

Monophthongization and Southern Appalachian Identity: Change over a Lifetime

Paul Reed
Linguistics Program
University of South Carolina

INTRODUCTION

The current study is an extension and follow-up to Reed (2012). In that study, I found that one sibling of a Southern Appalachian family was distinct from the rest of her family with regard to /ai/ monophthongization. The speaker, ST (Speaker 1 in the figure), was fully diphthongal where her family members were not. The results are displayed to the right. This current study was designed to attempt to determine at what life stage did ST become distinct by comparing her speech from recordings made in high school to current speech from sociolinguistic interviews.

My main research question is when and why do speech patterns change, and what factors influence this change. In the previous study, ST mentioned that her identity had shifted from Appalachia to a broader, less regionally based identity. Thus, this could be a factor if her speech has changed.

My hypothesis is that since her identity was more firmly rooted in Appalachia in high school, ST would have greater rates of monophthongization of /ai/ in speech from that time period.

Average Value /aj/ Diphthongs All Speakers

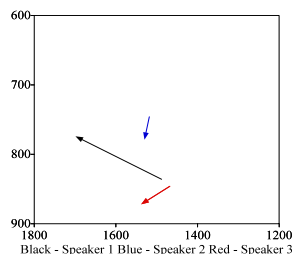
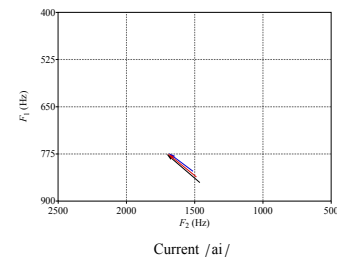
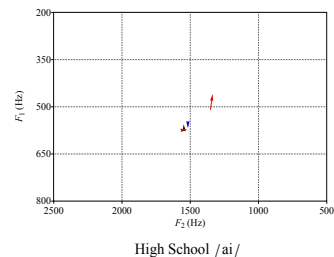


Table 1: Percentage of Monophthongization from 3 siblings

Speaker	Percent Monophthong
ST	2% (2/10)
HSR	83% (15/18)
HRM	77% (13/17)



PARTICIPANTS

ST is a female that was born and raised in a small, Southern Appalachian town. She is college-educated, a working professional, and married mother of two. She would be considered upper middle class, given her current profession (attorney), education, and home value (moderately above neighborhood and community median). She self-identifies as a 'citizen of the world with Southern roots'. She says that her identity is of the 'South as a whole, not to one particular area'.

Data

The data from high school was extracted from family home videos. For this study, 30 tokens from a speech were extracted and measured. This particular sample was chosen for by convenience. This was the only video that was available at the time of the study. More videos have been discovered, and will be incorporated in a larger study.

The current data was extracted from sociolinguistic interviews conducted in December 2011. 30 tokens were extracted,

This particular variable was chosen because /ai/ monophthongization in the Appalachian Dialect Region is unique from other areas in the South in that the monophthongization, which is a hallmark of Southern speech (Thomas 2001, 2003; MacMillan and Montgomery 1989 list 92 studies of Southern vowels), has a different pattern. Green (2010), Hall (1942), and Wolfram and Christian (1976) found that in three different areas of Appalachia, monophthongization occurred before both voiced and voiceless segments. Hall explains, 'The tendency observed elsewhere in Southern speech to reduce [ai] before voiced consonants, but to retain it before voiceless consonants is assuredly not characteristic of Smokies speech' (1942:43)

METHODOLOGY

30 tokens of possible /ai/ were extracted from both high school and current data and the formants were measured using the LPC function of Praat (Boersma and Weenik 2012). F1 and F2 measurements were taken at 20% and 80% duration of each token. The Euclidean distance of the nucleus and glide were computed from these measures. Two-tailed T-tests were then performed on the Euclidean distance and raw Hz values.

In addition, all tokens were impressionistically coded as diphthongal or monophthongal.

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Given the striking results, it appears that ST's identity shift began well after high school. In this relatively formal speech, she is almost categorically monophthongal. Thus, this feature was definitely present. It seems that her speech shift, along with her identity shift, began later. In a follow-up interview, she says that during college, her affinity and affiliation with Appalachia lessened as she was exposed to different regions and people. Additionally, during law school, she states that this was where her 'citizen of the world' identity became much more important and central to her construction of self. Following Johnstone (1996), ST was constructing a unique identity of self, reflecting her changing identity, community, and allegiances. In addition, further evidence that speech patterns can change after adolescence was uncovered (Bowie 2010, Sankoff 2004), as this shift happened after adolescence and well into adulthood. In fact, ST believes that her speech is still changing, which is natural.

Limitations of the study are the small number of tokens from the high school data. More family videos have been found and are now available. In addition, ST has found videos of her speech from later in college and law school. Thus, the opportunity to further probe when and in what manner her speech changed will be available soon.

The study provides some insight into the subtle contextual and linguistic factors that influence when and how a speaker changes speech patterns to reflect a change in personal identification and affiliation, as well as how language continues to change throughout the lifespan.

SELECTED REFERENCES

- Bowie, David. 2010. The ageing voice: Changing identity over time. In Carmen Llamas and Dominic Watt (eds.) *Languages and Identities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. pp. 55-66
- Green, Rebecca. 2010. *Language, ideology, and identity in rural Eastern Kentucky*. PhD Dissertation, Stanford University.
- Hall, Joseph S. 1942. The phonetics of Great Smoky Mountain Speech. *American Speech* 17.2:1-110.
- Johnstone, Barbara. 1996. *The Linguistic Individual*. New York: Oxford.
- McMillan, James B., and Michael B. Montgomery. 1989. *Annotated Bibliography of Southern American English*. Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press.
- Reed, Paul. 2012. Inter- and intra- generational monophthongization and Southern Appalachian identity: A family and self study. SECOL 79, Lexington, KY.
- Sankoff, Gillian. 2004. Adolescents, young adults, and the critical period: Two case studies from 'Seven Up'. In Carmen Fought (ed.) *Sociolinguistic Variation: Critical Reflections*. New York: Oxford. pp. 121-139
- Thomas, Erik R. 2001. *An Acoustic Analysis of Vowel Variation in New World English*. Publication of the American Dialect Society 85. Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press.
- . 2003. Secrets revealed by Southern vowel shifting. *American Speech* 78: 150-170.

RESULTS

I conducted paired T-tests on the Euclidean distances of the glides. The results were significant at the .0001 level. Thus, I conclude that ST is different in her manifestation of the glide from the two data sets. Since this is the same speaker, I also ran paired T-tests on the raw Hz values, and this was also significant at the .001 level.

For the study of rates of monophthongization, ST in high school was 100% monophthongal, as compared to 0% monophthongal in the current data. This obvious difference precluded the need for statistical testing, as the rates are obviously different.