the South, with a strong component from Texas and Oklahoma. The phonological consequences of this settlement pattern are not enough to extend the South westward beyond Texas, but effects are found in several scattered remnants of Southern speech. Map 20.4 shows a “Southwest” region that is marked by such some representation of Southern features.

Map 20.4 carries over the extreme fronting of /aw/ from Map 20.3 with red circles. Two of these appear in the Southwest. In addition, the pink symbols show

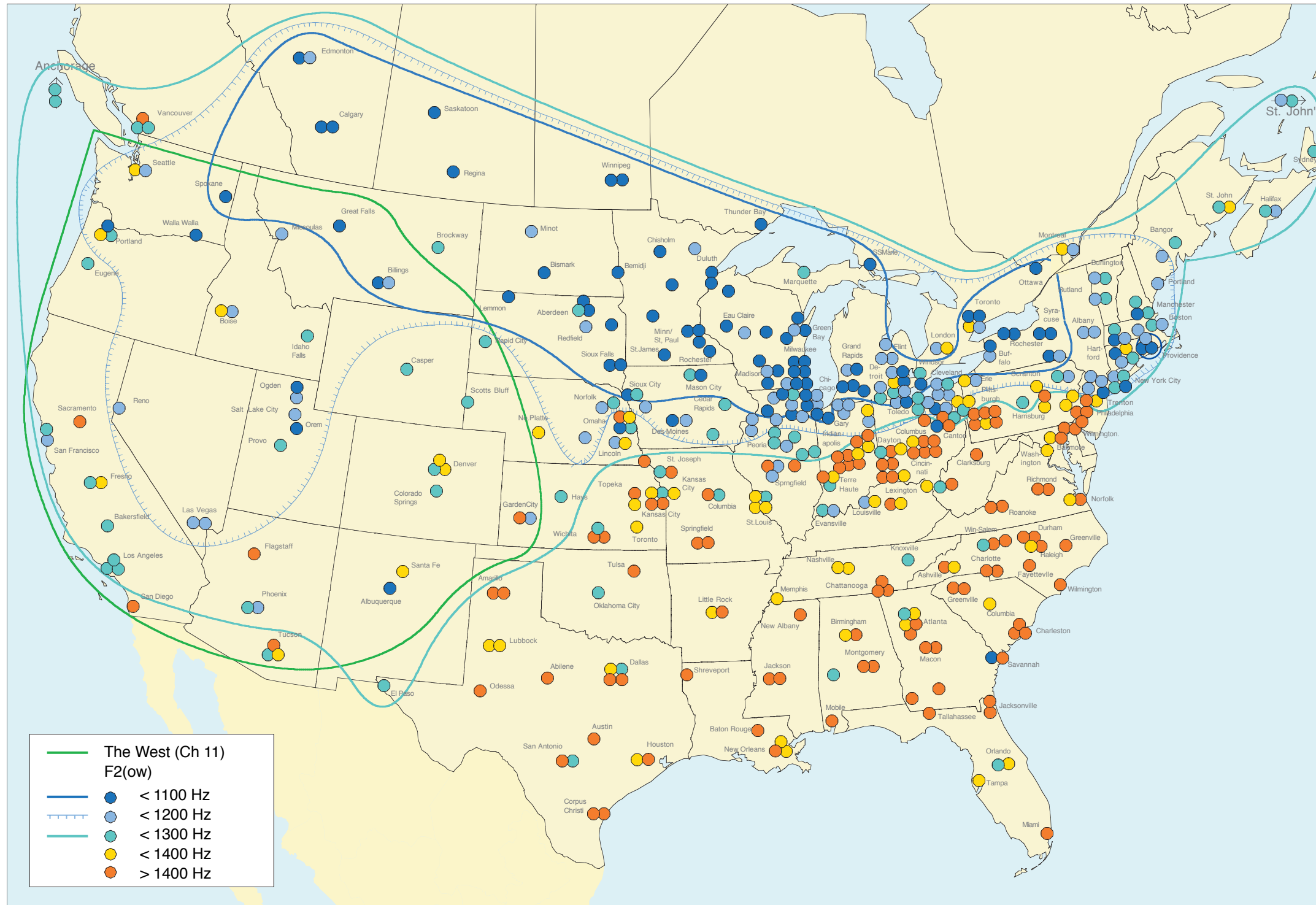
20.4

¹ The separation from the South on the basis of the low back merger is not so clear. Four Telsur speakers in West Texas show a complete merger, consistent with the reports of the progress of the low back merger in the Texas survey of Bailey et al. (1991).



