

The sociolinguistics of back vowel fronting in Manchester English

MACIEJ BARANOWSKI

University of Manchester

This paper reports on patterns of sociolinguistic variation and change found in Manchester's long back vowels. It is based on the acoustic analysis of 80 informants. The sample is stratified by age, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity. Fifty-six of the speakers identify themselves as white British; the other twenty-four informants represent the two largest ethnic minorities in Manchester, i.e., Pakistani and Black Caribbean. Five socio-economic levels are distinguished, from lower-working to upper middle class.

The informants' complete vowel systems (all vowel phonemes, both nuclei and glide targets) are measured in terms of F1, F2, and F3 in Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2012). For twenty-six speakers, the point of measurement is selected by hand, following Labov, Ash, and Boberg (2006). The speech of fifty-four speakers is measured automatically, using the Forced Alignment and Vowel Extraction suite developed at the University of Pennsylvania (Labov, Rosenfelder, & Fruehwald 2013). The acoustic measurements are subjected to a series of multivariate analyses, with factors such as age, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity entered as independent variables.

The results suggest a pattern of back vowel fronting in apparent time in the dialect. There is very advanced fronting of GOOSE, for both coronal and non-coronal onsets, involving all social groups at similar rates; there is also fronting of the glide target. Although there is less fronting of GOOSE before /l/, as in *school* and *pool*, speakers in the lowest socio-economic levels show considerable fronting in this environment. The fronting of GOAT (both the nucleus and the glide target) is a more recent change, led by females and upper middle class speakers, with ethnic minorities not participating in the process. GOAT fronting is argued to be a change brought in from outside the dialect by the highest social classes, in contrast to GOOSE fronting, an internal change.