

## Rural white Southern accents\*

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### 1. Introduction

If the “South” and “South Midland” dialect areas, as defined by Kurath (1949) and Kurath and McDavid (1961), are lumped as “Southern,” rural white Southern accents can be said to occur over a broad expanse of the United States. They occur throughout the southeastern part of the United States, excepting southern Florida, at least as far north as southern Maryland, central West Virginia, Kentucky, southern Missouri, and eastern and southern Oklahoma and perhaps as far west as western Texas and parts of eastern New Mexico. The exact limits are subject to disagreement; some researchers include northern West Virginia and the southern sections of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, while others exclude western Texas.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1. “Typical” rural white Southern vowels – summary

	Older	Younger
KIT	ɪ~iə>ɪ	ɪ~iə
DRESS	ɛ~eə~ ɛiə	ɛ~eə
TRAP	æ~æɛæ	æ
LOT	ɑ	ɑ
STRUT	ɜ>ʌ	ɜ
FOOT	ʊ~ʏ	ʊ~ʏ
BATH	æɛ	æ
DANCE	æɛ	eə
CLOTH	ɔo~ɑɒ	ɑɒ
NURSE	ɝ>ɛɝ>ɜɪ	ɝ>ɛɝ
FLEECE	ɪi~ii	ɪi~ii
FACE	ɛi~æi	ɛi~æi
PALM	ɑ>æ	ɑ~ɒo
THOUGHT	ɔo~ɑɒ	ɑɒ
GOAT	ɔu~ɒu	ɜy~ɜu>æu
GOOSE	ɥu~yɥ	ɥu~yɥ~ɥy~yy
PRICE	ai~aæ~a:	ai~aæ~a:
PRIZE	aɛ~aæ~a:	aɛ~aæ~a:
CHOICE	oi~ɔoi>oɛ~oə	oi
MOUTH, LOUD	æɔ~æɒ~æɛɒ>ɑɒ>æɑ	æɔ~æɒ>ɑɒ
NEAR	ɪɝ~iə	ɪɝ
SQUARE	æɝ~æə~ɛiɝ~ɛiə~ ɛɝ	ɛɝ

START	ɒ̃~ɒ̃:	ɒ̃>ɑ̃
NORTH	ɔ̃~ɔ̃~ɔ̃ɔ̃~ɔ̃ɔ̃~ɔ̃	õ
FORCE	õ~õ~oũ~oũ~oũ	õ
CURE	ũ~ũ~ʊ̃~ʊ̃>õ	ũ>ɔ̃
FIRE	aæ̃~aæ̃~a:̃~a:̃>ɒ̃	aæ̃~a:̃
POWER	æ̃ɔ̃~æ̃ɔ̃>ɒ̃	ɑ̃ɔ̃
<i>happy</i>	ɪ~i	i
<i>letter</i>	ɜ̃~ə	ɜ̃
<i>horses</i>	ɪ~i	ɪ~i
<i>comma</i>	ə	ə
HAND	æ~æ̃æ̃	eə
PIN/PEN	ɪ~iə	ɪ~iə
THINK, LENGTH	ɪ>ɛi~æ̃i	ɪ~ii
GOING	ɔ̃u~ɒ̃u	ɔ̃u~ɒ̃u
GOAL	ɔ̃u~ɒ̃u	ɔ̃u~ɒ̃u
POOL	ɸ~u	ʊ~u
PULL	ʊ	ʊ~u
FEEL	ji	ɪ~iə~ji
FILL	ɪ~iə	ɪ~iə~i
FAIL	ɛi~æ̃i~ei	ei~ɛ
FELL	ɛ~ei	ɛ
MARRY	æ	ɛ̃
MERRY	ɛ	ɛ̃
MARY	ei~ɛ	ɛ̃
MIRROR/NEARER	ɪ~i	i
TOMORROW	ɑ̃~ɒ̃	ɑ̃~ɒ̃
ORANGE	ɑ̃~ɒ̃	ɑ̃~ɒ̃~o

Within this vast territory there is a considerable amount of dialectal diversity, especially in the South Atlantic states. The origins of this diversity are closely connected with the sociohistorical background of the region. Most of the Atlantic coastal sections were initially settled in the 17th and early 18th centuries by English colonists. Two areas, the Delmarva Peninsula and the Pamlico Sound area of North Carolina, remained relatively isolated from inland areas until the 20th century and show several dialectal features in common: rhoticity, failure of BATH and THOUGHT to diphthongize, backing of the nucleus of PRICE/PRIZE, and fronting of the glide of MOUTH/LOUD, among others. Two other coastal regions, one comprising the Tidewater and Piedmont sections of Virginia and adjacent counties in Maryland and North Carolina and the other consisting of the “Low Country” of the South Carolina and Georgia coastal plain, were settled mainly by the English and by African slaves and also show dialectal similarities to each other. These

similarities include non-rhoticity and production of higher nuclei in MOUTH and PRICE than in LOUD and PRIZE. Each has its own features, though, such as the mutation of FACE to [ɛ] in some words (e.g., *make* and *afraid*) in Virginia and ingliding forms of FACE and GOAT in the Low Country.

During the 18th century, various non-English European groups began to settle the South. Numerous groups, including French Huguenots, Welsh, Highland Scots, Germans, Swiss, and Jews, clustered in limited areas. The major influx, however, was of Ulster Scots (Scotch-Irish). Large numbers of Ulster Scots migrated from Pennsylvania through the Great Valley of the Shenandoah River in Virginia or sailed to Charleston, South Carolina, mixing with English settlers who were moving inland and fanning out throughout the Piedmont and Appalachian regions. This mixture was aided by changes in religious affiliation because the organizational constraints of the older Presbyterian (Scottish) and Anglican/Episcopalian (English) denominations were too rigid to function well on the frontier and new denominations, mainly the Baptists and Methodists, attracted adherents from both backgrounds. In Piedmont sections, the Ulster Scots eventually adopted features such as non-rhoticity from their neighbors, and some adopted the plantation culture. In the southern Appalachians, though, the mixed Ulster Scot and English populations, who tended to live as hardscrabble farmers, maintained rhoticity. Much later, other features, such as glide weakening of PRICE (not just of PRIZE) developed in the Appalachians.

During most of the 18th century, plantations concentrated on growing tobacco in Virginia and North Carolina and rice and indigo in the Low Country. Tobacco growing spread to Kentucky and Tennessee as those states were settled in the late 18th century, but in other areas, such as the Delmarva Peninsula, it was replaced by wheat culture, which was less reliant on slaves. Although tobacco plantations depended on slaves, slave holdings tended to be largest in the Low Country. In parts of the Low Country, whites made up less than 20% of the population. The invention of the cotton gin in 1793 brought drastic changes, creating a new plantation culture centered on cotton and allowing plantation agriculture (and slavery) to expand westward through the Gulf states during the early 19th century. The westward spread was aided by the forced removal of Native Americans to Oklahoma on the infamous “Trail of Tears” in 1838. Plantation areas typically showed certain dialectal features, particularly non-rhoticity and intrusive [j] in *car* [c<sup>h</sup>ɹɑ:], *garden*, etc. Plantations occupied the better farmland, such as the “Black Belt” of central Alabama and the Mississippi valley, while poor white farmers predominated in less arable regions, such as the rugged terrain of northern Alabama and the sandy “Piney Woods” region that stretched from southern Georgia and northern Florida to southern Mississippi, with a disjunct area in western Louisiana and eastern Texas. One distinctive area was southern Louisiana, with its French influence and its sugar cane- and rice-based agriculture, but it is covered in a separate paper in this volume by Dubois and Horvath.

