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“REAL” DOWN-HOME SOUTHERN ENGLISH: COMPARING AN OKLAHOMAN’S REAL AND IMITATED DIALECTS¹

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Abstract

The Research on the Dialects of English in Oklahoma (RODEO) project offers a view of local perceptions of dialects in Oklahoma, USA. “Beth” (Female, 46, Watts, Oklahoma) spontaneously read the same passage in both her local, Southern-influenced English variety and a pretend, “real down-home Southern” variety. Spectra from both performances were analyzed to determine pitch, intensity, and formant values of stressed vowels and the length of words containing them. Beth’s local and exaggerated Southern performances were compared using paired t-tests. While many differences were insignificant, Beth’s imitated variety was characterized by FACE vowel onset centralization, THOUGHT vowel raising, and increases in time and intensity. Sociolinguistic interview data was also analyzed to reveal attitudinal evidence for the contrast. Beth appears to reveal weak perceptual associations with stereotypic Southern English phonological features but exhibits a complicated attitudinal relationship to the local speech community and an awareness of registers within the local repertoire.

Keywords

Southern American English, Oklahoma, language regard, perceptual dialectology, performance

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INGLÉS DEL SUR “REAL” CASERO:

COMPARANDO LOS DIALECTOS REALES E IMITADOS DE UN NATIVO DE OKLAHOMA

Resumen

El proyecto de investigación sobre los dialectos del inglés en Oklahoma (RODEO) ofrece una visión de las percepciones locales de los dialectos en Oklahoma, EE.UU. “Beth” (mujer, 46 años, Watts, Oklahoma) leyó espontáneamente el mismo pasaje tanto en su variedad local inglesa influenciada por el sur como en una pretendida variedad “real casera del sur”. Se analizaron los espectros de ambas interpretaciones para determinar los valores de tono, intensidad y formante de las vocales acentuadas y la longitud de las palabras que las contenían. Los resultados locales y exagerados sureños de Beth se compararon mediante t-tests emparejadas. Mientras que muchas diferencias fueron insignificantes, la variedad imitada de Beth se caracterizó por la centralización de la iniciación de la vocal, elevación de la vocalidad y incremento en tiempo e intensidad. Los datos sociolingüísticos de las entrevistas también fueron analizados para revelar evidencias actitudinales en el contraste. Beth parece revelar asociaciones perceptivas débiles con rasgos fonológicos estereotípicos del inglés del sur, pero muestra una complicada relación actitudinal con la comunidad del habla local y una conciencia de los registros dentro del repertorio local.

Palabras clave

inglés americano del sur, Oklahoma, conciencia lingüística, dialectología perceptual, actuación

1. Introduction

Dialect research frequently relies on structural descriptions of language varieties, but individuals’ perceptions and behaviors relating to dialect varieties also deserve attention, mostly as a means of gauging linguistic attitudes. Generally speaking, perception is the mechanism by which individuals internalize the language experience, and behavior—both conscious and less than conscious—is the mechanism by which individuals externalize it. However, the two are merely the most tangible components of a larger system of language regard characterized by beliefs about and attitudes toward language varieties, their speech communities, and members of those communities. Preston argues that such a language regard system “interacts with or, better, influences language production and comprehension, particularly the latter” (Preston 2011: 10). If so, then beliefs and attitudes are at the very heart of the language experience, not only

as passive mental filters but as active drivers of both the perceptions and behaviors of individuals and groups alike. Preston distinguishes these two kinds of language regard tenets, belief and attitude, as follows: “[B]eliefs are not necessarily evaluative, and evaluation is taken to be a necessary component of attitude” (Preston 2011: 10). Additionally, Garrett describes attitudes as “having a degree of stability that allows [them] to be identified” (Garrett 2010: 20). Attitudes are, then, essentially value judgments—positive or negative, strong or weak, conscious or less than conscious—as situated within particular social contexts against which stability² can be assessed through analysis of the perceptions and behaviors they presumably influence.

