

## 17. New York City and the Mid-Atlantic states

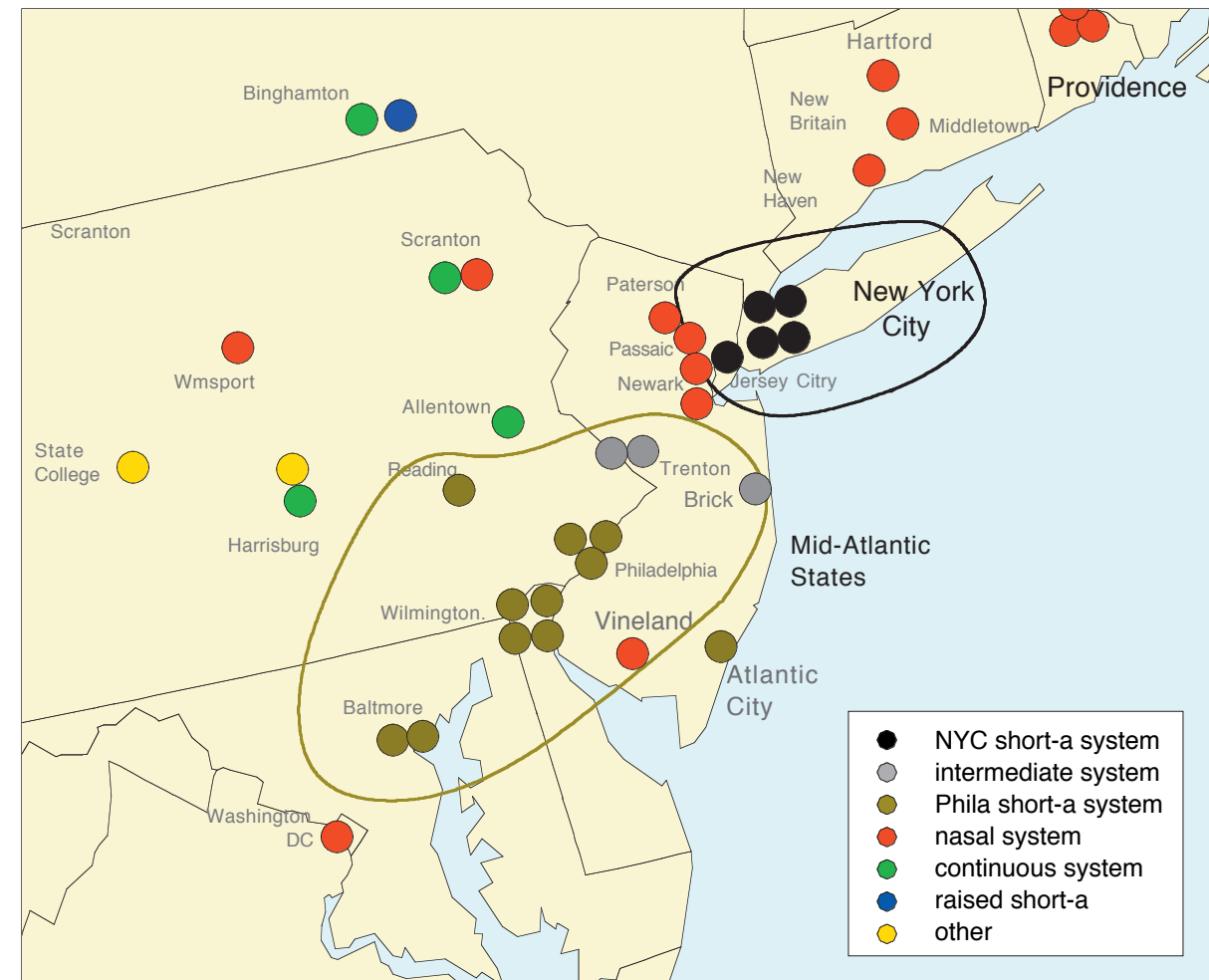
The dialect regions described in this chapter are united by two prominent features: a split short-*a* system and raised /oh/. Nevertheless, they are assigned to different dialect regions in Chapter 11. New York City is basically a part of the North, as shown by its conservative treatment of the back upgliding vowels /uw/ and /ow/ (Chapter 12) and the front upgliding vowels /iy/ and /ey/. In contrast, the fronting of the back upgliding vowels makes the Mid-Atlantic region a part of the Southeastern super-region, uniting the Midland and the South (Map 11.1, Chapter 12). The NYC vocalization of /r/ affects the vowel system as a whole, and further separates it from the Mid-Atlantic states. There is also a clear difference between the NYC version and the Mid-Atlantic version of the split short-*a*. This chapter will examine each region in detail, noting their similarities as well as their differences.

The distribution of short-*a* systems in the region concerned is shown in Map 17.1. Speakers who display the New York City system, as described in Chapter 13, are shown as black circles; those with the Mid-Atlantic system, exemplified by Philadelphia in Chapter 13, appear as light brown circles. An intermediate form appears in the city of Trenton and Brick township, represented by gray circles. Amongst and around these split systems there are a number of smaller cities which do not share the lexical split of the short-*a* class. Speakers with nasal systems are indicated in red. The continuous short-*a* pattern, in which vowels before /n/ are more raised than others but do not form a separate distribution, is shown as green circles. One representative of the general raising of short-*a* characteristic of the Northern Cities Shift is shown as a blue circle.

### 17.1. New York City

The dialect that is the first topic of this chapter is small from a geographic point of view, but sizeable in population. The dialect of New York City is confined to the city limits and a few neighboring cities in New Jersey, an area of 530 square miles, with a population of 8,500,000. It receives considerable attention nationally compared to most other dialects, through a widely recognized stereotype and because many actors and public figures are native speakers of the dialect. It was the focus of the first quantitative sociolinguistic study of a metropolitan area (Labov 1966), and can be traced in a series of real-time records dating from 1896 to the present (Babbitt 1896; Hubbell 1940; Frank 1948; Kurath and McDavid 1961; Hubbell 1962; Fowler 1986).

