

BOOK REVIEW

Christopher Strelluf and Matthew J. Gordon, *The origins of Missouri English: A historical sociophonetic analysis*. London: Lexington Books, 2024. Pp. 328. ISBN 9781498597265.

Paul E. Reed 

Department of Communicative Disorders, University of Alabama, Box 870242,
Tuscaloosa AL 35487, USA
pereed1@ua.edu

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The Origins of Missouri English: A Historical Sociophonetic Analysis by Christopher Strelluf and Matthew J. Gordon is a volume that shows how one can use modern sociophonetic methods on archival data to reach further into the past to help determine language variation and change. The book explores the distant recorded past of Missouri speech and seeks to demonstrate how this past speech is both similar to and yet distinct from more modern speech. The book can and will be a blueprint for researchers delving into the history and past of other speech varieties. The rigorous methodologies and, in particular, the clear and precise explanations of why certain methods were used serves as a model of how to do historical sociophonetic research.

The twelve chapters of the book, including the Preface, describe the motivation, explanation and findings of research into the speech of the Show Me state. The Preface sets the tone and goals of the book, explaining that the goals are to explore how folks spoke in previous generations of Missouri. The authors state that they hope it inspires others to comb archives to add data to answer questions regarding language variation and change more broadly. Further, the introductory material includes Notes on Notations. This short section was quite welcome, as the authors outline how this work connects to previous research, but at the same time differs from it. Strelluf and Gordon provide excellent reminders about nomenclature, wherein all researchers need to be mindful about why they are using particular conventions, here Wells' (1982) lexical sets. Additionally, the authors provide a full list of the studies, atlases and other projects they reference to make sure that the reader sees how the present work is situated, a very welcome chart.

Chapters 1 and 2 serve as an extended introduction to the rest of the book. Chapter 1 provides a brief history of Missouri to inform the reader but also to show why certain decisions will be made later, particularly with respect to divvying up the state regionally ('Missouri: History and dialectology', pp. 1–18). This historical section was well written and informative, without being bogged down with extraneous detail. It was quite concise while also thorough and deftly written. The chapter continues by explaining the regional linguistic landscape of Missouri, based on the history that was just supplied. Here, we see the complexity of the state, where a mixture and mingling of Southern, Midland and Northern speech varieties are found and, perhaps, should be expected. Throughout the chapter, we are provided several interesting facts and one clear truth: Missouri is complex, and the authors concisely summarize vast amounts of data. In chapter 2 (pp. 19–40), the authors define what they mean by historical sociophonetics: 'intentional sociolinguistic analysis of the oldest available phonetic data' (p. 19). Fundamentally, this means rigorously analyzing old

recordings to the fullest extent possible, while keeping in mind the caveats necessary. The authors compare historical sociophonetics with more well-known historical methods that primarily rely on textual sources, as well as contrasting with non-historical sociophonetics and sociolinguistics studies. The authors encourage researchers to try to push further back into the past, as there are reams (and reels!) of data in many sources. One just needs to look. Strelluf and Gordon are also quite careful to provide caveats. Using older sources means that the researchers must be aware of the limitations – recording materials, recording issues (e.g. noise), aims of the projects being used (oral history vs. sociolinguistic interview, etc.) and demographics of available data. Further, the authors discuss the thornier issues of using existing data with topics such as informed consent.

Chapters 3 and 4 serve as the methods and materials section of the book and set the stage for the following results chapters. Chapter 3 (pp. 41–80) explains the history of the methods employed (automated formant estimation and extraction) and interrogates some of the assumptions about these methods. Fundamentally, this chapter provides a blueprint of how to do this type of work, while acknowledging and situating issues and ongoing concerns. I found this chapter to be perhaps the most valuable for the field at large, with implications for sociophonetics, corpus linguistics, computational linguistics and beyond. Strelluf and Gordon explain both how to do automated extraction and why to do it, but also things to be aware of when doing it. For example, the authors discuss what ‘accuracy’ means via a case study comparing the output of automated formant extractions with hand formant extractions. The results were comparable, but the authors discuss a complex issue. Automated extraction and hand extraction are similar in the aggregate and on the average, so the much more efficient automated methods can be used. However, for any single measure, there are differences. This is an important concept to keep in mind. Chapter 4 (pp. 81–110) overviews the corpus of materials used for the entire project – primarily the Missouri Mule History Project (MMHP) (but other sources were used as well). The authors explain where the corpus materials were located and what the original goals of the project were; they also provide some important background about the speakers of the MMHP. Then, the authors discuss how they split and grouped the speakers for analysis (i.e. the regions of Missouri, year of birth, biological sex, etc.). The chapter also discusses how the authors quantified sound change, using Euclidean distance and Bhattacharyya’s coefficient for F1/F2 measures of vowels. The chapter concludes with an overview of the Missouri Speech Survey (MSS), which serves as the comparison to modern Missouri speech.