Consider the dialectal context of English in present-day Oklahoma, a largely rural state located in the southern Great Plains region in the central U.S. The dialect situation in Oklahoma is not well documented in the scholarly literature, though structural descriptions of English varieties in the state (e.g., Bailey, Wikle, Tillery & Sand 1993; Bakos 2013; Labov, Ash & Boberg 2006; Tillery & Bailey 1998; Weirich 2013; Wikle & Bailey 1997) are more readily available than attitude-oriented studies (e.g., Bakos 2013; McBride 2015). As it stands, structural research demonstrates that the state exhibits certain features—mostly phonological and lexical—of both the South and Southern Midlands dialect regions. In terms of phonology, this includes fronting of the GOOSE, FOOD, and GOAT vowels,³ a feature associated with both regions; occasional reversal of the DRESS/FACE onsets, a Southern but not Midlands feature; and merger of LOT/THOUGHT vowels, a Midlands but not Southern feature. Yet, the exact details of this dialectal mix, especially speaker attitudes about these and other features, are poorly known. For this reason, Dennis Preston founded the Research on Dialects of English in Oklahoma (RODEO) project at Oklahoma State University to collect and analyze dialect and dialectal attitude data from across the state. It is hoped that the

² Garret (2010) defines attitudes in terms of stability, yet Bassili & Brown (2005) problematize stability thusly: “One may think, for example, that feelings that are accessible, that are held with certainty, that are considered important to the self, and that are felt with intensity, ought to resist the influence of suggestions contained in an attitudinal query. Under most circumstances, however, this is not the case” (Bassili & Brown 2005: 547). Nevertheless, a full treatment of stability is somewhat tangential to the discussion at hand insofar as attitudes, while clearly malleable over time, appear capable of some sort of assessment through contextualized behavior on a moment-by-moment basis.

³ Note that vowels in this article are represented using the Standard Lexical Sets for English vowels (cf. Wells 1982).

RODEO project will help to clarify understanding of dialects and their speakers' perceptions in Oklahoma.

One of the early subjects in the RODEO study is "Beth," a then 46-year old single female living and working as an artist and homeless shelter supervisor in Tulsa, OK. Beth is of Anglo ethnicity and has a baccalaureate degree. One of the things that makes Beth of great interest is that her isolated, rural hometown of Watts, where she lived until finishing high school, is located along a theorized line of isoglosses that Labov, Ash, & Boberg (2006: 129) suspect divides the Southern Midlands dialect region from two proper South dialect regions, the Inland South and the Texas South (see Figure 1). If these isoglosses truly exist then she may be expected to exhibit specific perceptions and/or behaviors of either Southern or Midlands dialects that may differ from those who grew up farther from this proposed border.

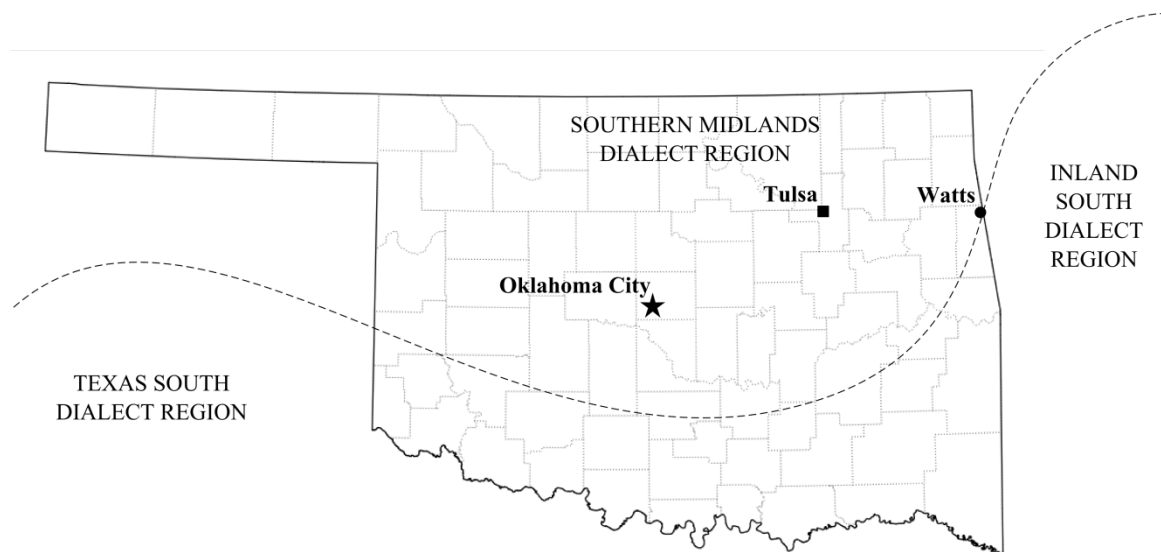


Figure 1. Watts and Oklahoma dialect borders (adapted from Labov, Ash & Boberg 2006)