One of the most startling facts about New York City is the narrow extent of its influence in the surrounding area. As the largest city of the United States, it would be expected that its dialect would have diffused to a radius at least equal in size to the region surrounding Boston, Philadelphia, or Richmond. But the Linguistic Atlas records of the mid-twentieth century show that only a small section of northeastern New Jersey is included in the New York City dialect area. A study of the relation of average daily traffic flow to dialect boundaries showed that all of the boundaries established in Kurath (1949) fall into natural troughs in communication networks, with the exception of those surrounding New York City. Vast numbers of people cross that boundary every day, but its location has



Map 17.1. New York City and the Mid-Atlantic short-*a* systems

This area shows the geography of the split short-*a* system characteristic of two distinct regions: New York City and the Mid-Atlantic region. It is not a continuous area, but is divided by a region in central New Jersey where intermediate or nasal systems prevail. The rest of the chapter will show that NYC differs from the Mid-Atlantic region in many respects.

remained fixed for more than two centuries (Labov 1974).<sup>1</sup> Although the Telsur sampling of urbanized areas cannot delimit the outer boundaries of the New York City dialect with any precision, Map 17.1 is consistent with previous reports. This geographic restriction appears to be associated with the negative prestige of the New York City vernacular, as documented in Labov 1966: Ch. 13.

Within this metropolitan linguistic area, there is no reliable evidence for geographic differentiation. The stereotype *Brooklynese* is used to refer to working-class New York City speech, whether the speaker is a resident of Brooklyn, Queens, the Lower East Side of Manhattan, or Jersey City. Many members of the public are convinced that they can recognize a Queens or Bronx or Jersey accent, but it appears that these geographic labels are in fact labels for perceived social class differences.

Chapter 11 defined the New York City dialect as the region of *r*-vocalization with a split short-*a* system. There is a structural connection between these two properties. When short-*a* is split into tense and lax classes, the tense class rises along the front periphery as an ingliding vowel /æh/, which merges with the mid (and high) ingliding vowels that have developed from the vocalized /ihr/ and /ehr/ word-classes. The words *bad* and *bared* become homonyms. With more extreme raising of /æh/, this homonymy can extend to include *beard*.

*The short vowels of New York City*

The short vowels of the NYC system form a symmetrical, stable set of six nuclei that match the initial position of Figure 2.2. Figure 17.1 displays the short vowels of a 65-year-old woman, Nancy B.<sup>2</sup> The F1 means of the front and back vowels are similar; the back vowels are slightly lower in each case. There is very little overlap; the margins of security between these vowels are at least two standard deviations, as shown by the bars added to the mean symbols. This is in contrast

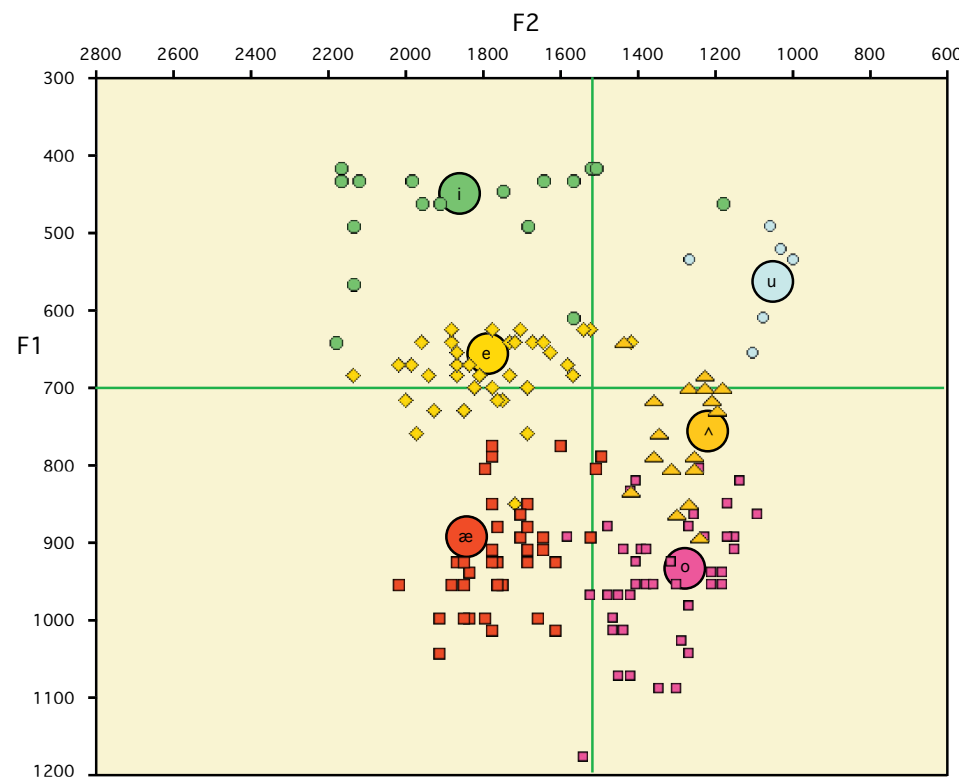


Figure 17.1. Short vowels of Nancy B., 65, New York, NY TS495

with other dialects in which the short vowels are involved in significant changes from initial position.<sup>3</sup>

*The upgliding vowels of NYC*

The conservative character of New York City upgliding vowels is illustrated in Figure 17.2, showing the Vy and Vw subsystems. The vowel tokens shown are all members of the upgliding classes; in addition, means of the mid and low short vowels are displayed. The high and mid vowels are firmly located in front and back positions, with the exception of some /uw/ tokens after coronals, which have moved to the high-front quadrant, with an F2 of around 2000. /uw/ vowels after noncoronals show no fronting, and are close to the extreme back position of vowels before /l/ (highlighted symbols). Even more conservative behavior is seen in /ow/: here the main distribution of tokens is very close to those before /l/. With the exception of /i/, the means of the short vowels are very close to the means of a corresponding long vowel: /e/ and /ey/, /æ/ and /aw/, /u/ and /Kuw/, /ɔ/ and /ow/, /o/ and /ay/.