West of the Mississippi, the plantation culture was largely restricted to the Mississippi valley and delta and the more fertile portions of eastern and southeastern Texas. Appalachian farmers, largely from Tennessee, settled the Ozarks. Germans settled parts of the Missouri and Mississippi valleys near St. Louis, and Kentuckians and Virginians settled the “Little Dixie” region of Missouri north of the Missouri River. Various settlers, mostly from Tennessee and Arkansas, settled northern and central

Texas, with a subsequent influx of Germans in central Texas. In southern Texas, these settlers encountered the already established Spanish-speaking Tejanos, though Anglo settlement of southern Texas was sparse until an agricultural boom occurred in the 1920s. Much of Oklahoma remained the “Indian Territory” until it was opened to white settlement in 1889, after which time settlers from Texas and Arkansas dominated its southern and eastern sections.

The Civil War (1861–1865) put an end to slave-based plantation agriculture in the South, leading to the tenant and sharecropper systems on farms (in which owners divided profits from crops with tenants or sharecroppers) and ultimately to the establishment of mills for processing cotton and tobacco. Textile mills appeared in numerous towns, especially in Piedmont areas from Virginia to Alabama, and many of these towns grew into cities. Cotton growing declined in that same region, shifting in large part to the Mississippi valley and Texas. The invention of cigarette machines and the introduction of flue-cured tobacco led to large tobacco mills, primarily in North Carolina and Virginia, and a southward expansion of tobacco farming. Northern entrepreneurs also made timber a major industry throughout the South. Coal mining became a major industry in the Appalachians and mining towns sprang up there. Other industries, such as steel in Alabama, appeared locally. Expansion of railroads facilitated the growth. A demographic effect of these new industries was that it helped to inspire considerable migration of white workers toward mill towns. In addition, Texas received large numbers of migrants from other Southern states seeking new farmland after the Civil War. It is possible that these movements played a role in the spread of several sound changes that previously occurred only locally, including the PIN/PEN merger, glide weakening of PRIZE, fronting of GOOSE, rounding of the nucleus of START, and, after 1900, lowering of the nuclei of FACE and GOAT.

Until World War II, the South generally showed net out-migration. This trend was spurred by persistent, widespread poverty and also by specific events, such as boll weevil infestation and the Great Depression. Migration from some regions, especially Appalachia, continued after World War II, but a counter-trend began. The oil industry in Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma; the establishment of numerous military bases; the growth of businesses attracted by cheap labor; and the appearance of resort and retirement communities all attracted migrants from other parts of the United States. This contact with non-Southerners may have influenced some sound changes, such as the decline of [j] in words such as *tune* and *news*, the FORCE/NORTH merger, the spread of [oɜ] in the ORANGE class, and the decline of triphthongization (a correlate of the “Southern drawl”) in MOUTH/LOUD, DRESS, and other classes. However, the growth and in-migration has been concentrated in urban centers, and rural areas have continued to struggle economically. In fact, the economic gap between urban and rural areas is still widening today. Rural areas now show traditionally Southern dialectal features to a greater degree than urban areas.

Another event that may have influenced Southern dialectal patterns was the Civil Rights Movement, particularly desegregation, which was accompanied by turmoil in the South from the 1950s through the 1970s. The civil rights struggle seems to have caused both African Americans and Southern whites to stigmatize linguistic variables associated with the other group. It coincides with the sudden spread among whites of GOAT fronting, which African Americans avoid, as well as with the reversal in which non-rhoticity

changed from a prestigious to an unprestigious feature among whites. The latter change was probably also promoted by the influx of non-Southerners.

## 2. Phonological systems

The phonological inventory is essentially the same as in other forms of North American English. Many Southerners distinguish the TRAP and BATH classes, though this distinction is disappearing. A number of distinctions, most notably those between NORTH and FORCE, between MARY and MERRY, and between W and HW (as in *witch* and *which*), persisted longer in the South than in most other parts of North America. Similarly, the prosody of white Southern English follows patterns similar to that of white English in other parts of North America, albeit with a few special, interrelated features collectively called the “Southern drawl.”

### 2.1. Prosodic features

Two prosodic features of rural Southern English are commonly remarked upon: the “Southern drawl” and the tendency to place stress to the initial syllable of particular words. The Southern drawl is defined variously, and it has even been dismissed by some as nothing more than a stereotype. It is probably best described as prolongation of certain stressed vowels and diphthongs, often accompanied by breaking of and exaggerated pitch rises in those vocoids. Although the phenomenon has not been studied as extensively as it could have been, there seems to be adequate evidence that it exists. It is widespread in Southern white English. However, it seems to be more observable in the speech of Southerners born before 1960 than in the speech of those born afterward, though published evidence for such a trend is lacking.

The exaggerated pitch peaks that have been noted as a correlate of the Southern drawl are the main intonational feature noted for white Southern English. These peaks occur in heavily stressed syllables. In other respects, Southern intonation patterns seem to be similar to those in other forms of American English, though little research on them has been carried out.

The other oft-noted aspect of Southern prosody, placement of primary stress on initial syllables, occurs for some speakers in words such as *cement*, *police*, *hotel*, *pecan*, *July*, *Detroit*, and *Monroe* for which other varieties of English do not show primary stress on the initial syllable. This feature has become a stereotype of Southern English, both white and African American. As a result, it is recessive for most words, but for at least one, *insurance*, it has become a marker of Southern identity and is still common. In a number of additional words, such as *theater* and *peanut*, many Southerners show a secondary stress that is absent in other varieties of English. This tendency is also stereotyped and recessive.

Other features of stress and rhythm, such as the relative degree of stress timing and syllable timing, have not been investigated in Southern English.

### 2.2. Lexical distribution

A large number of words show a phonemic incidence that is associated with Southern English. Many such words are discussed in Kurath and McDavid (1961) and the *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States* (Pederson et al 1986–1892, henceforth LAGS). For some of these words, the pronunciation is widespread but is stereotypically associated

with the South; examples are *get* pronounced [gɪt] and *just* pronounced [dʒɪst]. Other cases are pronunciations that were once widespread but have receded and are now – in North America at least – largely restricted to the South. Examples are *rather* as [ɹʌðə], *further* as [fʌðə], *radish* as [ɹɛrɪʃ], *kettle* as [kʰɪtʌ], *drain* as [dɹɪn], *sumac* as [sʊmæk], and *haunt* as [hænt]. This group, as a rule, occurs mostly among older, less-educated speakers. There are also variants whose primary distribution has long been the South, though many of them once had some currency elsewhere. The viability of these items varies. Some are highly recessive, e.g., *put* as [pʰʌt], *coop* and *Cooper* as [kʰʊp] and [kʰʊpə/ə] respectively, *shut* as [ʃɛt], and *pasture* pronounced to rhyme with *master*. Others are still used by many younger speakers, such as *grease* (verb) and *greasy* as [gɹɪz(i)], *naked* as [nekɪd], *can't* rhyming with *faint*, *on* pronounced as *own*, and perhaps *Mrs.* as [mɪz(ɪz)], though these usages are probably receding slowly.