Chapters 5–10 are the results chapters, comparing and contrasting the speech of past Missourians to more recent recordings. Chapter 5 (pp. 111–32) focuses on the PIN/PEN Merger, usually associated with Southern US speech. The authors find that this merger has been in Missouri speech for more than a century, with the majority of their archival speakers having some evidence of the merger. However, it is not found uniformly across the state, as there is a bit of an urban/rural split with St. Louis and its surrounding area, and also Kansas City being somewhat distinct from the rest of the state. The Low-Back Vowel Merger is the topic of chapter 6 (pp. 133–54), with some interesting findings. Overall, Missouri speakers developed the merger over the course of the twentieth century. What is fascinating is that the evidence points to rural speakers being some of the first to lose the distinction in THOUGHT and LOT. The topic of chapter 7 is the pre-rhotic status of FORCE, NORTH and START (pp. 155–76). The findings here point to the complexity of sound change. The data point to several systems of pre-rhotic vowels in Missouri existing in the earliest recorded speech. Over the course of the twentieth century, a NORTH/FORCE merger made progress. However, St. Louis speech shows some indication of a NORTH/START merger very early, but the merger remained relatively confined to the city. Thus, speakers with a NORTH/FORCE merger lived alongside those with NORTH/START mergers and co-existed for a period of time. Chapter 8 evaluates the presence of the Southern Vowel Shift (SVS) (pp. 177–216). The data indicate that aspects of the Southern

Shift were already present in Missouri (e.g. PRICE monophthongization) in the earliest recordings, and was fairly advanced (e.g. rotation of FACE/DRESS, conservative FLEECE and KIT) in several speakers. The SVS was more regionally located, as the areas with heavier Southern and Appalachian migration had the more advanced SVS. Chapter 9 focuses on the Northern Cities Shift (NCS) and the Low-Back Merger Shift (LBMS) (pp. 217–42). The data basically indicated that the NCS and the LBMS are both much more recent phenomena in Missouri. The NCS, even in the most incipient stages, was restricted to the St. Louis area. The LBMS, in contrast, seems to have its origins in the Kansas City area, with some speakers demonstrating some aspects of the LBMS in the earlier recordings. Chapter 10 (pp. 243–60), the final results chapter, discusses the pronunciation of the name of the state *Missouri* itself. This fascinating chapter shows the complexity, with many speakers being variable in the final vowel quality. But many show a preference for one pronunciation and some speakers prefer eliding the final vowel entirely.

Chapter 11 (pp. 261–72) wraps up the book and situates the findings as a first step, as an initial foray into a larger linguistic system. While the findings show similarities and differences, there are many other productions that can (and I daresay will) be examined, such as the production of initial (w). The authors summarize the key findings of each chapter but also look forward to the future. The authors, enthused and invigorated by the success of the data and their methods, desire to focus on other phenomena while also seeking to expand the corpus by including other archival recordings.

The Origins of Missouri English: A Historical Sociophonetic Analysis is a valuable and welcome addition to anyone's library, and a must for sociophoneticians and those interested in the history of American English. One small, but glaring, shortcoming of the book is the size and quality of some of the graphs and charts, particularly for the vowel and vowel merger comparisons. Certain fonts and the grayscale were very difficult to read (I suspect this may be the publisher's decision). Nonetheless, the authors' explanations of the graphs were clear and concise and overcame the issues with the graphs. The contributions of this book are obvious, from thought-provoking questions regarding informed consent to reminders about formant extraction. I commend the authors on their achievement, as they have shown how sociophonetics continues to be not just a handful of methods, rather a discipline that advances our field.

Reference

Wells, J. C. 1982. *Accents of English*, 3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.