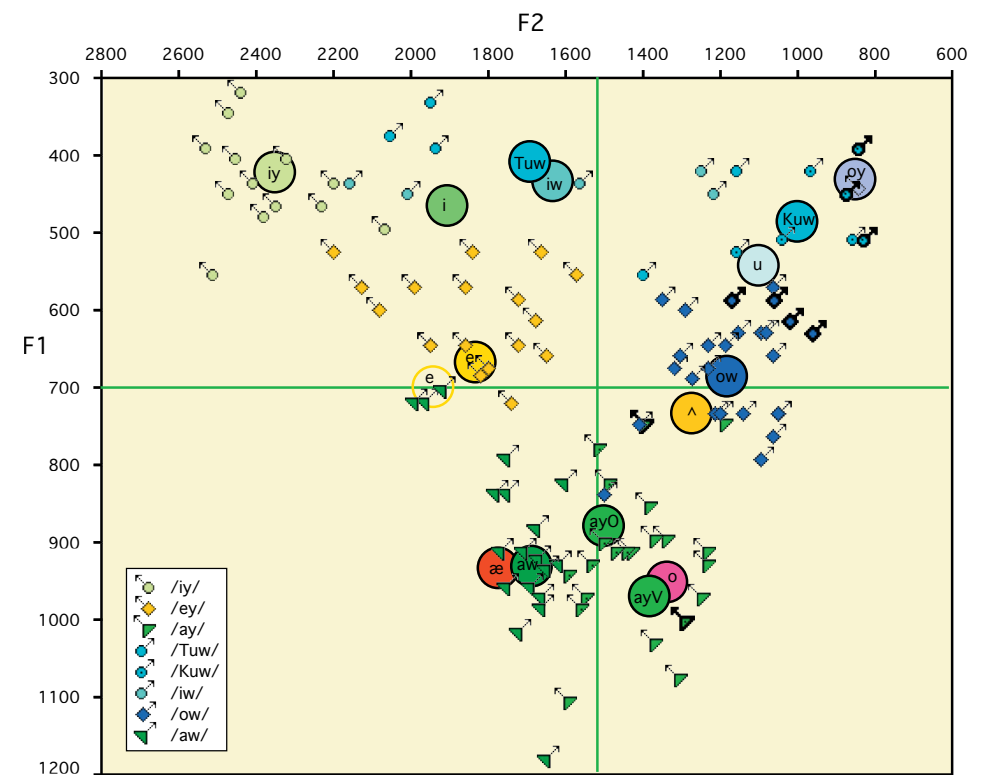


Figure 17.2. Vy and Vw vowel systems of Nancy B., 65, New York, NY TS495. Highlighted symbols: back vowels before /l/; Tuw = /uw/ after coronals; Kuw = /uw/ after non-coronals

1 In an unpublished paper given before the International Linguistic Association, Raven I. McDavid Jr. pointed out that the limits of the New York City dialect area coincided with the limits of the occupation of New York City by British troops in the war of 1812.  
 2 The low front position of mean /æ/ reflects the fact that all vowels that are raised and fronted are assigned to the long and ingliding phoneme, /æh/ (Figure 17.2).  
 3 The rotation of short vowels in the NCS (Chapter 14), the fronting of /ɔ/ in the Midland; (Chapters 14, 20); the retraction of short vowels in the Canadian Shift (Chapter 16); the fronting and raising of front short vowels in the Southern Shift (Chapter 18).

In only one respect does this New York City system deviate from the conservative Northern pattern: the nucleus of /aw/ is front of center, while the nucleus of /ay/ is back of center. This pattern was first seen in Maps 12.4 and 12.5, in which New York City is associated with the Mid-Atlantic States and the Midland in regard to the relative positions of /ay/ and /aw/. Labov 1966 showed that this was a change in progress at mid-century.

*The long and ingliding vowels of New York City*

The basic configuration of the NYC short-*a* split was displayed in Figure 13.2. Figure 13.3 shows the details of the split in the vowel system of Nancy B., the speaker studied in the two preceding figures. Figure 17.3 expands this picture by adding the other members of the long and ingliding system, /oh/ and /ah/. It displays the striking symmetry of /æh/ and /oh/. Both /æh/ and /oh/ rise along a peripheral track, and range from upper-mid to high position.

A second characteristic of the New York City system is the wide gap between the tense vowels and their lax partners in spontaneous speech, modified by a strong tendency to correct tense vowels to lax ones. General attitudes towards the New York City dialect have been strongly negative for a long period of time (Labov 1966: Ch 13), and as a result, speakers' behavior changes rapidly when attention is focused on speech. In the Telsur interview data, Nancy B. showed an unusually small number of corrections of her vernacular forms. In Figure 17.3, only three words show this effect: *bad*, *Babs*, and *bag*.<sup>4</sup> She shows no corrections of /oh/; minimal pairs and spontaneous speech are distributed about the same mean.

Nancy B. has a single low-back vowel, merging /o/ and /ah/ as in most North American dialects. The /ah/ class is represented by *pasta*, *croissant* and two tokens of *father*. The figures to follow will show that this merger is not uniform in New York City: for many speakers, /ah/ is a separate mid-back vowel, distinct from both /o/ and /oh/, and is joined by an irregularly distributed subset of /o/ words.