Lexical incidence in certain groups of words has attracted particular attention from dialectologists. One is a group of words that vary between the LOT and THOUGHT classes. Southerners who distinguish LOT and THOUGHT consistently produce *on* with the THOUGHT or GOAT vowels, not with the LOT vowel. *Long* and words rhyming with it formerly grouped with LOT in parts of Virginia and North Carolina but with THOUGHT elsewhere, though the THOUGHT variant has probably encroached on the LOT island. For words spelled *-og*, *dog* consistently groups with THOUGHT but other words (*fog*, *hog*, *log*, etc.) vary, generally grouping with LOT in coastal plain areas and with THOUGHT in inland areas. Among words spelled *wa-*, *want* with the THOUGHT vowel is particularly associated with the South.

In addition, there are a few function words (*was*, *what*, *of*) that have been shifting in North American English from LOT to STRUT. For these words, the LOT pronunciation has survived longer in the South than elsewhere, though it is giving way now. Similarly, *because* is shifting from THOUGHT to STRUT, though the THOUGHT form is still common in the South.

### 2.3. Vowels

Virtually every vowel class shows distinctive variants in rural white Southern English. A number of processes, such as triphthongization, glide weakening of PRIZE and PRICE, upgliding forms of THOUGHT and BATH, and the PIN/PEN merger, have become more or less stereotypical of Southern speech. One assemblage of vowel shifts, dubbed the *Southern Shift*, has attracted prominent attention recently; see especially Labov (1991, 1994) and Labov et al. (2002). It consists of several different shifts that are associated with each other. PRIZE, and often PRICE as well, undergoes glide weakening to [æ~a:] or, as in the Pamlico Sound region, becomes backed to [æ~ɤe]. The tense/lax front vowel pairs switch places: the nuclei of FACE and FLEECE become non-peripheral and fall, while KIT and DRESS become peripheral and rise toward [i] and [e], respectively. The nucleus of GOAT may fall, and GOAT and GOOSE become fronted. Finally, THOUGHT is either diphthongized to something like [ɔo] or raised toward [o]. It should be noted that the different components of the Southern Shift have not spread through the South at the same time. Shifting of THOUGHT may date from the late 18th or early 19th centuries and glide weakening of PRIZE apparently dates from the late 19th century, while fronting of GOAT spread mostly after World War II.

Because of the diachronic, regional, and social diversity in rural white Southern English, it is impossible to provide a concise table listing forms typical of rural white Southern speech in general. The following descriptions discuss the different variants that occur, giving their general distributions across time, space, and social groups. Social distribution is poorly known for many of these variants, though some information is available in LAGS and various smaller-scale studies.

#### KIT

Realizations of KIT vary. In the Southern shift, KIT may be tensed and raised to [i], usually with an inglide, i.e., [iə]. This process is most common in heavily stressed syllables. Under weak stress, a value of [ɪ] is usual. The tensing/raising is uncommon in some regions, such as Texas. In older Southern speech, centralized forms, i.e., [ɪ], were common in certain words, such as *sister*, *thistle*, and *ribbon*, in which a schwa was present in the following syllable. See below under PIN/PEN and THINK for developments before nasals.

#### DRESS

This vowel shows some variation related to the Southern Shift. Considerable variation between the widespread form [ɛ] and the Southern Shift form [e] occurs, the latter often with an inglide. Under heavy stress, particularly before /d/, as in *dead*, middle-aged and older speakers often show a triphthongal form, [eɪə]. For the development of this vowel before nasals, see below under PIN/PEN and LENGTH.

#### TRAP

An unshifted form, [æ], is common, but the Southern drawl results in triphthongal forms such as [æɛæ], especially before /d/ and /n/. Speakers born between the World Wars may also show some raising of TRAP to [ɛ]. For other raising, see below under DANCE/HAND. Both the triphthongization and the raising are subsiding among young Southern whites. A few younger speakers from, e.g., Texas, who show the LOT/THOUGHT merger have TRAP shifted toward [a], but this retraction is not yet as common as in some non-Southern regions (e.g., California and Canada), though it is increasing in parts of the Midwest on the margins of the South (e.g., central Ohio).

#### LOT

This vowel is among the most stable in rural Southern white English, being realized as low back unrounded [ɑ]. Rounded [ɒ] variants were reported for old-fashioned South Carolina Low Country speech. In some areas, THOUGHT is being merged into LOT (see below under THOUGHT).

#### STRUT

The most common realization is the [ɜ] that predominates in most North American English. In former plantation areas, a more backed form, [ʌ], is common among middle-aged and older speakers, but it appears to be recessive. Fronting to [ɛ] is sometimes reported. Raising to [ə] occurs for occasional speakers.

## FOOT

This vowel varies on a gradient from central [ʊ] to fronted [ɪ]. The full range of variants occurs within most age groups and social levels. The degree of fronting of FOOT is usually correlated with the degree of fronting of GOOSE and GOAT.

## BATH, DANCE

Most younger Southerners make no distinction between BATH and TRAP. White Southerners born before World War II, however, often do distinguish the two classes, though in a way unique to the American South. For such speakers, BATH shows an upglide. The most common realization is [æɛ], but variations such as [æe] and [aæ] occur. Some speakers who show these forms also show lowering of the FACE vowel; they distinguish pairs such as *pass* and *pace* by the height of the glide, which is mid for BATH words and high for FACE words. Many Southerners produce the same [æɛ] diphthong in the DANCE class (i.e., words in which RP shows [ɑ:] before a nasal/obstruent cluster). Upgliding BATH and DANCE forms are widespread in the South Atlantic states, but are absent in three areas: around the Chesapeake Bay, around the Pamlico Sound, and in the Low Country of South Carolina. In the Gulf states, they occur everywhere – except perhaps southern Louisiana – but are most common in the Appalachian and Ozark Mountains and in the Piney Woods belt.

In a number of BATH and DANCE words – today usually only *aunt* or *rather* but in former times many others, such as *pasture* – some speakers show the vowel of START (in non-rhotic varieties) or LOT. This tendency most likely originated as an imitation of fashionable British usage rather than as a trait inherited from the earliest settlers. It is most prevalent in eastern Virginia.

## CLOTH

This class is always merged with THOUGHT (see below).

## NURSE

White Southern speech is increasingly rhotic, and stressed syllabic /r/ – i.e., NURSE – is the most likely context for rhoticity in syllable rhymes. The details of /r/ articulation are discussed below under R in the section on consonants. In older white Southern speech, though, non-rhotic forms of NURSE occurred. From South Carolina to Texas and north to eastern Arkansas and the southern edge of Kentucky, an upgliding form, [ɜɪ], once predominated, but very few speakers born after World War I show it and it is thus nearly obsolete. A few Southerners from the same region, usually from high social strata, showed a monophthongal [ɜ]. The monophthongal form also occurred in eastern Virginia and adjacent parts of Maryland and North Carolina, but a weakly rhotic variant was more common there.

