

### Local Attitudes and Dialect Change in a Tourist Town

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**Loss of Northern Cities Shift** in Inland North is often attributed to declining cultural capital of industrial labor in Rust Belt communities (Nesbitt 2021, Thiel 2019). But what’s the social motivation for NCS loss in a town with **no history of industry?**

#### Cooperstown, NY:

village in rural Otsego County, central New York State; population ca. 2000; home of National Baseball Hall of Fame, nearby baseball summer camps, etc. **Abrupt apparent-time retreat** from TRAP-raising and LOT-fronting (Dinkin 2019)—a **sharp distinction** between Baby Boomers and Gen X. Cooperstown experienced **rapid growth in tourism** in second half of 20th century; downtown businesses now mainly cater to tourists rather than locals (Anania 2016). Do locals’ **attitudes toward tourism** correlate to NCS production? (cf. Labov 1963).

**Data:** 40 new sociolinguistic interviews collected summer 2018; speakers grew up in **Cooperstown school district** from age 8 or younger. Formants extracted, Lobanov-normalized with FAVE (Rosenfelder et al. 2014); speakers coded as having **positive, mixed, negative** (+1, 0, -1) attitudes about tourism based on notes taken by research assistants transcribing interviews. Tourism attitudes show **no apparent correlation** with gender, age, mobility.

#### Mixed-effects models calculated in Rbrul (Johnson 2009):

factor	coefficient	p
post-Boomer × wordlist	+40 Hz	< 10 <sup>-3</sup>
post-Boomer	+31 Hz	
wordlist	+7 Hz	
male	-21 Hz	0.01
post-Boomer × tourism attitude	-27 Hz	0.01
tourism attitude	+24 Hz	

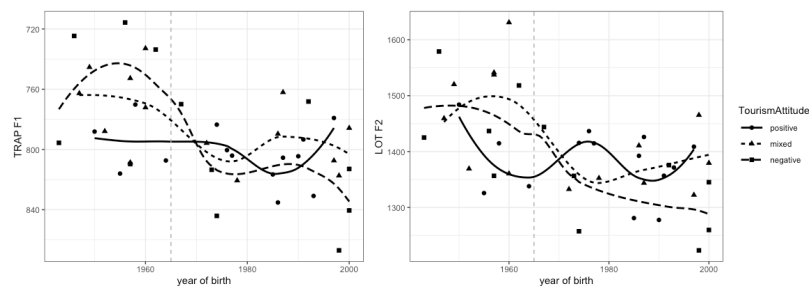
TRAP F1. *n* = 5654. Baseline: Baby Boomer, spontaneous speech, female. Random factors: speaker, word, speaker × style. Intercept ≈ 818 Hz. Tokens before sonorants excluded.

factor	coefficient	p
post-Boomer × wordlist	-80 Hz	< 10 <sup>-3</sup>
post-Boomer	-84 Hz	
wordlist (including minimal pairs)	+22 Hz	
has lived outside Inland North 5+ years	-54 Hz	0.01
male	+48 Hz	0.01
post-Boomer × tourism attitude	+61 Hz	0.01
tourism attitude	-35 Hz	

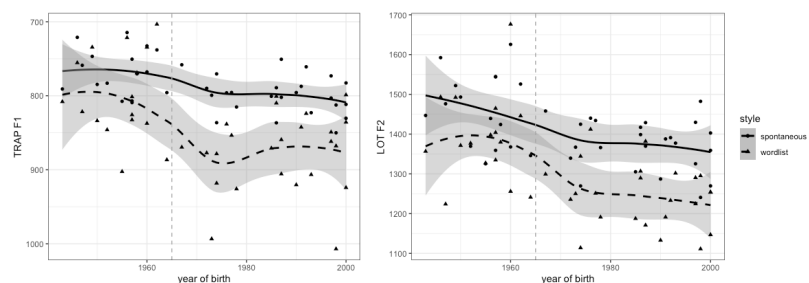
LOT F2. *n* = 5007. Baseline: Baby Boomer, spontaneous, never lived 5 years outside Inland North, female. Random factors: speaker, word, speaker × style. Intercept ≈ 1392 Hz. Pre-*L* tokens excluded.

**Results:** TRAP F1 and LOT F2 show **similar interactions** of age with **tourism attitude** and **speech style**:

- **Wordlist style** leads change from NCS, more for post-Boomers than Boomers.
- **Positive** tourism attitude **disfavors** NCS for Boomers; attitude effect is **absent or reversed** for younger speakers.