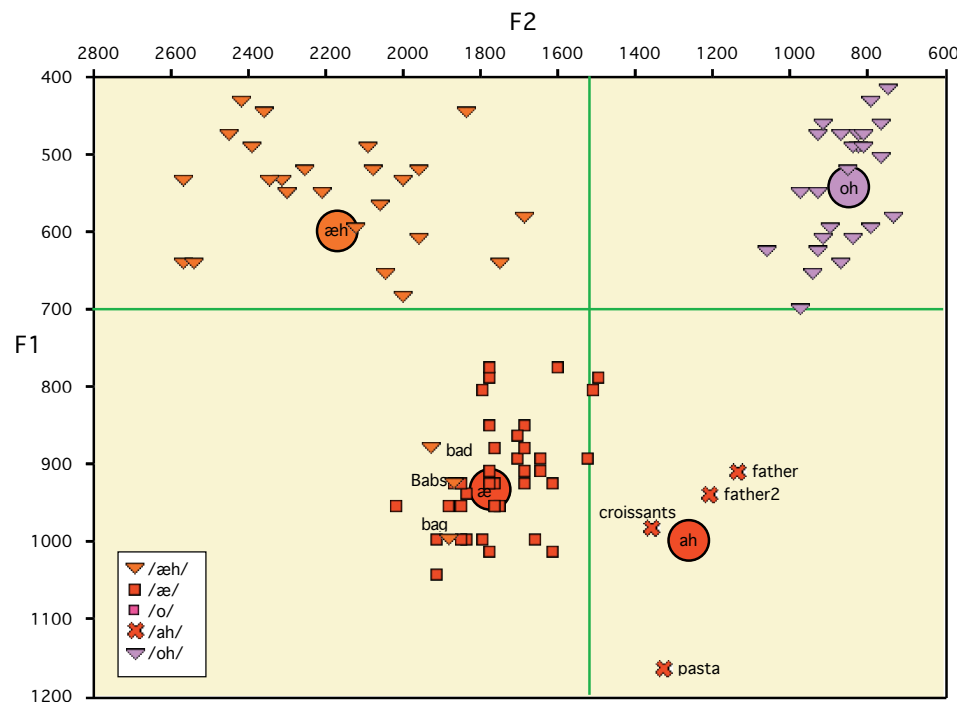


Figure 17.3. Long and ingliding vowels of Nancy B., 65, New York NY, TS495

Figure 17.4 displays the more extreme type of correction that is typical of New York City speakers, as reported in Labov (1966). It shows the long and ingliding vowels of a 70-year-old woman from Jersey City, who read a word list with full representation of the tense and lax short-*a* classes. Figure 17.4 shows that in New York City, word lists can give results that are heavily skewed from the norms of spontaneous speech. The highlighted /æh/ symbols represent word list tokens; the plain symbols are spontaneous speech. It is evident that the entire set of word list pronunciations is shifted downwards to occupy the same low-front position as the lax /æ/ class.

As already seen with the previous speaker, correction of /oh/ is less drastic. Here the highlighted symbols represent /oh/ in minimal pairs. While three of these tokens are among the lowest, suggesting some correction, two are among the highest and backest. Correction of /oh/ also differs from correction of /æh/ in that there is no established target for /oh/ in low-back position parallel to that provided by lax /æ/ in the case of /æh/. The correction of [sɛ:əd] to [sæ:d] is heard as a form of the same word, while the correction of [soəd] to [səd] is heard as a different word.

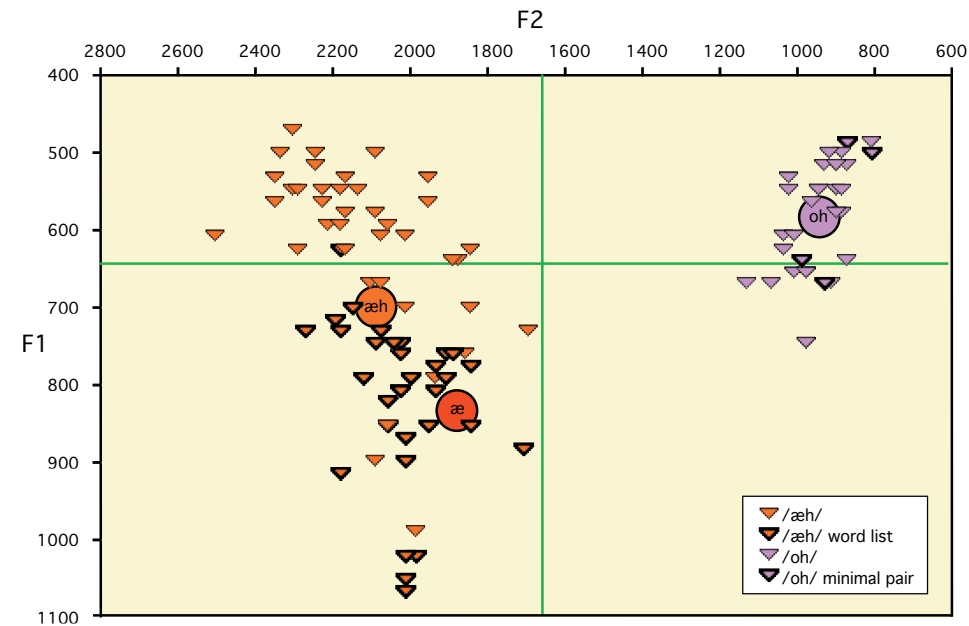


Figure 17.4. Stylistic stratification of long and ingliding vowels for Florence O., 70, Jersey City NJ, TS807

Although Figure 17.3 showed no distinction between /o/ and /ah/, it has been reported before that New York City speakers have a distinct lower mid back phoneme that is opposed to both /oh/ and /o/, consisting of the /ah/ class along with a selection of /o/ words determined only in part by phonetic factors (Cohen 1970; see also the case of Paul Prinzivalli, reported in Labov 1994). Figure 17.5 illustrates this configuration in the vowel system of Florence O., here including only tokens from spontaneous speech.

The distribution of the /o/ class is in many ways similar to the short-*a* split in the front vowels. There is strong phonetic conditioning, but there is also lexical irregularity. The /ah/ class is represented by four tokens of *father*. Along with these there

<sup>4</sup> *Babs* as the abbreviation for *Barbara* may be lax in the vernacular. A note from the analyst on *bad* says that it seems to have been strongly influenced by the pronunciation of the interviewer.

is *despondent*, *odd*, *Don*, *bottom*, and several tokens of *job*, all words with voiced codas.<sup>5</sup> Vowels before voiceless stops occupy a lower position in the /o/ range, but there is also *on*, *monogram*, *gone*, *concerts*, *common*, contrasting with *despondent*. This may be viewed as a continuum, with initial labials leading, or it may be seen as further evidence for /ah/ as a separate phoneme, only partially overlapping with /o/. Unlike the case of /æh/, such lexical assignments to /ah/ appear to differ from one speaker to the other (Cohen 1970); further investigation is called for.