For rhotic speakers, a different diphthongization of NURSE can appear in which the variants [ɜə~ɐə] occur. This widening tends to co-occur with widening of the FACE and GOAT diphthongs.

## FLEECE



Unless it is truncated – as would happen with weak stress or rapid speech – the FLEECE vowel is slightly diphthongal. In white Southern speech, diphthongal forms vary from the [ji] form that predominates in other parts of North America to wider [ii] forms. The latter are most common in areas in which the FACE nucleus is strongly lowered, especially eastern Tennessee and much of Alabama (Labov et al 2002). Variants that are even wider, such as [əi], are rare.

#### FACE

This vowel shows more variation in the South than in any other part of North America. In the past, a monophthongal form, [e:], occurred inconsistently in plantation areas. In the Low Country of South Carolina/Georgia, the monophthong occurred in pre-pausal position and ingliding [eə] occurred in other contexts. These forms are now nearly obsolete, though the nucleus of FACE has remained higher in the Low Country than in other parts of the South. Today, lowering and/or retraction of the nucleus are widespread in rural white Southern speech. The shift may be moderate – i.e., [ɛi] – or more extreme – i.e., [æi~zi].<sup>2</sup> The more extreme forms are found largely in areas in which PRICE is monophthongal in all contexts, which include the southern Appalachians, the Ozarks, Texas, the Piney Woods belt, and parts of the North Carolina coastal plain. The more moderately shifted forms tend to occur where PRICE remains diphthongal before voiceless consonants.

#### PALM

In contemporary Southern English, these words are nearly always merged with LOT or, with the *l* pronounced (as a spelling pronunciation), with THOUGHT – e.g., [p<sup>h</sup>ɒtəm]~[p<sup>h</sup>ɒm] (the latter with vocalized *l*). In the past, PALM was commonly merged with the TRAP or BATH classes, and occasional survivals of this usage, such as the term *slick ca'm* ‘unrippled water,’ persist locally. In the South Carolina Low Country, even *pa* and *ma* were once produced with [æ]. Merger of PALM with START in non-rhotic areas, especially eastern Virginia, also occurred sporadically.

#### THOUGHT

Upliding forms of THOUGHT/CLOTH, [ɔə~ɒə~ɑə], are stereotypically associated with Southern speech in general. The actual picture, of course, is more complicated. There are a few Atlantic coastal areas – the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay, the Pamlico Sound area, and the South Carolina/Georgia Low Country – in which upgliding forms did not traditionally occur; instead, raised, monophthongal [ɔ] occurred. In the rest of the South, upgliding forms predominate, but there have always been many speakers who used monophthongal forms exclusively, and raised monophthongs are common after [w], as in *want* and *water*. In older speech, raised, upgliding forms, [ɔə], were common, though some speakers showed wider diphthongization, such as [ɒə] or even [ɑə]. During the 20th century there was apparently a trend toward lower variants, and today the most common form is [ɑə].

Merger of THOUGHT/CLOTH with LOT has been spreading recently in the South, especially in two areas: an Appalachian area including West Virginia, western Virginia,

and eastern Kentucky and a western area extending from Texas and Oklahoma east through Arkansas, middle and western Missouri, and the vicinity of Memphis, Tennessee. Occasional speakers elsewhere show it as well. The result is a realization as [ɑ]. A possible stigma against upgliding variants may promote the merger.

#### GOAT

GOAT shows several different developments. Analogously with FACE, monophthongal [ɔ:] once occurred inconsistently in plantation areas, and the monophthong alternated with ingliding [ɔə] in the South Carolina/Georgia Low Country. As with the corresponding variants of FACE, these forms have nearly disappeared. Lowering of the nucleus and fronting of both the nucleus and glide of GOAT have become widespread over the past century. Lowered but unfronted forms, [ɔu~ɒu], became common in the early 20th century and are still found among many older speakers. Fronted forms apparently originated in northeastern North Carolina during the 19th century and spread slowly at first. This fronting affected both the nucleus and the glide, yielding [ɜy]. Fronting only of the nucleus also spread slowly from Pennsylvania into Maryland, West Virginia, and southern Ohio. Since World War II, fronting has spread rapidly. Fronting of the nucleus is now found throughout the South among young whites. In combination with lowering, it yields forms as extreme as [æu], though [ɜu] is more common. Fronting of the glide is common as far west as Tennessee and Alabama but is less frequent west of the Mississippi River and quite rare in Texas; its northern limits are uncertain. It is possible that both fronting processes, at least in certain areas, are more prevalent among females than among males.

In certain contexts the GOAT vowel is not usually fronted; see below under GOAL and GOING.

#### GOOSE

When fully stressed, the GOOSE vowel is slightly diphthongal in Southern English. Some degree of fronting is associated with the nucleus of GOOSE in virtually all forms of white Southern English. The nucleus may vary from a central to a front position. Fronting of the glide also occurs and is more common in the eastern half of the South. Variants include [ɥɨ~yɨ] (without fronting of the glide) and [ɥy~yy] (with fronting of the glide).

#### PRICE, PRIZE

Monophthongization of PRICE (i.e., /ai/ before voiceless consonants) and, especially, PRIZE (i.e., other phonetic contexts of /ai/) is stereotypically associated with the American South. However, *glide weakening* is a more accurate term because it encompasses both monophthongal forms and variants with a glide that is only partly truncated, both of which are perceived as “flattened” by outsiders. Both forms are common and widespread.

Glide weakening has, since the late 19th century, occurred throughout the South except for a few Atlantic coastal areas, and even there it has shown signs of encroaching recently. Where weakening occurs, it consistently affects contexts before liquids most strongly and those before voiceless consonants least strongly, but the relative strength of the effects of following pauses, nasals, and voiced obstruents is a matter of dispute.

Weakening produces forms such as [æ~aæ], leading ultimately to monophthongal [a:]. Some speakers show forms such as [æ:] and [q:], but [a:] is more usual.

Weakening before voiceless consonants (PRICE) is geographically and socially restricted. It is found mainly in Appalachia (south to northern Alabama), Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, the Piney Woods Belt, and parts of the North Carolina coastal plain, but some working class speakers elsewhere show it. It has long been associated with working-class speech, and hence many upper-middle class speakers avoid it. Weakening in any context (PRICE or PRIZE) is apparently declining around the margins of the South, such as in Maryland and Oklahoma. Speakers with aspirations of upward white-collar mobility often avoid it, though such avoidance is not as prevalent in rural areas as in urban areas.

Glide weakening was traditionally absent on the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay, around the Pamlico Sound, and in the Low Country of South Carolina and Georgia. In the former two areas, backing of the nucleus occurred instead in all contexts. Forms such as [æ] were usual, with [ɒ] and [ɒæ] occurring sporadically. Backing occurred for PRIZE in the Low Country. Such backing also occurs widely in the South before voiceless consonants (PRICE) where that context remains diphthongal. Another variation reported from older speech in Tidewater and Piedmont Virginia and the South Carolina/Georgia Low Country for contexts before voiceless consonants is [ɛi], with a higher nucleus. Acoustic analyses indicate that only some speakers from those areas showed [ɛi].