Map 20.1. The West and its neighbors

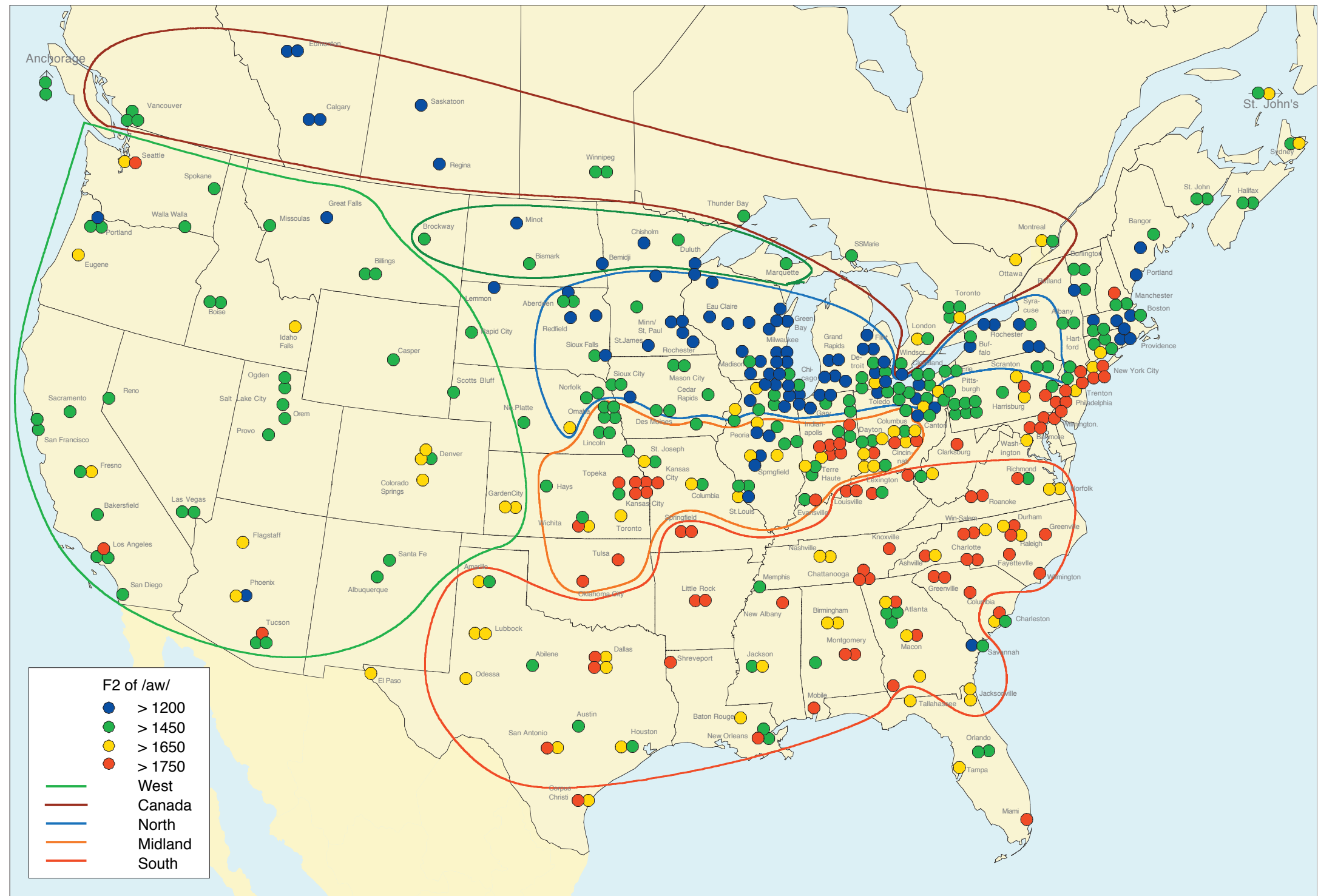
The West as defined in Chapter 11 has four neighbors: Canada, the North, the Midland, and the South. This chapter presents the main features that distinguish the West from each of its neighbors, and examines any degree of phonological differentiation within this large territory.