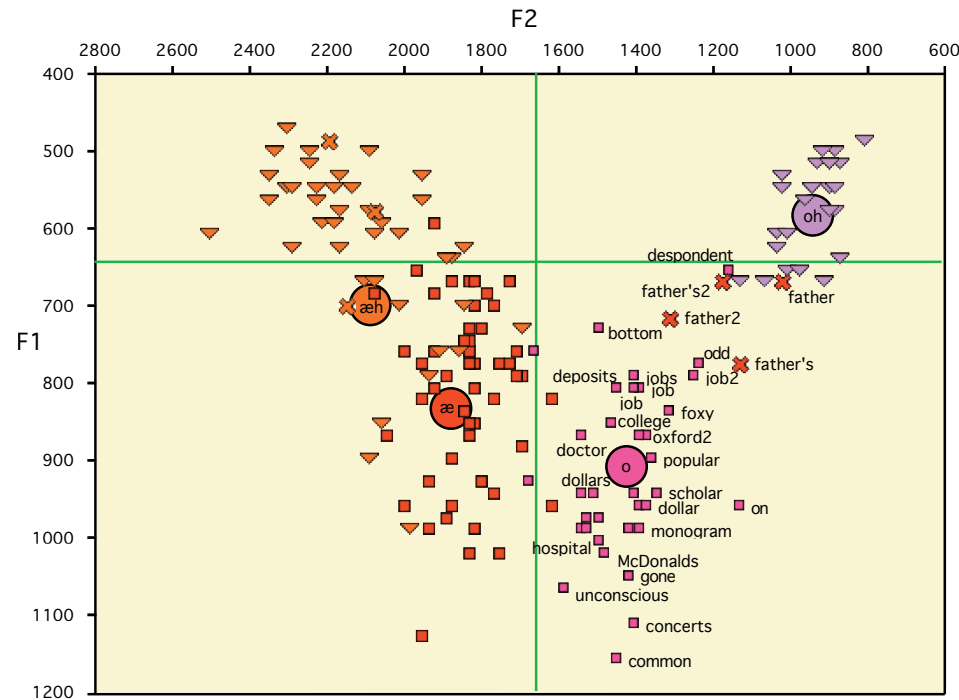


Figure 17.5. The differentiation of /o/ and /oh/ in vowel system of Florence O., 70, Jersey City NJ, TS807. Word list and minimal pair data excluded

Vowels before /r/ in New York City

The dialect of New York City is traditionally *r*-less. The importation of the *r*-pronouncing norm following World War II did not materially change the basic vernacular of every-day life (Labov 1966, 1994). As Maps 7.1 and 16.1, indicated, *r*-lessness persists in New York City even in the relatively monitored speech pattern of the Telsur interviews, which are strongly focused on language. The importation of the norm of *r*-pronunciation appears primarily among young college-educated speakers and in careful speech, but even there, the increase in *r*-pronunciation has been slow (see the replications of the department store study in 1984 and 1986 reported in Labov 1994: 86–94). The use of constricted /r/ by the twelve Telsur subjects in the NYC dialect area is instructive:

Age	% [r]	Age	% [r]	Age	%[r]
70	70	52	100	28	95
65	0	48	50	20	100
65	5	45	20	18	30
		43	40	18	10
		41	2		

The 52-year-old with consistent *r*-pronunciation is a dance therapist. The 20-year-old is a college student.

Figure 17.6 shows vowels before /r/ for the 48-year-old New Yorker, Pat M., 48, who has 50 percent [r] in the Telsur interview.

Among the front vowels are /ihr/ in *hear*, *hearing*, etc. and /ehr/ in *chairs*, *there*, etc. The latter vowel is evidently merged with the long and ingliding vowel /æh/ in *mad*, *pass*, *bath*, etc. Among the back vowels, the means for /ah/ and /ahr/ are not significantly different. However, /ahr/ shows a larger range, with a number of /ahr/ tokens in upper-mid position, overlapping the /oh/ class. There is no evident phonetic conditioning for this range: *card*, *hard*, *park* are in high position; *card* and *heart* are below the mean; and other tokens of *park* and *heart* are clustered at the mean value.

Traditionally, it was considered that /oh/ class words with vocalized /r/ were homonymous with the corresponding words without /r/. LYS (1972) reported that the distinction between *source* and *sauce* persisted: that even though native speakers thought they were the same, there was a significant tendency to pronounce the *source* class with a higher and backer vowel.<sup>6</sup> Figure 17.6 confirms this observation. Although /ohr/ and /oh/ overlap, the means are significantly different (479 Hz for /ohr/ and 520 Hz for /oh/;  $p < .025$ ).