#### CHOICE

Although the widespread [oi~ɔi] forms are common in the South, two mutations occur in the South but not elsewhere in North America (except in varieties with Southern roots, such as African American English). The first is breaking, which results in triphthongs such as [ɔoi] and [ɒɔi]. The second is lowering and/or weakening of the glide, resulting in forms such as [oɛ] and [oə]. The latter process is found most often in former plantation areas. Both processes occur mainly for speakers born before 1960. However, before /l/, as in *boil*, glide weakening is widespread among all age groups and monophthongization to [o] is common. The alternation in which certain CHOICE words derived from Middle English /ui/, e.g., *join* and *poison*, show the PRIZE vowel is highly recessive except in *hoist/heist*.

#### MOUTH, LOUD

Fronting of the nucleus and lowering of the glide, resulting in [æɔ~æɒ] and, in some areas, [æɒ], are widespread in white Southern English. Not all speakers show the fronting, and most speakers show [aɒ] under weak stress. In two areas – the South Carolina/Georgia Low Country and southern Louisiana – fronting was traditionally absent. Many speakers born before 1960 show breaking, resulting in triphthongal [æɛɒ].

Two local variations occurred in traditional dialects, though both are recessive today. In the Tidewater and Piedmont sections of Virginia and adjacent parts of Maryland and North Carolina, as well as in the South Carolina/Georgia Low Country, positional variation developed. Before voiced consonants and word-finally (LOUD), the variants described above occurred. Before voiceless consonants (MOUTH), both the nucleus and

the glide were higher. The glide also tended to be fronted, with the result of [ʒɥ~ʒy]. On the Delmarva Peninsula and around the Pamlico Sound, fronting of the glide occurred with low nuclei. The nuclei tended not to be much fronted. Common variants there were [aθ~aø~aɛ].

#### NEAR

The common variants are [i̯ə] and [iə]. In some areas, [jə] was once a common alternant in certain words, e.g., *beard*. In old-fashioned South Carolina/Georgia Low Country speech, NEAR and SQUARE were merged to [eə], but contact with other Southern dialects has reversed this merger.

#### SQUARE

A wide variety of variants occur in older Southern speech. Lowering of the nucleus, resulting in [æ̯ə] for rhotic speakers and [æə] for non-rhotic speakers, was once widespread, though today it is mainly heard among middle-aged and older speakers in regions far from urban centers, such as the Pamlico Sound area and the southern Appalachians. It never occurred in the South Carolina/Georgia Low Country, however, where [eə] was usual. Breaking was common as well, especially in non-rhotic areas, where forms such as [ɛiə] and even [æiæ] could be heard. Young white Southerners have abandoned this diversity and uniformly show a quality of approximately [ɛ̯ə].

#### START

Southern English, both rhotic and non-rhotic, shows a marked tendency toward rounding of the nucleus of START, resulting in values of [ɒ̯ə] or [ɒ]. This process is probably a 19th century development. There may be some stigma against the rounding today, as some young whites seem to be moving toward unrounded nuclei.

#### NORTH

NORTH remained distinct from FORCE in most parts of the South until recently. Usual pronunciations were [ɔ̯ə~ɔə] in rhotic speech and [ɔə~ɔə~ɔ] in non-rhotic speech. In certain areas – the Delmarva Peninsula, parts of the Mississippi and Ohio valleys, and Texas – many speakers merged NORTH with START as [ɒ̯ə]. On the Delmarva Peninsula, this merger dates from the 19th century and may have been a majority variant, but in Texas, it mainly comprises speakers born between the World Wars and was never a majority variant. Its demographics in the Mississippi and Ohio valleys are unclear. Over the course of the 20th century, the NORTH/FORCE merger gradually spread throughout the South. Very few Southerners born after World War II distinguish NORTH and FORCE. The result of this merger is a value of approximately [o̯ə].

#### FORCE

In older Southern speech, FORCE could show variable diphthongization, i.e., [o̯ə~ouə] in rhotic varieties and [oə~ouə~ou] in non-rhotic ones. Younger white rural Southerners seldom show upgliding in FORCE, the usual variant being [o̯ə]. See above on the merger of FORCE and NORTH.

## CURE

Merger of the vowels of CURE and FORCE became a stereotype for some older rural Southern speech, especially in Appalachia. As a result, most Southerners came to avoid it except for words spelled *-oor* (e.g., *poor, boor, Moore*), for which usage varies. Thus [uɔ̃~ʊɔ̃] predominates, especially in words such as *tour*. After palatals, as in *cure* and *sure*, and in non-final syllables, as in *tournament* and *Missouri*, merger with the NURSE class is common among young speakers in some areas, such as Texas and Missouri. Such speakers follow a pattern increasingly common in other parts of North America. This CURE/NURSE merger tends to show considerable style shifting; many speakers who show the merger in casual speech pronounce CURE words with [uɔ̃~ʊɔ̃] when their attention is drawn to it.

## FIRE

For a large number of speakers, FIRE follows the pattern of PRICE/PRIZE, with glide weakening resulting in [æɔ̃~a:ɔ̃] in rhotic varieties and [æɐ~a:ɐ] in non-rhotic ones. Many speakers, however, show merger of FIRE with START, resulting in [ɒɔ̃~ɑɔ̃~ɒ:~ɑ:]. This merger is highly stereotyped and, consequently, is most typical of older, working-class, and less educated speakers. Some speakers show hypercorrection of glide weakening for FIRE, resulting in [ajɔ̃].

## POWER

For most speakers, power follows the same pattern as MOUTH/LOUD. Some speakers show loss of the glide before /r/, resulting in [æɔ̃], especially in the word *our*. *Our* is more commonly merged into the START class – in fact, this variant of *our* is quite general – but for other words merger of POWER with START occurs infrequently, mostly among the same groups who merge FIRE with START.

*happy*

Although [ɪ] in *happy* persisted longer in the South than in other parts of North America, the shift to [i] is now essentially complete and only speakers in a few isolated communities (such as islands in the Chesapeake Bay) and some older speakers elsewhere still show [ɪ]. The final vowels of many other words, such as *borrow, soda, okra*, and *Sarah*, were once commonly pronounced with [ɪ~i] in the rural South, especially among speakers with less education, but this process is now highly recessive.

*letter*

The general distribution of rhotic and non-rhotic varieties and the wholesale shift to rhoticity in white Southern speech is discussed below under R. Unstressed syllables are the most likely contexts for non-rhoticity, and some varieties that show consistent rhoticity in other contexts show variable non-rhoticity in unstressed syllables. In older speech, the *comma* vowel, both historical, as in *idea*, and derived from GOAT, as in *hollow*, is commonly produced as [ɔ̃].

*horses*

A value of [ɪ], perhaps better described as central [ɪ̈], is usual. However, the exact quality is highly affected by coarticulation with neighboring segments.