Map 20.2. Differential fronting of /ow/ within the West

The West is generally conservative in the realization of /ow/ in *go*, *boat*, *road*, etc., but it is not homogeneous in this respect. There are three waves of /ow/ fronting that divide the territory roughly into three regions. The strongest North-

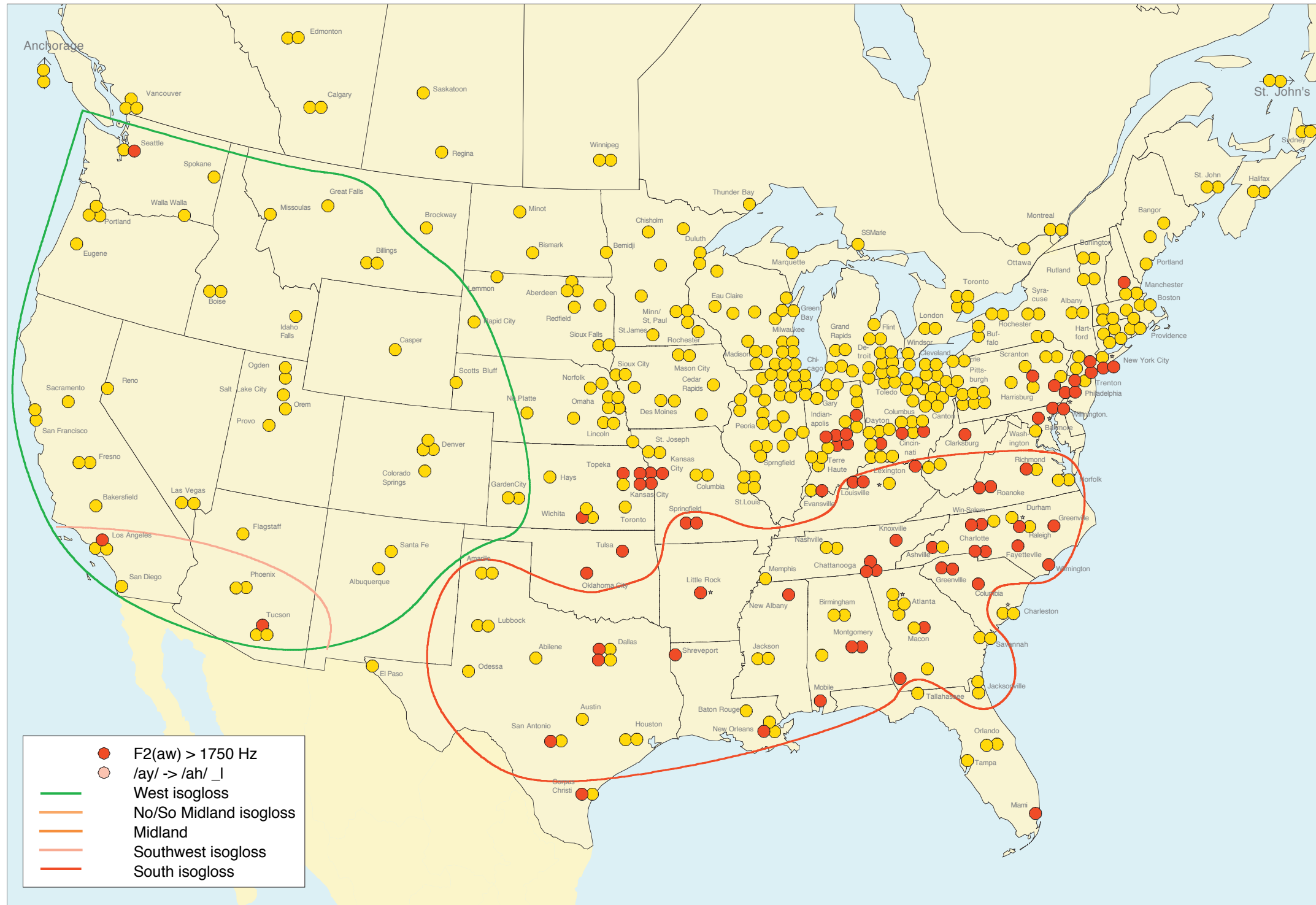
ern influence is shown in the backest versions of /ow/ (dark blue circles), and the most fronting is found in the southeast, adjacent to the South (yellow and orange circles).