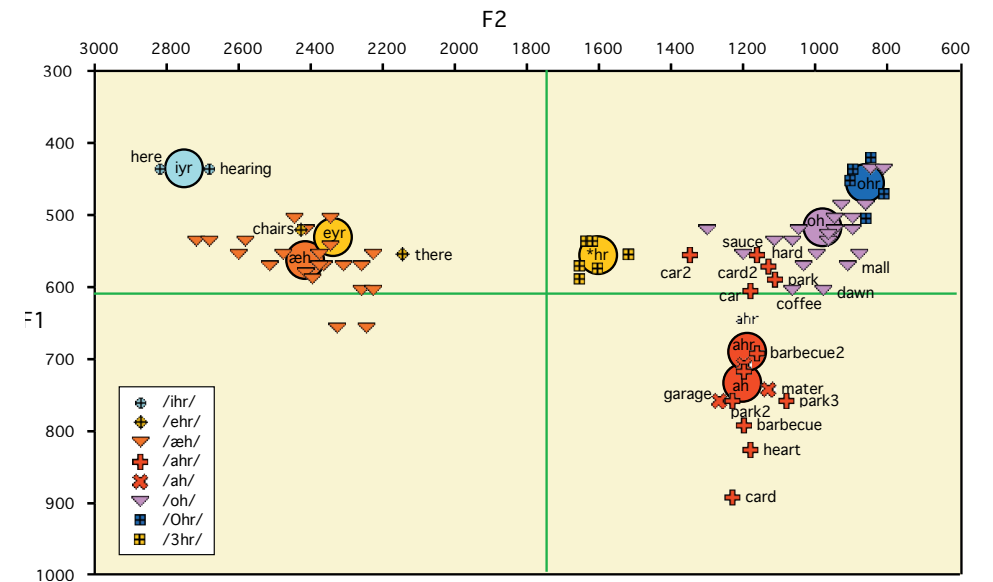


Figure 17.6. Vowels before /r/ for Pat M., 48, New York, NY, TS800

17.2. The Mid-Atlantic States

The Mid-Atlantic dialect region was defined in Chapter 11 as an area with a split short-*a* system and no vocalization of /r/. Map 17.1 outlined this region as a set of cities with these dialect characteristics: Philadelphia, Reading, Atlantic City, Wilmington, and Baltimore. Vineland appears here as a sole exception with a nasal system, but more detailed studies of the region (Ash 2002) show other middle-sized cities and small towns in the intervening territory with the same pattern. There is a general tendency for the Mid-Atlantic short-*a* system to be eroded in favor of the default nasal system, though no such tendency appears within the major cities themselves. Since ANAE is devoted to a description of the regional

5 Considering the flap of *bottom* as a voiced segment.

6 This is one of the many cases of near-merger discussed in LYS (1972) and Labov (1994).



dialects of urbanized areas, this chapter will present the major features of the Mid-Atlantic vowel systems as they are exemplified in Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore.

Chapter 12 showed that the Mid-Atlantic region shared with the Midland an extreme fronting of /ow/ and /aw/, as well as /uw/ (Figure 12.6, Maps 12.3–12.5). As the largest and most influential American city of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the port of entry for Midland settlers, Philadelphia undoubtedly had a strong influence on the formation of the Midland dialect. However, the definition of the Midland in Kurath (1949) does not regularly include the Mid-Atlantic area. *I want off* (for ‘I want to get off’) is found in Philadelphia and Wilmington, but *snake feeder* for ‘dragonfly’ is not (Kurath 1949, Fig. 15). *Blinds* for ‘roller shades’ appears in Baltimore, but not in Philadelphia or Wilmington (Fig. 16). On the other hand, a number of words that define Eastern Pennsylvania are consistently found in Philadelphia and Wilmington (Figs. 20, 22): *pavement* for ‘sidewalk’, *baby coach* for ‘baby carriage’, *hot cakes* for ‘pancakes’, *bagged school* for ‘played hookey’. The phonological unity that we find in Baltimore, Wilmington, and Philadelphia is not reflected in the lexical patterning, where Baltimore often falls outside of the Philadelphia area.

The lexical maps of Carver (1987), based on 25 DARE isoglosses, do not include the Philadelphia area in the Midland (Maps 6.5, 12). Carver points out that the line separating the Philadelphia region from the rest of eastern Pennsylvania is not as coherent as the North–Midland line (‘We would expect this boundary to be more transitional in nature, since Philadelphia is the source of the Pennsylvania German region’, p. 169). All these considerations lead to the conclusion that the Mid-Atlantic region was an original source and center of the Midland region, but is now clearly separated from the rest of the Midland by developments in the Pennsylvania German cultural area and western Pennsylvania. Twentieth century developments in Philadelphia, like the shift of /aw/ from [æo] to [eɔ], did not spread to the Midland areas.

#### The Philadelphia vowel system

One of the most characteristic features of the Philadelphia vowel system is the fronting of back upgliding vowels except before liquids /r/ and /l/. Figure 17.7 shows the Vw subsystem of Rosanne V, whose short *a* pattern was presented in Chapter 13. For /uw/, almost every vowel is front of the center line, including /uw/ after non-coronals, except the vowels before /l/, shown in bold. There is no significant distinction between /iw/ and the /uw/ allophones. The /ow/ vowel is fully centralized, and a number of tokens are well front of center. This is in sharp contrast with the New York City system, where /Kuw/ remains a back vowel, and /ow/ is not fronted at all (Figure 17.2).

The fronting of /aw/ is much more extreme in Philadelphia than in New York. This is one of the new and vigorous changes that is described in Labov (1980, 2001). The nucleus of /aw/ fronts to peripheral position and rises to mid or upper-mid position, while the target of the glide falls from /u/ to /ɔ/. Figure 17.7 shows that /ow/ and /aw/ are in a chain shifting relation, with some /ow/ tokens moving toward the position formerly occupied by /aw/.

Two other new and vigorous Philadelphia sound changes appear in Figure 17.8, which shows the front upgliding system of Rosanne V. The front upgliding vowels are divided into those in word-final position (iyF, eyF) and those before consonants (iyC, eyC). It is evident from the mean positions that there is a sizeable difference between these environments for both vowels, but it seen most dramatically with /ey/. As Tucker (1944) first reported, the /eyF/ tokens are open, almost in low position, while /eyC/ tokens are peripheral upper mid, overlapping both /iyF/ and /iyC/. The two allophones have become further separated over

