

# On the Fringes of the Inland North: Aspects of the NCS in Real and Apparent Time

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While sociolinguists have always recognized the necessity of real-time evidence to corroborate apparent-time analyses of language change, the increasing availability of real-time data since the birth of the discipline some forty to fifty years ago has triggered a resurgent interest in real-time studies. A number of recent efforts to evaluate the apparent-time construct have come in the form of longitudinal, or trend, studies, revealing a very important and completely justifiable preoccupation with its underlying assumption of vernacular stability. But insofar as the apparent-time construct's ability to model language change may not necessarily rely upon the absolute validity of its foundational assumption (cf. late adoption, or lifespan changes (e.g., Boberg 2004, Sankoff 2005)), cross-sectional, or panel, studies are equally necessary. Ultimately, only cross-sectional data provides information about community-level, rather than individual-level, change. Therefore, this paper reports on part of a larger study currently being conducted that seeks to test the apparent-time construct with real-time, cross-sectional data.

Here, three relatively early stages of the Northern Cities Shift (NCS) –the raising of (æ) as in *'pat'*, the lowering and backing of (e) as in *'pet'*, and the fronting of (o) as in *'pot'*– are analyzed in the speech of twelve European-American men in a community located in the industrial, urbanized areas of extreme northwestern Indiana, along the southern shore of Lake Michigan, just southeast of Chicago, Illinois. It is a community that Labov, Ash, & Boberg (2006) describe as being traversed at various locations by various Inland North / NCS isoglosses, thus a community that is on not only the geographic but also the linguistic fringes of the Inland North. Six of the twelve community members analyzed for this paper –two born in each of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s– were interviewed recently; the other six of them –two born in each of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s– were recorded an average of some twenty years earlier, throughout the 1980s. (These earlier interviews are taken from a local archives' oral history collection.)

Preliminary results for the six speakers recorded in the 1980s show some evidence of the NCS but no clear indications of change in apparent time. For all but one of them, born in the middle 1930s decade, (æ) has raised and/or (e) has lowered such that no significant difference remains between the mean F1 values of these vowels. Likewise, there is no sign of increasing approximation of (e) and (o) on the front - back dimension in apparent time: for all six of these speakers, regardless of age, the mean F2 values for (e) and (o) remain statistically distinct; neither the backward movement of (e) nor the forward movement of (o) characteristic of the NCS has advanced enough to erase the distinction. A comparable apparent-time analysis of six speakers recorded more recently will be presented, and the combined results of these two independent investigations will serve not only to track (the early stages of) the NCS in this community but also to assess the apparent-time construct more generally.

## **References**

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