Map 20.3. Fronting of /aw/ in the West

The West is differentiated most clearly from its neighbors in the realization of /aw/ in *now*, *about*, *South*, etc. The green circles show a central position for /aw/ (hovering about a value of 1550 Hz for the second formant). The dark blue circles shown in the neighboring territory to the north and east represent a value consid-

erably less than this, indicating a back position for this nucleus. The yellow and red circles to the south and east show a position of /aw/ well to the front, again contrasting with the West.



Map 20.4. Glide deletion of /ay/ in the Southwest

Westward migration from Texas and Oklahoma has influenced the southern portion of the West, but not strongly enough to make this a subsection of the South or even a distinct southwestern region. A few speakers show the strong fronting

of /aw/ characteristic of the Midland and the South, and a few show glide deletion of /ay/, but only in the most favoring environment: before /l/. These southwestern speakers resemble the Midland regions of Kansas or Ohio more than the South.

glide deletion of /ay/ before resonants. The mixture of red and pink circles is confined to the southern half of the Midland, outlined by the North/South Midland line. It continues in the southwest, where the resonants are always /l/:

Phoenix: *while, miles*
 Tucson: *nylons*
 LA: *miles*

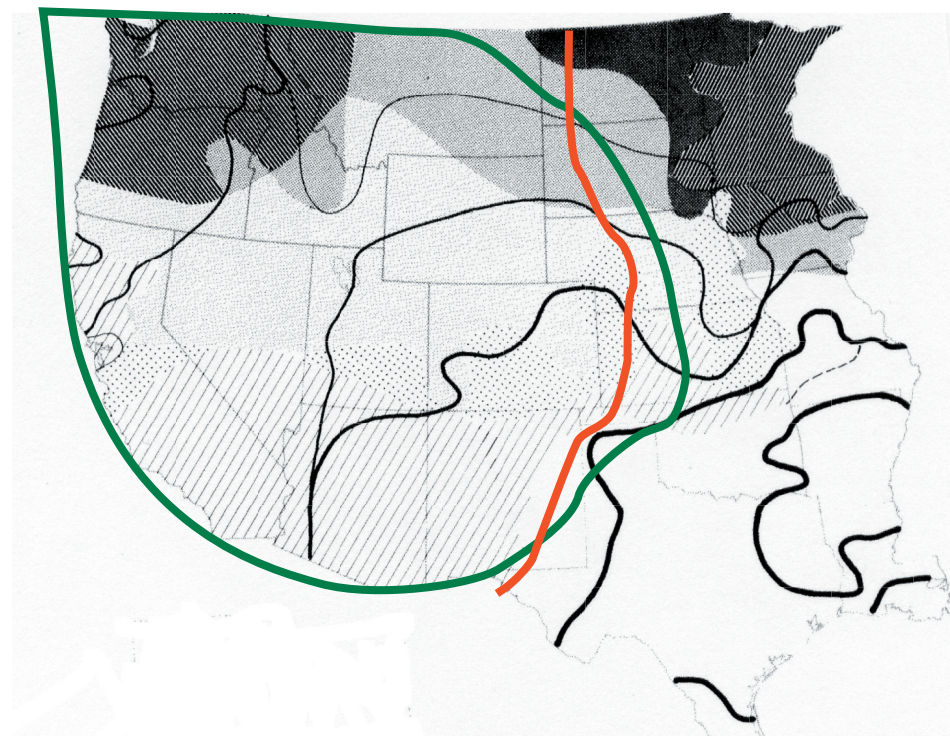
Although this is a limited display of glide deletion in both frequency and environment, it is not accidental that it appears within the light red boundary that delimits a “Southwestern” section of the West.

