

New Perspectives on Vowel Shifting

Organizers

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Panel Description

Variationist research on sound change has shone new light on a range of traditional questions in historical phonology. Key to this endeavor has been the exploration of changes in progress, which offer a valuable perspective on the mechanisms that drive change. The picture that emerges from such studies sometimes supports traditional understandings of sound change but other times challenges that received wisdom. This has certainly been the case with one of the most popular foci of variationist attention: vowel shifting.

Vowel shifts have remained near the top of the sociolinguistic agenda for some forty years due in large part to Labov's work on changes like the Northern Cities Shift and the Southern Shift. Since the pioneering work of Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner (1972), sociolinguists have examined several vowel shifts in English and other languages around the world. This work has allowed for exploration of issues familiar from the historical linguistic literature. For example, many earlier analyses of vowel shifts, in particular chain shifts, focused on questions of chronology (e.g. Martinet's (1955) elaboration of drag vs. push chains). Implicit in many of these discussions is the notion that the links in these chains are somehow causal in nature and that the chain itself was a unitary phenomenon.

Recent sociolinguistic work on vowel shifts has called into question a number of the older assumptions. In part, this has been a result of researchers' investigating an ever-increasing palette of chain shifts in both real and apparent time using

instrumentally measured acoustic data, methods unavailable to earlier researchers. At the same time, researchers have also expanded their horizons by investigating shifts other than chain shifts, such as parallel shifts (Labov 2010) and "drifts" (Stockwell & Minkova, 1997). With this expanded exploration has come a renewed interest in the underlying processes driving vowel shifting. Of course, the fact that such research is sociolinguistic has meant that it has also pursued the social aspects of vowel shifts, at both the individual and the community level.

This panel brings together research that takes stock of the current state of the art and also charts new courses for the study of vowel shifts. The papers offer a broad survey of approaches to the issues from data---focused studies of particular speech communities to more theory---oriented explorations of fundamental questions. The work draws on numerous cases of observed vowel shifts. These include commonly studied English chain shifts (e.g., Northern, Canadian, and Southern), as well as other vowel shifts such as the English Vowel Shift and the fronting of the back vowels /aw/, /ow/, and /uw/. Less often discussed non---English vowel shifts will also be discussed, providing a broader perspective on the theoretical and empirical issues explored.

This is a double panel with eight papers selected to represent the cutting edge of research on vowel shifting. The papers are arranged thematically into two groups. The first focuses more heavily on the interaction of social factors and vowel shifting, while the second focuses on the interaction of linguistic factors and vowel shifting.

Papers:

What Are We Talking About When We Talk About Vowel Shifts?

David Durian
Ohio State University

Matthew J. Gordon
University of Missouri

The Relationship between Community vs. Individual Norms in the Production and Perception of Vowels

Valerie Fridland
University of Nevada – Reno

Tyler Kendall
University of Oregon

Shifting Theories: Social Rather than Phonological Accounts for the Canadian Shift

Matthew Hunt Gardner
University of Toronto

Becky Childs
Coastal Carolina University

Geolinguistic Diffusion of the Canadian Shift Near Toronto

Rebecca Roeder
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Part 2

The papers in this section explore fundamental issues in our theories of what vowel shifts are and how they operate. The themes addressed include the relationships between classic chain shifts and other patterns such as parallel shifts.

Also examined are questions about whether vowel shifting is best understood in phonetic or phonological terms.

Toward a Unified Theory of Chain Shifting

Aaron Dinkin
Swathmore College

Vowel Shifts, Unchained

Patricia Donegan
University of Hawai'i at Ma noa

Getting a Handle on Shifting Changes: The Role of Phonetic Analogy in Vowel Shifts

David Durian
Ohio State University

Brian Joseph
Ohio State University

The Phonological Component of Phonetic Change

Josef Fruehwald
University of Pennsylvania

Panel Abstracts

What are We Talking about when We Talk about Chain Shifts?

David Durian
Ohio State University

Matthew J. Gordon
University of Missouri

Historical linguists developed the concept of chain shifting to describe sound changes after the fact. The sociolinguistic investigation of change in progress offers new perspectives on how and why chain shifts happen. In the last four decades, sociolinguists have examined numerous cases of chain shifting in progress. The panel in which this paper appears is intended to sample the state of the art for this line of research. This paper serves to set the table for this discussion by highlighting key questions in the variationist study of chain shifting. In particular we focus on two central issues:

1. What phenomena should be addressed under the label ‘chain shift’? In some discussions, changes like the coordinated fronting of the back vowels /aw/, /ow/, and /uw/ are treated as a kind of chain shift. Other scholars recognize this type of phenomena as something different (e.g., a parallel shift (Labov 2010) or some form of drift (Stockwell & Minkova 1997)). What are the consequences of counting or excluding such changes for our understanding of chain shifting?

2.

Do the mechanisms that drive chain shifting operate on the level of the individual or the speech community? Should we expect to find evidence of coordinated shifting in, e.g., a single speaker’s vowel space? What does the presence or absence of such evidence reveal about the process of chain shifting? We draw on examples in the literature as well as our own empirical studies of the Northern Cities Shift, back vowel fronting, and the “Canadian” Shift.

References:

Labov, William. 2010. *Principles of Linguistic Change*, Vol. 3. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Stockwell, Robert and Donka Minkova. 1997. On drifts and shifts. *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 31: 283---303.

The relationship between community vs. individual norms in the production and perception of vowels

Valerie Fridland
University of Nevada Reno

Tyler Kendall
University of Oregon

A combined vowel perception/vowel production study was designed to address the question of how variability in speech production relates to variability in speech perception. For the study, participants from three different U.S. dialect regions (North, South and West) completed an online vowel identification experiment. A subset of participants from each region also provided speech samples. We have reported on individual aspects of these results in previous papers, particularly those results from the sub-set of perception/speech sample participants from the South. The current paper seeks to provide a unified account of our results, both in terms of cross-dialect differences in production and perception and in terms of internal variation among individuals within each regional subset in both production and perception. While our results show significant differences across dialects, some of our most interesting findings emerged when comparing speakers from the same region who participate in local vowel shift patterns differentially and suggest that perception is a key and often understudied component of dialect, and, in concert with production, has to be considered when studying the dynamics of vowel shifts and sound change. Our dataset is also unique in that we have a large group of siblings that provide an additional aspect of comparison in terms of production and perception across individuals from related and unrelated backgrounds. We find a surprising amount of familial variability in both perception and production that suggests that shift participation is a better predictor of perceptual behavior than familial status.