



A comparison of the Northern Cities Shift and the Southern Shift in vowel pronunciation by American English speakers

Olivia Frey

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Seminar paper from the year 2007 in the subject American Studies - Linguistics, grade: 1,0, University of Vienna (Anglistik & Amerikanistik), course: Introductory Seminar / Linguistics - Phonetics & Phonology, 10 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: Like all living languages, English is continually changing as new words, pronunciations, grammatical structures and word meanings arise and eventually supplement or replace old ones. This means that every linguistic branch, from morphology and phonology to syntax and semantics is subject to change. In North American English, pronunciation is the most active arena for language change. In the last few decades, researchers have identified various pronunciation changes that are in progress in different parts of the United States (Gordon 2001: 2-3).

Towards the end of the 20th century, William Labov, an American linguist, overruled the methods of traditional dialectology depending on lexical variation and claimed that “regional diversity is increasing as a result of opposing movements within vowel systems” (Labov, Ash & Boberg 2005: 18). In other words, the divergent developments in American English dialects are attributable to the operation of chain shifts moving the phonetic values of vowels in radically different directions. In these complex rotations, whole sets or subsystems of vowels reverse their relative positions to each other, whereby phones representing one phoneme in one dialect represent an entirely different phoneme in another (Labov 1991: 3).



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