The DARE subdivisions of the West

Carver (1990) applies data from DARE records to the problem of tracing subdivisions of the American West. His overall view is similar to that which emerges from Maps 20.1–20.4, emphasizing a lack of homogeneity and uniqueness. He attributes these traits to the recent date of English-speaking settlement in much of the region:

Western speech is both extremely young and still undergoing the modifications and leveling processes of a region in social flux. But this in itself contrasts its speech with that of the rest of the country. (Carver 1990: 205)

Map 20.5 superimposes the West isogloss of ANAE (green) and the West isogloss of Carver’s Map 7.2 (red) on Carver’s Map 7.7, which shows the extensions of both Northern and Southern lexical markers into the West (black). The region to



Map 20.5. Lexical subdivisions of the West. The lexical distributions that lead Carver (1986) to identify subsections of the West do not have any clear phonological correlates. The green line is the definition of the West used in this chapter; the red line shows the eastern limit of 17 Western words. The black lines are Carver’s subdivision of the West.

the west of the red isogloss is the area of 17 specifically Western lexical items, such as *corral, canyon, jerky, sourdough*. The shaded areas (taken from Carver’s Map 7.4) represent the extension of various layers of Northern words into the West. According to Carver, northern vocabulary is the dominant feature of the West, though it is most heavily concentrated in the northern sections. The black isoglosses represent the northwestward spread of Southern lexical layers. However, none of the subdivisions of the West that might be made on the basis of vocabulary corresponds to any of the divisions that might be made on the basis of phonology in Maps 20.2–20.4. The most distinctive western subregion to emerge from Carver’s analysis is the Pacific Northwest, centered on Seattle and Portland, but there is nothing in the ANAE data to support the identification of this region as phonologically distinct from the rest of the West.

20.2. The position of the West among North American dialects

The description of the West in Chapter 11 and in this chapter makes it plain that this region lacks the high levels of homogeneity and consistency that was found for most other dialects. The West shows trends or tendencies that differentiate it from its neighbors, but many of its characteristic features are also found in quite distant regions, like western Pennsylvania. At present, the leading characteristics of the West must be treated in a statistical manner, and not in the discrete manner in which, for example, glide deletion defines the South.

Figure 20.1 is a Plotnik Meanfile diagram that plots the normalized mean values of 22 North American dialects for 12 vowel classes.² It labels the mean symbol for the West, highlighted for each vowel, with a few other dialects labeled for comparison. In regard to the mean positions of the tense front vowels /iy/ and /ey/, the West is close to the highest and frontest, but not so extreme as Canada. The West’s means for the short vowels /i/, /e/, /æ/, and /o/ do not stand out from the others, but are found slightly below the center of the main distribution.³