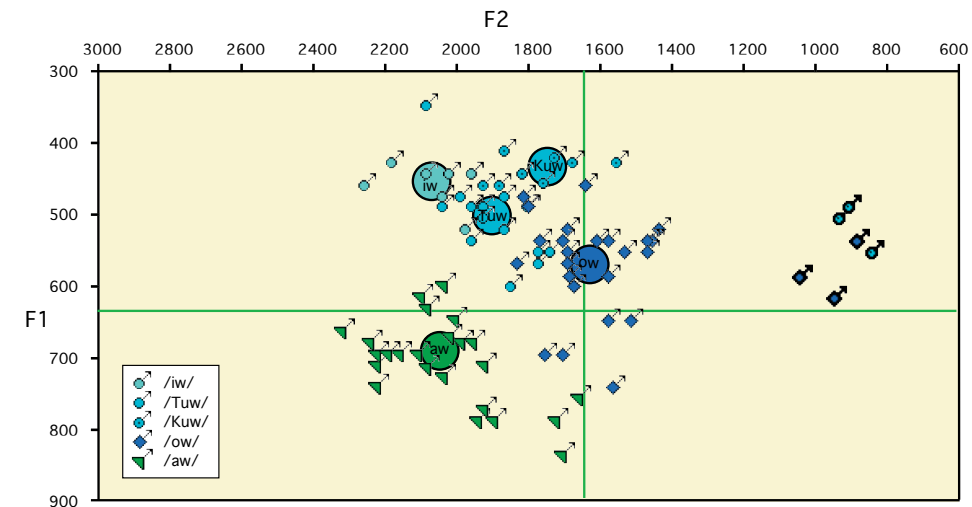


Figure 17.7. Back upgliding vowels of Rosanne V., 30, Philadelphia PA, TS587. Tuw = /uw/ after coronals; Kuw = /uw/ after noncoronals. Bold symbols: vowels before /l/.

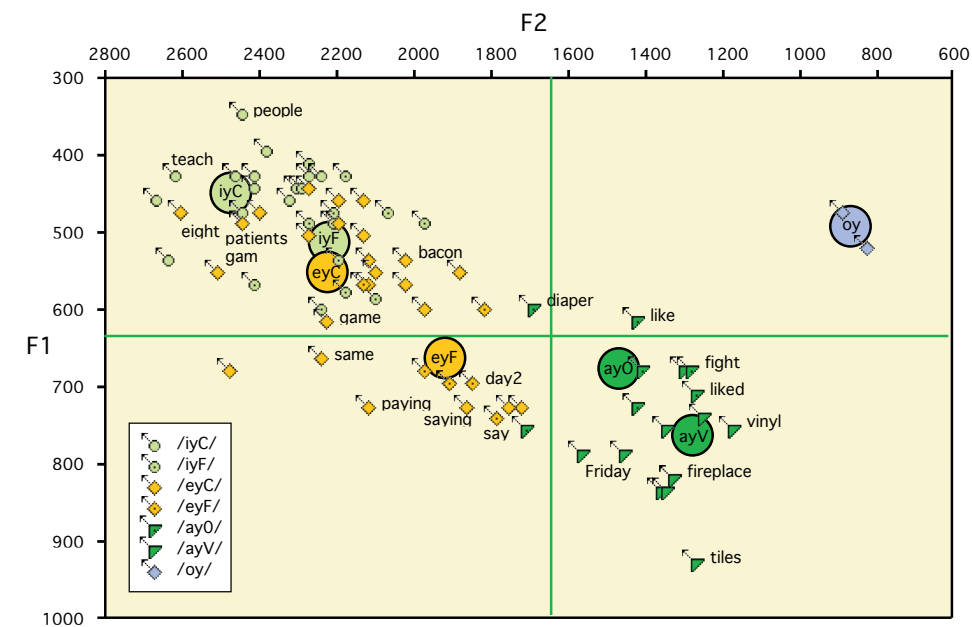


Figure 17.8. Front upgliding subsystem of Rosanne V., 30, Philadelphia PA TS587

time; apparent time distributions show a strong shift upward and frontward of /eyC/, while /eyF/ has remained open. In Figure 17.8, the words *eight*, *patients*, *baby* are squarely in the /iyC/ distribution.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, *day* and *say* show low nuclei.

Figure 17.8 also shows a parallel distinction of /ay/ before voiceless consonants (ay0) and before voiced and finally (ayV). Here the preconsonantal raising is restricted to vowels before voiceless consonants, as in Canadian raising. *Like*, *fight*, *diaper* are in mid position, while /ay/ in *Friday* and *tile* is low. Sociolinguistic studies of Philadelphia show a strong shift among younger speakers, especially males, towards increasing centralization of /ay0/. Conn’s re-study of

<sup>7</sup> This overlap does lead to misunderstandings in the Philadelphia speech community. The archive of natural misunderstandings includes *snake* → *sneak*, *slave* → *leave*, *train* → *tree* and.

Philadelphia in 2004 showed that the upward and backward shift of (ay0) has continued (2005).

The Philadelphia split short-*a* system that defines the Mid-Atlantic region in Map 17.1 was described generally in Chapter 13, Figure 13.2, and exemplified by a view of /æh/ and /æ/ in the vowel system of Rosanne V., TS 587. A more detailed description is to be found in Ferguson (1975) and Labov (1989), while recent developments in the expansion of the tense class are reported in Roberts (1993), Roberts and Labov (1995), and Banuazizi and Lipson (1998). The major outlines of the tense /æh/ class are:

- Short *a* is tense in closed syllables before front nasals and voiceless fricatives.
- Syllables are closed by inflectional boundaries, yielding tense *panning*, *passing* vs. lax *panel*, *passive*.
- Syllable closure with derivational boundaries is variable.
- Short *a* is tense before /d/ in *mad*, *bad*, *glad*, otherwise lax before voiced stops.
- Short *a* is lax in auxiliaries and irregular verbs with nasal codas *ran*, *swam*, *be-gan*, *wan*<sup>8</sup>

As in New York city, the resultant tense class is a member of the long and ingliding subsystem. Unlike in New York City, the /æh/ class (Figure 17.9) is considerably more peripheral than the /ehr/ or /ihr/ class, which in Philadelphia are terminated with consonantal /r/. The /ah/ class of *father*, *garage*, *bra* (red x's) is distinct from the /ahr/ class (red vertical crosses), unlike the situation in New York City. In Philadelphia, the /ahr/ class is shifted to mid-back position for speakers of all ages and all social classes (Labov 2001), and as shown in Figure 17.9, coincides with /oh/ rather than /ah/. Finally, we note that the /ohr/ class, with original /ohr/ and /ohr/ merged, is in high-back position, and is further merged with /uhr/ (not shown here).

Philadelphia exemplifies the Back Vowel Shift before /r/, which is common throughout the Southeastern super-region.

