

Linguistic GOOSE chase: real time incrementation of u-fronting in Southern British English

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Recent research has focussed on the process of *incrementation*, where successive cohorts and generations of children advance ‘change beyond the level of their caretakers and role models’ (Labov 1994). Essentially, children increment changes in terms of the ‘frequency, extent, scope or specificity of a variable’ (Labov, 2007). Apparent time studies provided initial support where children showed lower rates of innovative forms than adolescents, creating an ‘adolescent peak’ (Labov, 2001; Tagliamonte & D’Arcy, 2009). More recently, real-time panel research has provided direct support for this model (e.g. Van Hofwegen & Wolfram, 2010) where the linguistic systems of individual children, as they mature into adolescents, are shown to develop in the direction of the change, meaning that they move into the lead as they approach adolescence. While studies have demonstrated incrementation of rates (e.g. frequency) there is less evidence for the ways in which incrementation is implicated in change in the underlying grammar of the system (e.g. frequency, extent, scope or specificity).

The present paper contributes to this area by combining real and apparent time methodologies to examine GOOSE-fronting, where the back high rounded vowel in words like *boot*, *news* and *school* is moving forwards in the vowel space, using data from Southern British English. Data came from two corpora. The first was an apparent time corpus of 47 speakers stratified by age (old: 65-90, middle: 35-50, adolescent: 16-18, and child: 8-11) with a 50/50 gender split. The second was a real-time corpus where 14 speakers from the child cohort, interviewed originally in 2012 – time point 1 – were interviewed again, now aged 12-15, in 2016 – time point 2. Following transcription, data were force-aligned and acoustic measures of F2 automatically extracted using FAVE-align (<http://fave.ling.upenn.edu>).

Real time comparison showed that each child had incremented over the four-year timeframe, with their GOOSE vowels significantly fronter in 2016 compared to their 2012 targets ($p=.008$). The analysis of constraints revealed elements of stability and elements of change. Following phonetic environment showed that following /l/ consistently blocked fronting across both real and apparent time, suggesting the maintenance of the allophonic GOOSE/GHOUL split. In contrast, preceding phonetic environment showed instability over time, with the distinction between preceding palatals/coronals/non-coronals weakened over apparent time and inconsistent across the real-time points. These findings echo previous accounts of the change (e.g. Harrington et al. 2008), which suggest a coarticulatory model of sound change where, over time, favouring environments trigger a categorical shift. The implications of these findings are discussed more broadly in light of the Life Cycle model of sound change (Bermudez-Otero, 2015).

References

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