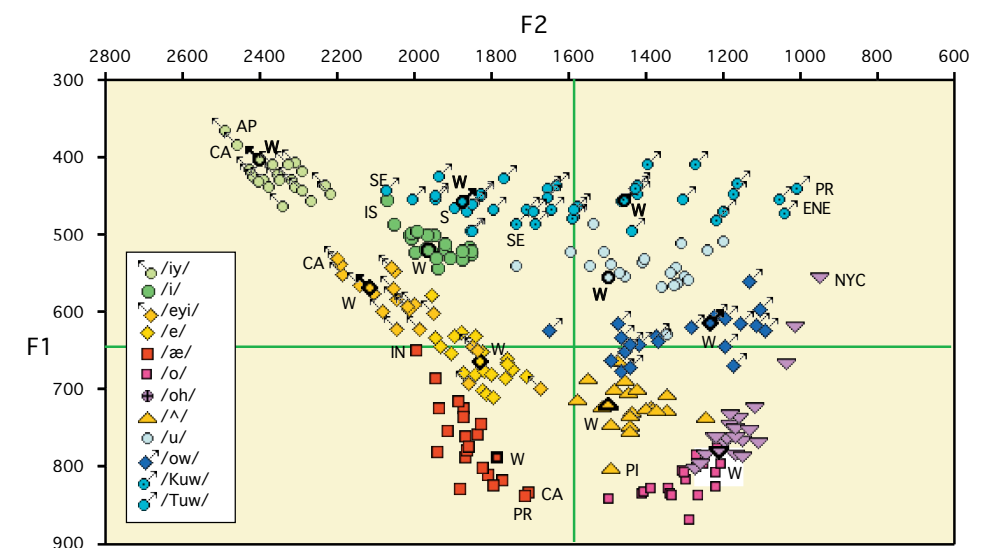


Figure 20.1. The position of the West among North American dialects. W = West, IN = Inland North, CA = Canada, AP = Atlantic Provinces, PR = Providence, ENE = Eastern New England, PI = Pittsburgh

2 The number of phonemes represented by these vowel classes varies across dialects, as the figure suggests.
 3 In the group of /u/ vowels, the West is shifted somewhat towards the fronter part.

The West does not participate strongly in the Canadian Shift, as reflected in the intermediate position of Western /æ/, considerably less back than Canada and Providence. The status of the low back merger in the West is shown by the coincidence of the /o/ and /oh/ means (the mean symbol for the West for /o/ lies directly below the /oh/ symbol). But the characteristic configuration that distinguishes the West from other dialects is the combination of a relatively front position for /Tuw/ – about equal to the South, but behind the Southeast and the Inland South – and a relatively back position in the /ow/ distribution. Thus Figure 20.1 illustrates the definition of the West as the area of low back merger with strong fronting of /uw/ but little fronting of /ow/. It does not of course, illustrate the absence of Canadian raising and the Canadian Shift that distinguish the West from Canada.

Figure 20.2 is the characteristic Western vowel system of a 24-year-old man from Las Vegas whose personal background illustrates the mixed character of the Western population. He identifies his family background as “Jewish/French/Cherokee/German/English” and attended a high school that he says was evenly mixed “White/Hispanic/Black/Asian”. He was currently working at a car wash.

The low back merger of /oh/ and /o/ is clearly illustrated in this figure. Both /Tuw/ and /Kuw/ are well fronted except before /l/, but /ow/ is not. The short-*a* shows a nasal system, more or less continuous, with the main body of non-nasal /æ/ in low front position. The mean for /æ/ (non-nasal) is back enough to qualify for the Canadian shift, at 1645 Hz. But /e/ shows no strong lowering: the mean of 585 Hz is well below the 660 Hz criterion for the shift.