#### *comma*

This vowel tends to be lower than the *horses* vowel, closer to [ə], but, like *horses*, it is strongly affected by context. On the production of some *comma* words with [ɪ~i], see above under *happy*; on production as [ɚ], see above under *letter*.

#### HAND

Younger white Southerners follow the widespread North American trend of raising /æ/ before nasals to something like [eə]. This process includes words of the DANCE class, whose earlier development is discussed above. Older Southerners often showed triphthongal [æeə] forms.

#### PIN/PEN

The merger of the KIT and DRESS vowels before nasals, as in *pin* and *pen*, is strongly associated with Southern speech, though it also occurs among some whites in the southern Midwest and among African Americans everywhere. The resulting merged vowel usually closer to [ɪ] in quality, though a few speakers have it closer to [ɛ]. The merger apparently grew from a sporadic feature of a few speakers to a majority feature during the late 19th century and continued to spread during the 20th century. Today, however, some Southerners, largely under the influence of schools, have begun to distinguish PIN and PEN.

#### THINK, LENGTH

Before [ŋ], as in *think* and *thing*, some Southerners diphthongize the KIT vowel and lower the nucleus to yield [ɛi~æi]. The same process may apply to LENGTH, which otherwise is usually pronounced with [ɪ].

#### GOING

In hiatus positions, as in *going*, *go out*, *so is...*, etc., fronting of the GOAT vowel does not occur for many speakers who otherwise front. The same may be true for GOOSE, as in *do it*. Fronting may also be blocked before nasals, as in *grown* and *don't*.

#### GOAL

The back vowels are seldom fronted before /l/, especially by younger speakers. Thus, GOAL is rarely if ever fronted. Common realizations are [ɔu~ɒu].

#### POOL, PULL

Although many older white Southerners show fronting of POOL, younger Southerners almost never do. PULL consistently remains backed. POOL and PULL are commonly merged by younger speakers throughout the South; the resulting vowel is [ʊ~ɯ].

#### FEEL, FILL

These two classes are also merged by many younger Southerners, ordinarily to [ɪ] or to a quality intermediate between [i] and [ɪ].

FAIL, FELL

Merger of these two classes also occurs, though less often than that of the other two pre-/l/ pairs. The resulting vowel is usually [ɛ].

MARRY, MERRY, MARY

These classes were once kept distinct by most Southerners, with qualities of [æ], [ɛ], and [ei~e], respectively. Younger Southerners have shown a wholesale trend toward merging all three into the SQUARE class. Merger of MARY with MERRY has proceeded faster than merger of MARRY with the other two classes.

MIRROR/NEARER

Published evidence on this opposition is scarce for Southern English. Young white Southerners, in general, appear to merge them.

TOMORROW, ORANGE

The stressed vowel in these classes was formerly produced with [ɑ~ɒ], the LOT or START vowel, throughout the South. It still is for words in which the /r/ is followed by a vowel in an open syllable, such as *tomorrow* and *sorry*. However, for words in which the /r/ is followed by a vowel in a closed syllable, such as *orange*, *foreign*, and *horrible*, there is a trend toward [ɒ], the FORCE/NORTH vowel. This trend appears stronger in some areas (e.g., Texas and Virginia) than in others (e.g., the Carolinas).

## 2.4. Consonants

R

/r/, when it is articulated in the South, is articulated much as in other North American Englishes. The ordinary form is the “bunched-tongue *r*,” produced with constrictions by the tongue root (in the pharynx), the tongue dorsum (to the velum or palate), and – in syllable onsets – the lips as well. The currency of the competing variant, the “retroflex *r*” (produced with the pharyngeal constriction and with retroflexion of the tongue tip) is difficult to assess but seems far less common. Production of the bunched-tongue *r* often results in latent retroflexion. One other variant, the tap [ɾ], may have occurred in some older Southern speech after [θ], as in *three*, but the evidence is unclear.

Postvocalic /r/ is the most heavily studied consonantal variable in Southern English, and it shows rich contextual, geographical, socioeconomic, diachronic, ethnic, and stylistic conditioning. It also shows continuous gradation from fully rhotic to fully non-rhotic variants. In terms of phonetic context, non-rhoticity is most frequent in unstressed syllables; see above on the *letter* class. Non-rhoticity may occur variably in this context in areas such as the Pamlico Sound region and Appalachia that are otherwise rhotic, and, as rhoticity has increased recently, unstressed syllables are often the last context to become rhotic. The next most frequent environment for non-rhoticity is in syllable codas, whether word-finally (*four*, *here*) or pre-consonantly (*hard*, *fourth*).

Linking *r*, as in *here is* [hiə ɪz], has historically been absent for a large number of Southerners, though some speakers showed it, often variably. Intrusive linking *r* in other hiatus positions, as in *saw-r it*, is virtually unknown in the South, in part because intrusive *l* may occur in such contexts. Rhoticity tends to be more frequent after front vowels (e.g., *here*, *there*) than after back vowels (*four*, *hard*). Stressed, syllabic *r*, the NURSE class, is more likely to be rhotic than *r* in syllable codas; see above under NURSE. Some older Southerners are also variably non-rhotic in intra-word intervocalic contexts, as in *carry* [k<sup>h</sup>æi]. Deletion of *r* occurs as well for some speakers between [θ] and a rounded vowel in *throw* and *through* and after a consonant in some unstressed syllables, e.g., the initial syllable of *professor*.

Deletion of *r* in certain words before coronal consonants, as in the widespread forms *bust*, *cuss*, and *gal* for *burst*, *curse*, and *girl*, respectively, and *ass* and *bass* (*fish*) for earlier *arse* and *barse*, as well as dialectal forms such as *futher*, *catridge*, and *passel* for *further*, *cartridge*, and *parcel*, is not properly considered to be non-rhoticity, since it arose earlier from assimilation. Nor is the dissimilation that results in deletion of the first *r* in words such as *surprise*, *governor*, *temperature*, *veterinarian*, and *caterpillar* properly considered non-rhoticity. Both processes are common in the South, though forms such as *passel* are recessive.

Geographically, non-rhoticity is strongly correlated with former plantation areas. Non-rhoticity formerly predominated in Tidewater and Piedmont Virginia and adjacent parts of southwestern Maryland and northern North Carolina; in a band stretching from South Carolina across the Georgia Piedmont through central Alabama and central Mississippi; throughout the Mississippi River lowlands as far north as Kentucky, extending to include the western two thirds of Kentucky and western and north-central Tennessee, and thence west to include Gulf coastal plain sections of Texas; and in some coastal communities in Georgia and the Gulf states. Much of North Carolina and parts of central and even western Texas showed mixed patterns. The principal rhotic sections were the Delmarva Peninsula; the Pamlico Sound region of North Carolina; the southern Appalachians, extending to northern Alabama; the Ozarks, Oklahoma, and northern Texas; and the Piney Woods region of the southern parts of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, northern Florida, western Louisiana, and eastern Texas. None of these areas was monolithic, however, and the Piney Woods region, especially, showed mixture.

