

Raising from the past: Using digitized sound archives to inform unsolved mysteries in dialectology

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The focus of this paper is the phonetic feature known as "Canadian Raising" (Chambers 1973, 2006), whereby the diphthongs /ai/ and /au/ display mid rather than low onsets before tautosyllabic voiceless consonants. Despite its iconic association with Canadian English, CR also occurs in a number of conservative early overseas varieties, including regional speech on the US eastern seaboard, along with the Caribbean (e.g. Kurath and McDavid 1961, Labov 1963, Trudgill 1985, 1986).

The origins of this feature remain unresolved. On the one hand, CR has been attributed to dialect contact (Trudgill 1985, 1986, Brittain 1997), whereby different allophonic variants in the input dialect mix undergo subsequent phonetic reallocation. A second approach sees CR as a natural phonetic development, which may be independently re-innovated rather than inherited (e.g. the "Asymmetric Assimilation" hypothesis of Moreton and Thomas 2007).

We investigate CR via recorded archival data from Newfoundland English (NE), an autonomous conservative overseas variety with roots in the regional speech of southwest England and southeast Ireland, neither of which exhibits CR. Our sample consists of nine traditional male speakers representing two generations (born between 1898 and c. 1935) as well as both ancestry groups, which in Newfoundland remained for the most part regionally segregated (Clarke 2010). First and second formants of 348 tokens of /ai/ and /au/ were analyzed via Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2013). Though it has been claimed (e.g. Trudgill 1985: 40) that NE does not display CR, our acoustic analysis indicates that this feature occurs variably, among both generations investigated, for both /ai/ and /au/ despite the NE tendency towards mid- rather than low-vowel onsets in both pre-voiced and pre-voiceless environments. Our findings point to independent innovation as the source of CR in NE, and rule out dialect mixing as a necessary condition for the development of this feature.