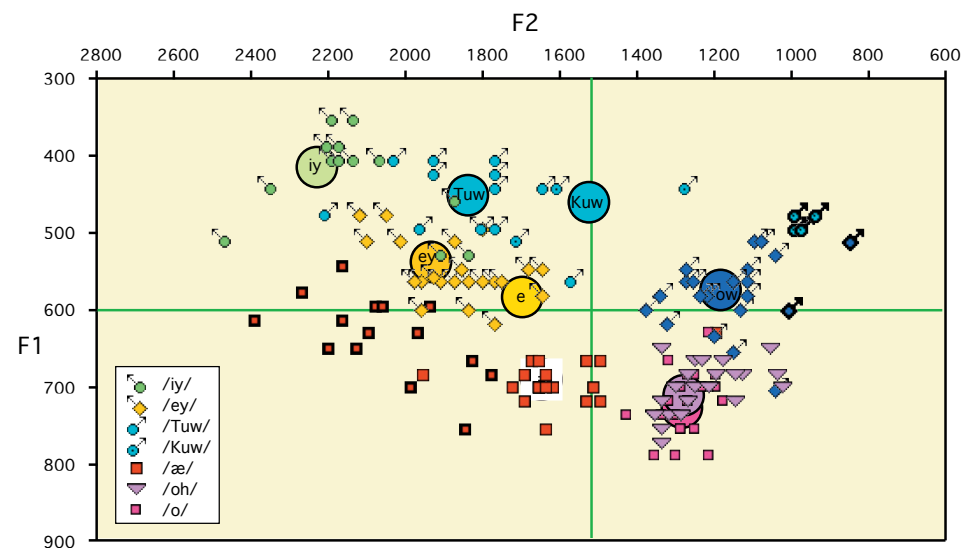


Figure 20.2. The Western vowel system of Ernest P., 24, Las Vegas NV, TS 323. Highlighted /æ/ are before nasals. Highlight /ow/ are before /l/.

20.3. The merger of vowels before /l/

In one respect, the Telsur interviews do not fully reflect the results of previous sociolinguistic work in the West. LYS reported a tendency toward the merger or near-merger of high tense and lax vowels before /l/ in several areas of the West, including Albuquerque and Salt Lake City. A case of the near-merger of /ul/ and /uwl/ in Albuquerque was examined in detail (LYS 1972: s. 6.3). In these near-mergers, speakers tended to label a minimal pair as ‘the same’, even though they consistently made a difference in production. Di Paolo (1988) examined the relations of /il/ ~ /iy/ and /ul/ ~ /uw/ in Salt Lake City in perception and production,

finding strong evidence of these near-mergers in that community. Di Paolo and Faber (1990) examine back vowels before /l/ for eighteen Salt Lake City subjects in considerable detail. As in most cases of near-merger, widespread individual variation appears (cf. Labov 1994: Ch. 12). In the vowel charts provided by Di Paolo and Faber, 14 of the 18 speakers show distinct distributions of /uw/ and /ul/ tokens, although there is a strong tendency (especially among teenagers) to make categorial judgments that ignore these phonetic differences.

None of the five Telsur subjects from Utah showed a complete merger of /uw/ and /ul/ in production. However, evidence for a near-merger appears in the vowel system of a 23-year-old woman from Provo (Figure 20.3). Among the front vowels before /l/, *heel* and *feeling* are much higher than /i/ in *hill*, *Brazil*, and *building*, but *deal* is at the level of short /i/, and *field(s)* is level with *skills*. Among the back vowels the pattern is similar. Although there is no overlap between /uw/ and /ul/, the phonetic distance between them is less than the difference between vowels not before /l/. Four tokens of /uw/ are in high back position (*fool*, *school*), but three other tokens are in lower high position, no higher than *full*. The small difference in backing between these lowered tokens of /uw/ and /u/ is typical of the situation reported in LYS (1972): in cases of near-merger, the phonetic difference is usually limited to F2, less than 200 Hz, which does not appear to be sufficient to maintain a reliable phonemic contrast from the perceptual point of view.

The minimal pair test with this subject produced a clear distinction in both production and perception. The pair produced were *fool*₂ and *full*₂, which was judged as different and are clearly separated in both height and backing on Figure 20.3.

Maps 9.6 and 9.7 examined the merger of /iy/ and /i/ and /uw/ and /u/ before /l/ for all of North America. A heavy concentration of the merger of /u/ and /uw/ before /l/ was found in Western Pennsylvania, closely linked to the vocalization of /l/ that is characteristic of that area. The merger of /iy/ and /i/ before /l/ was strongest in the South. The West did not show more than a light scattering of speakers who displayed a merger of either of these pairs. However, a study of all minimal pair responses for the West compared to all other areas shows one significant difference. The 88 subjects from the West had twice as great a tendency as others to judge the two pairs as ‘close’.⁴ Thus there may be a general trend in the West that renders these two distinctions less salient than in other areas.