The features of Philadelphia discussed so far are general to the Mid-Atlantic dialect. As in New York City, Philadelphia speakers recognize a three-way distinction between *Mary*, *merry*, and *marry*. However, the city of Philadelphia is

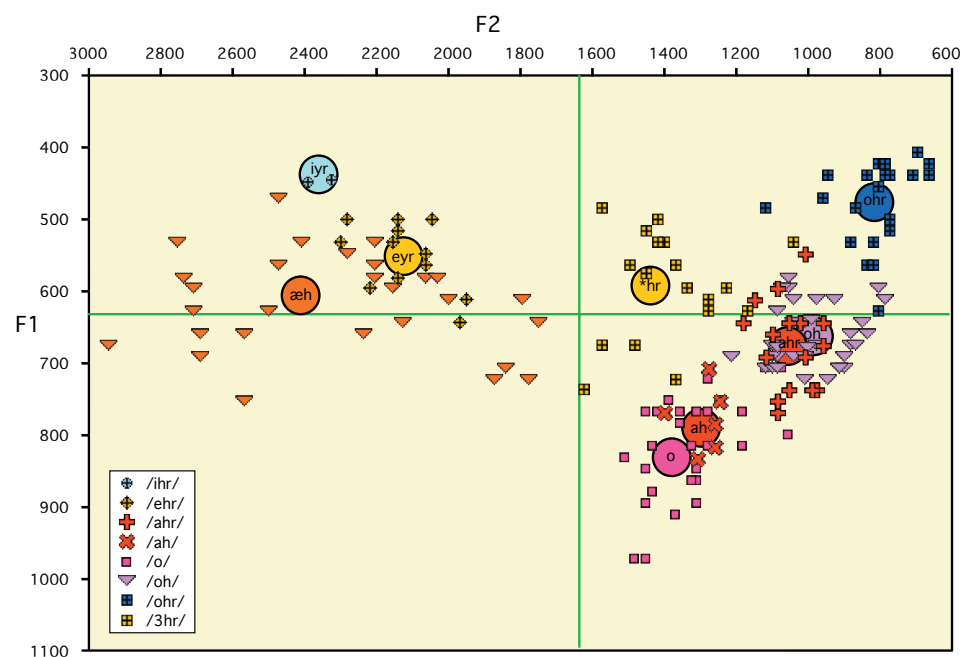


Figure 17.9. Long and ingliding vowels of Rosanne V., 30, Philadelphia PA, TS 587

unique among American dialects in its treatment of /e/ ~ /ɛ/ before intervocalic /r/ in *ferry* ~ *furry*, *merry* ~ *Murray*, etc. Labov and Karan (1991) found that one third of their Philadelphia subjects made a clear distinction between *ferry* and *furry*, one third showed a clear merger, and one third a near-merger: that is, subjects made a small but consistent distinction in spontaneous speech which they could not recognize in minimal pair or commutation tests. Figure 17.10 shows the overlap of /er/ and /ɛr/ for Rosanne V. in two words: *cherish* located well back of center, and *thoroughfare* in a somewhat fronter position, almost at the mid-line.<sup>9</sup>

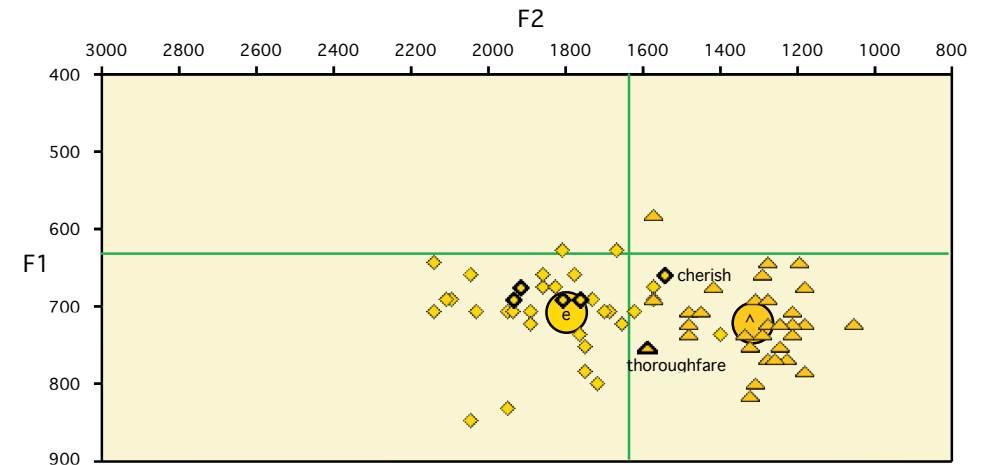


Figure 17.10. Backing of /er/ and fronting of /ɛr/ for Rosanne V., 30, Philadelphia PA TS587

### Baltimore

The data generated by the Telsur interviews do not show any substantial differences between Philadelphia and the neighboring cities of Wilmington and Baltimore. Only two specific Philadelphia features are limited to that city: the near-merger of /e/ and /ɛ/ before intervocalic /r/, and the raising of /ey/ in non-final position. The other cities share with Philadelphia the split short-*a* pattern, the raising of /oh/, the back shift of vowels before /r/, the merger of /ah/ and /o/, and Canadian raising of /ay/. Figure 17.11 shows the long and ingliding vowels of Mark D., 43, of Baltimore. The tense short-*a* class includes *ask*, *vast*, and three tokens of *bad*, while short-*a* in *sad* and before other voiced stops is consistently lax. The /oh/ class shows a dispersion along the peripheral back range that is characteristic of this region. Note in particular the very high-back position of *on*, showing its characteristic Midland association with the /oh/ class, in contrast with the much lower articulation of *on* as a member of the /o/ class in New York City in Figure 17.5.

### An intermediate short-*a* system: Trenton and environs

Earlier investigations of the area between New York City and Philadelphia suggested the existence of a continuum, in which the tensing environments of the New York City system are gradually deselected until one arrives at the Philadel-

8 The colloquial form of the preterit of *win*, common in Philadelphia. This completes the series of irregular verbs ending in /n/, all descended from Class III Preterit strong verbs in Old English.  
 9 The /e/ token even further back is *stressful*, which shows the effect of a preceding /r/ as well as the complex coda and following syllable.