TRAP F1 and LOT F2 by age and tourism attitude



TRAP F1 and LOT F2 by age and style

This pattern is **not** present for non-NCS vowels undergoing change in Cooperstown:

- Pre-voiceless PRICE raising in apparent time:
  - No effects of attitude, attitude × age, or style × age
  - Main effect of style: spontaneous speech leads change
- Post-coronal GOOSE fronting in apparent time:
  - No effect of attitude or attitude × age (wordlist data not collected)

factor	coefficient	p
post-Boomer	-26 Hz	< 10 <sup>-3</sup>
wordlist (including minimal pairs)	+33 Hz	0.003

Pre-voiceless PRICE F1. *n* = 1264. Baseline: Baby Boomer, spontaneous speech. Random factors: speaker, word. Intercept ≈ 773 Hz. Lexical item *like* excluded. Random style slopes did not converge.

Post-coronal GOOSE F2: *n* = 3207. Post-boomer coefficient +146 Hz. Random factors: speaker, word. Intercept ≈ 1469 Hz. Pre-*L* tokens excluded.

So apparently the NCS has **changed its social meaning**:

- for Boomers, it indexes **local orientation** in opposition to the growth of tourism;
- for post-Boomers, it is a **non-standard** feature avoided in careful style.

A hint of the role of local orientation in Boomers' **intra-speaker** variation for TRAP: **tourism-negative Boomers** are slightly more likely than other Boomers to have TRAP **higher when discussing feelings about Cooperstown/tourism** than other topics.

No such effect exists for younger speakers.

factor	coefficient	<i>p</i>
Cooperstown topic × negative attitude	-40 Hz	< 10 <sup>-3</sup>
Cooperstown topic × positive attitude	-10 Hz	
negative attitude	-6 Hz	
positive attitude	+27 Hz	
Cooperstown topic	+10 Hz	
has lived outside Inland North 5+ years	+25 Hz	0.04

TRAP F1, Boomers only; interview formalities excluded. *n* = 1675. Baseline: mixed attitude, other topics, never lived 5 years outside Inland North. Random factors: speaker, word. Random topic slopes did not converge. Discrete attitude variable produced better fit than scalar. Intercept ≈ 794 Hz.

### Why the change in the social meaning of NCS in Cooperstown?

D'Onofrio & Benheim (2019) remind us:

“explanations... must be couched in highly localized temporal and place-based contexts” and “must therefore integrate findings... with the evolving dynamics of social contact and ideological contrast in a given community”.

In that spirit, a hypothesis:

- Tourism in Cooperstown began to increase between the 1950s and 1970s, the childhood and adolescence of the Baby Boomers.
- Boomers perceived NCS as indexing the difference between locals and tourists
- Boomers with high local orientation and antipathy to tourism maintained high levels of NCS, tourism-friendly Boomers accommodated more away from NCS
- Younger generations perceived less NCS in Cooperstown compared to nearby towns
- Nearby towns are less affluent, more working-class than Cooperstown, so NCS was interpreted as a nonstandard feature

This hypothesis will be able to be tested with data from less affluent nearby communities.

	Otsego	Middlefield	Hartwick	Milford	Springfield
Bachelor's degree	56%	37%	33%	25%	28%
White-collar jobs	59%	46%	43%	33%	37%
Median income	\$76,141	\$52,543	\$52,679	\$53,929	\$45,455

Comparison of middle-class indices among nearby towns in Otsego County. Cooperstown lies mostly in the town of Otsego. Data from U.S. Census American Community Survey 2018 five-year estimates; “white collar” denotes census’s “management, business, science, and arts” category.

**However**, loss of NCS among post-Boomers and evaluation of it as working-class is documented in just about **every study in the Inland North** in the past 12 years! A more general, **less-local explanation** may be in order.

Perhaps in **any** Inland North community, NCS is indexically linked to **the social milieu Baby Boomers grew up in**—robust manufacturing industry (Nesbitt 2021), suburban white flight (D’Onofrio & Benheim 2019), locally-oriented Cooperstown, etc. Then as social circumstances & attitudes change, NCS is lost among post-Boomers— for locally different reasons but globally part of the same broader pattern.

### Acknowledgements:

Thanks to my research assistants: Alyssa Blancada, Mitchell Celaya, Clara Fulks, Martin Martinez, Bea Morales, Matt Springer, Mike Stephens, and Shane Taylor. This research was supported by the University Grants Program and a Critical Thinking Grant at San Diego State University.

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