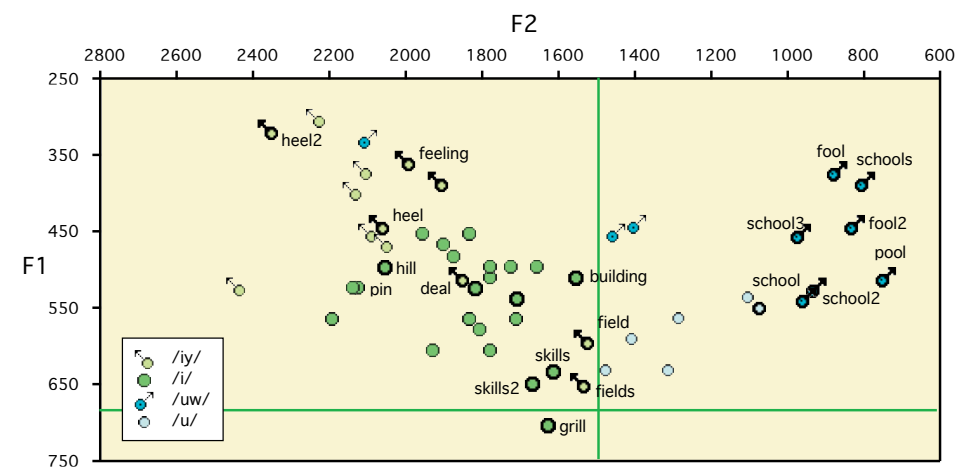


Figure 20.3. High vowels before /l/ for Jessie M., 23 [1995], Provo UT, TS 332. Vowels before /l/ are highlighted

⁴ For /uw/ ~ /ul/, the West showed 17 ‘close’ judgments out of 88, while all other areas showed 57 out of 578 (chi-sq = 8.99, *p* < .005). For /iy/ ~ /il/, the West showed 12 ‘close’ out of 88, and others 57 out of 578 (chi-sq = 6.33, *p* < .02).

Figure 20.4 displays a similar pattern of near-merger of /uwl/ and /u/ for a 14-year-old girl from Albuquerque. Here the word *school* shows the same variation as in Figure 20.3, with some tokens high and others at the level of /u/. The two tokens from the minimal pair test, *full*₂ and *fool*₂, are both in high back position, and these were rightly judged as ‘close’ by the speaker. Figures 20.3 and 20.4 therefore replicate quite closely the earlier observations in Albuquerque and Salt Lake City, but they are a minority pattern in the ANAE data: no area of the West is dominated by the tendency to merge vowels before /l/ that was reported in earlier studies.

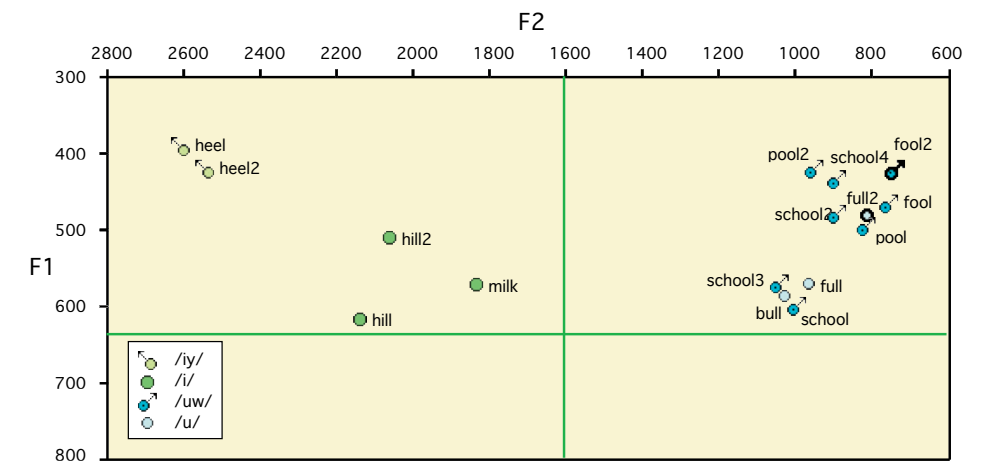


Figure 20.4. High vowels before /l/ of Kate A., 14 [1996], Albuquerque NM, TS 515. Minimal pairs are highlighted