The socioeconomic and diachronic aspects of rhoticity in the South are intertwined. Various studies, notably McDavid (1948) and Levine and Crockett (1966), have suggested that rhoticity has undergone a shift in prestige. Before World War II, non-rhoticity was prestigious, appearing most frequently among higher social levels and spreading (except, perhaps, in NURSE words). Afterward, rhoticity became prestigious and non-rhoticity became most common among lower social levels. Females have forged ahead of males in this change. Today, even in areas that were once strongholds of non-rhoticity, young white Southerners are rhotic, especially females. Predictably, rhoticity increases with stylistic formality. It should be noted that the dramatic increase in rhoticity applies only to white Southerners; African Americans remain largely non-rhotic, except for the NURSE class, and, as discussed previously, social polarization of the two ethnicities magnified during the civil rights movement may be related to the divergence in rhoticity.



## L

Although American English is often reported to show a “clear” [l] in syllable onsets and a “dark,” or velar, [ɫ] in syllable codas, articulatory evidence suggests that American English shows a velar form in syllable onsets, and Southern English follows this pattern. In syllable codas, vocalization occurs. The term *vocalization* has been used loosely. It has been applied to what would be better referred to as *deletion*, as in [wʊf] for *wolf*. This deletion may occur before labials (except [b]), and the forms [hɛp] for *help*, [sɛf] in *-self* compounds, [t<sup>h</sup>wɛv] for *twelve*, and [hɒp] for *holp* (old preterit of *help*) are stereotypically Southern. True vocalization of syllable-coda *l* is widespread in North American English and seems to be particularly common in the South. The result is a phone with the value of [o] or [w], as in *fill* [fio]. This phone is sometimes described as [ʊ] but is normally rounded. The acoustic similarity between [ɫ] and [w] has made vocalization of *l* difficult to study, and hence details of its distribution are unavailable.

Linking [ɫ] is apparently common in hiatus positions, as in *sell it* [sɛɒɫɪʔt]. Intrusive [ɫ], as in *saw it* [sɒwɪʔt], is known to occur irregularly. However, vocalization can also occur in hiatus.

Older Southern speech did show a truly “clear” [l] in one context: between front vowels, as in *silly*, *Billy*, and *Nelly*. Some elderly Southerners still show this variant.

## KJAR, GJAR

During the 19th century, insertion of [j] in such words as *car* [c<sup>h</sup>ɹɑː~ c<sup>h</sup>ɹɑə], *garden*, and *Carter* was widespread in coastal plain and Piedmont sections of the South, though perhaps less so in the Appalachians. This variation probably began to decline in the late 19th century and has now entirely disappeared.

## JU

In words with historical [iu~ju] after coronal stops, as in *tune*, *duke*, and *news*, [j] has persisted in the South longer than in any other part of the United States (though it still appears elsewhere as an affectation). Kurath and McDavid (1961), whose sample consisted almost entirely of speakers born in the 19th century, showed [ju] and its variants ([iu], [dʒu], [tʃu]) as nearly universal in the Southern states. Since World War II, however, a steady movement toward loss of [j] in the South has occurred. The loss has been slower in common words than in infrequent words. Findings differ on whether males or females lead in this change.

## TH

Rural white southern English shows all of the mutations of /θ/ and /ð/ that African American speech is better known for, but they generally do not occur as often. Thus /θ/ may be realized as [t~tθ], usually by lower-status speakers, or, in syllable codas (e.g., *both*, *birthday*), occasionally as [f]. The [f] variant is much rarer in white speech than in African American speech. Mutations of /ð/ are more common. Realizations of /ð/ as [d~dð] may be increasing among young white males, though more study is needed. Assimilation of /ð/ to a preceding consonant, as in *in nere* for *in there* or *up pat hill* for *up that hill*, is fairly common. None of these variants can be described as a strictly Southern phenomenon.

## SHR

In words such as *shrimp*, *shrink*, and *shrub*, many white Southerners produce [sɪ] instead of [ʃɪ]. Early reports of this feature were from the South Atlantic states, especially Virginia. In the Gulf States, LAGS found it to be widespread but most heavily concentrated in the Piedmont and Piney Woods regions. Surprisingly, LAGS found little correlation of [sɪ] with sex, age, education, or social status.

## ZN, VN

Before *n*, voiced fricatives often undergo assimilation and become voiced stops. The result is forms such as *idn't*, *wadn't*, and *bidness* for *isn't*, *wasn't*, and *business*, respectively, and *sebem* and *elebem* for *seven* and *eleven* (with assimilation of /n/ to the labial place of articulation as well). Theoretically, this process might also affect /ðn/, as in *heathen*. The assimilation is most frequent in common words. It is sometimes reported as being specifically Southern, but in fact is far more widespread.

## TAPS AND FLAPS

Like other North Americans, Southerners produce intervocalic coronal stops as a tap or flap [ɾ]. This process normally occurs when the stop falls after any vowel or [ə] and before a heterosyllabic vowel or [ə], as in *batty* [bæɾ.i], *sit out* [sɪɾ.æʊʔt], *Ida* [a:ɾ.ə], *hardy* [hɔɾ.i], and *inner* [ɪɾ.ə]. It does not occur before a tautosyllabic vocoid, e.g., *attain* [ə.t<sup>h</sup>ɛɪn], *go tell* [gɔɹ.t<sup>h</sup>ɛʊ], and *a tamale* [ə.t<sup>h</sup>əmətɪ], except for unstressed *to* and *don't*, e.g., *go to* [gɔɹ.rə] and *I don't* [a:ɾɔnʔt]. It also affects *nt* clusters, as in *Santa* [sɛəɹ.ə] and *enter* [ɪɾ.ə]. Technically speaking, a flap occurs after [ə] and a tap after a vowel. Some Southerners extend tapping/flapping to one additional context: before unstressed /n/. They produce *important* as [ɪm.p<sup>h</sup>ɔɾ.ɪnʔt] and *get in a* as [gɪɾ.ɪɾ.ə] instead of as the more widespread pronunciations [ɪm.p<sup>h</sup>ɔɾʔt.ɪnʔt] and [gɪʔt.ɪ.ə], respectively. This process does not affect all pre-nasal examples, e.g., *button* [bʌʔt.ɪ]. Outright deletion of the tap/flap is not uncommon in casual speech, e.g. *pretty* [p<sup>h</sup>.ɪ<sup>w</sup>.ɪ.i], *little* [ɫɪ.o].

## W

Deletion of *w* often occurs, mainly for *one* and *was*, as in *younguns* 'children,' *little'un*, and *he* 'uz 'he was.' At one time, it apparently occurred in other words, e.g., *Edward*.

## WH

The sequence *wh*, as in *which*, was formerly widely pronounced as [hw] (or [ʍ]) in the South; Kurath and McDavid (1961) found it in all parts of the South except the Low Country and part of Maryland. Nearly all young Southerners today produce it as [w], however. LAGS found that better-educated speakers were more likely to distinguish *wh*.

## INTRUSIVE T

A few words, notably *once*, *twice*, *across*, and *cliff*, may show an intrusive [t] after the final fricative, e.g., [wʌnst]. This process is not limited to the South but is especially

common in older white rural Southern speech. Intrusive [t] is also reported in other words, e.g., *sermont* for *sermon*.

#### OTHER CONSONANTAL VARIABLES

Three other consonantal variables that have attracted extensive sociolinguistic attention are simplification of final consonant clusters (as in *last* and *raised*), unstressed final *-ing* (as in *looking* and *something*), and realization of nasal consonants in syllables codas only as vowel nasalization (as in [dõũ] for *don't*). As with other varieties of English, simplification of final consonant clusters is infrequent before vowels, common before consonants, and intermediate before pauses, as well as being more frequent in monomorphemic words (*last*) than in bimorphemic words (*raised*). Forms such as [p<sup>h</sup>ousɪz], [wɒsɪz], and [dɛsɪz] as the plurals of *post*, *wasp*, and *desk*, respectively, which were common in older African American speech, occurred only rarely in older Southern white speech. Forms such as [p<sup>h</sup>oustɪz], [wɒspɪz], and [dɛskɪz] were more common in white speech but are now quite recessive and are currently most prevalent in Appalachia. Unmarked plurals or plurals such as [p<sup>h</sup>ous:] are still fairly common in white Southern speech, but they are widespread elsewhere, too.

Unstressed final *-ing* may occur as [ɪn] at higher rates in white Southern speech than in other white North American English, but otherwise it shows the same social and stylistic conditioning (i.e., [ɪn] is more frequent among lower socioeconomic groups, among males, and in less formal styles). Hypercorrection, e.g., *mounting* and *chicking* for *mountain* and *chicken*, was once common in the South, especially in writing. Realization of nasals in codas as vowel nasality is widespread as a sandhi-form.

### 3. Current issues

The most pervasive issue in studies of rural Southern white accents has been their relationship to African American vernaculars. This issue includes several more specific questions. Did African American vernacular speech arise from an earlier rural Southern white vernacular, or have they always differed? Did African American speech influence Southern white speech, and if so, how? Has rural Southern white speech been moving away from or toward African American norms in recent decades? What sorts of features have spread across ethnic lines, and which ones have not? At present, there is no consensus on any of these controversies. For example, it has been suggested that non-rhoticity spread from slave speech to white speech in the South, a contention supported by early accounts of white children adopting accents from slave children, by the concentration of non-rhoticity in former plantation areas, and by the consistently higher incidence of non-rhoticity in African American speech. However, others have argued that non-rhoticity emerged as an imitation of British usage, largely because Southerners of means often sent their children to England to be educated. The fact that Southerners with sufficient wealth to send their children to school tended to be slaveholders might explain why non-rhoticity was concentrated in plantation areas. A third explanation for non-rhoticity is that the original English settlers brought it, but rhotic regions in English-settled areas, such as the Pamlico Sound region, would seem to militate against that possibility (though settlers could have brought non-rhoticity in unstressed syllables). At any rate, while it appears clear that whites borrowed some morphological processes from

African Americans, it is nearly impossible to prove or disprove that phonological borrowing occurred.

Similarly, the contemporary relationship between African American and Southern white vernaculars is open to dispute. There is ample evidence that African Americans in the South are not participating or barely participating in several aspects of the “Southern Shift” that typify the speech of Southern whites, such as GOOSE and GOAT fronting and FACE lowering. Whether this division reflects African American reaction against white norms, white reaction against African American norms, or a combination is not entirely clear. Even though the two ethnic groups have been diverging for those vowel quality features, the possibility that they may borrow other features from each other, such as pre-/l/ mergers, deserves some scrutiny.

Other issues have received less attention. The origins of white Southern English have sparked some inquiry, and some evidence suggests that many defining features of Southern speech, such as glide weakening of PRIZE, may not have spread widely until the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Another issue is what effects the recent population movements of the South, especially the heavy in-migration of Northerners, are having on Southern speech. It appears that these movements have made more of an impact on urban centers than on rural areas. However, it is difficult to say how impervious rural areas are to such changes. Rural areas may be intensifying Southern dialectal features in reaction to the cities, or they may eventually succumb to urban influences. The status of individual features has garnered considerable attention. Two of the most intensively studied changes are the spread of rhoticity and the disappearance of [j] in words such as *tune*. The speed of these changes and the reasons for them have been debated. Among other issues, the Southern drawl is still poorly defined and it has not been determined whether the vowel quality changes associated with the Southern Shift are still spreading or have begun to retreat. The disappearance of certain local features, such as the ingliding forms of FACE and GOAT in the Low Country, has attracted some research.

Clearly, the extensive research conducted on rural white Southern speech in the past has not exhausted the potential research topics on this group of dialects. Future work can be expected to address the issues noted above and open new questions. The intricacies of ethnic relations, population movements, shifts in prestige, and linguistic structure, as well as the historical differences that set the South off from the rest of the United States, combine to make the South a fertile ground for linguistic inquiry.

### Exercises

1. Of the three speakers on the audio sample, the one from Wilson County, North Carolina shows some non-rhoticity. Describe the pattern of her non-rhoticity. In what contexts is she rhotic and non-rhotic? How consistent is the pattern?
2. Describe the pattern of glide weakening of PRICE/PRIZE for each speaker on the audio sample, categorizing the tokens according to the following phonetic context.
3. In what ways is the “Southern drawl” realized for each speaker on the audio sample?

4. Linguistic atlas records of speakers born in the mid-19th century show that whites were less likely to show monophthongal variants of FACE, GOAT, THOUGHT, FLEECE, and GOOSE than African Americans (Dorrill 1986a, 1986b). What implications does this have for understanding the historical relationship between Southern white and African American English? Does it prove anything?

5. Population movement has been a constant in the South. Compare and contrast the linguistic effects of a) the westward movement before the Civil War, b) the movement toward mill towns between the Civil War and World War II, and c) the migration toward the Sunbelt since World War II.

6. Population stability has also characterized parts of the South. The notion of isolation and preservation of old linguistic features has been applied to the Delmarva peninsula, the Pamlico Sound area, the Appalachians, and various other locales, such as Spicewood, Texas (Klippel 1945); the label “Elizabethan English” is often applied to dialects of such places in the popular press. To what degree do these areas really preserve older linguistic features?

### Notes

\*I wish to thank Walt Wolfram and Kirk Hazen for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I also wish to thank Guy Bailey, who introduced me to a number of the ideas articulated here, such as the importance of the growth of mill towns, some years ago.

<sup>1</sup>Southern English has received extensive attention from dialectologists, and a large number of sources, many of them gleaned from McMillan and Montgomery (1989), were consulted for this overview. Because of space limitations, in-text citations here are mostly restricted to sources listed in the selected bibliography. The full list of sources is given in the comprehensive bibliography, available on the CD version of this volume.

<sup>2</sup>Traditionally, the glides of upgliding diphthongs have been transcribed with lax vowel symbols, e.g., [ɪ] and [ʊ]. Acoustic measurements, however, show that upgliding diphthongs normally glide toward the periphery of the vowel envelope; see Thomas (2001). Hence these glides are usually transcribed here with tense vowel symbols. Similarly, acoustic measurements indicate that what have traditionally been called “ingliding” diphthongs actually glide both inward and downward, so that a form denoted as [eə] is probably better described as [eɛ] or [eæ].

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