Another intriguing fact about Beth occurred during her sociolinguistic interview, which a RODEO field linguist digitally recorded under unknown conditions at Beth's Tulsa home in September of 2009. The interview included a brief reading passage that Beth read twice. After first reading it through using her natural dialect, she then volunteered to read it through a second time using an English variety that she termed

“real down-home Southern Oklahoma” (see Appendix). Her decision to do this offers the unique opportunity to examine not only the structure of both her real and imitated varieties (henceforth termed *Real* and *Imitated* to distinguish the performances from the common adjectives), but potentially her attitudes towards a Southern—using her term of preference—perceptual prototype. Thus, by examining both of Beth’s reading passage performances we can presumably learn a great deal about how she situates herself within Oklahoma’s dialect context, both in terms of reception and production.

The purpose of this study, then, is to investigate three problems involving Beth’s reading passages. They are as follows:

1. What exactly are the behavioral differences between the two performances?
2. What do these differences tell us about Beth’s perceptions of “real down-home Southern Oklahoma” English?
3. What do those perceptions and behaviors tell us about Beth’s attitudes about the English varieties in her local environment?

2. Method

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to present a fuller picture of Beth’s dialectal behaviors in both her Real and Imitated performances and her perceptions, as far as they can be determined.

2.1 Quantitative Procedures

The quantitative component consisted of two parts, non-instrumental and instrumental comparisons of the two performances. The non-instrumental comparison was limited to phonological reduction and lexical substitution phenomena that could be detected by simply transcribing the performances and making note of differences. The most obvious feature of interest in this phase was [ING] realization. The instrumental comparison involved the use of PRAAT (Boersma 2001) to analyze performance data. The original digital sound capture was imported into the program, resampled at a

sampling rate of 10,000 Hz, and then analyzed word-by-word in terms of the following primary variables: Word length (s), mean pitch (Hz), mean intensity (dB), and vowel quality, including F1 and F2 frequencies (Hz) and various monophthongization and diphthongization concerns. For the instrumental comparison, only words containing stressed vowels were of interest (N = 87). Two-tailed paired sample t-tests were then used to determine the statistical significance of the differences between the two performances.

2.2 Qualitative Procedures

The qualitative component consisted mostly of classical content analysis of the interview (Bauer 2000). The purpose of this analysis was to identify themes as evidence of Beth's attitudes toward either the local dialect variety—i.e., Real—or her “real down-home Southern Oklahoma” variety—i.e., Imitated. To accomplish this, the entire interview of approximately 33 minutes was transcribed (a close-vertical but not phonetic transcript was used for this purpose) and then analyzed with thematic categories emerging organically from the process. Qualitative findings will be addressed in the Discussion section below.

3. Results

3.1 Non-Instrumental

Table 1 represents the primary results of the non-instrumental comparison of the two performances for each of three variables, lexical or phonological reduction, lexical substitution, and [ING] realization as a special case of phonological reduction.

Feature	Real	Imitated
Phonological/lexical reduction	<i>them</i>	<i>'em</i>
	<i>remembered</i>	<i>'membered</i>
	<i>garage</i>	<i>g'rage</i>
	<i>that</i> [relative pronoun]	<i>∅</i>
Lexical substitution	<i>(the) Wal-Mart</i>	<i>Wally World</i>
[ING] realization	<i>planning</i>	<i>plannin'</i>
	<i>shopping</i>	<i>shoppin'</i>
	<i>going (to)</i>	<i>gonna</i>
	<i>baking</i>	<i>bakin'</i>

Table 1. Non-Instrumental performance comparisons

Nine types were found to vary between performances, one token per type. The Imitated performance exhibits more reduction and substitution, and less realization of [ING]. Note that at no time in the reading passage that [ING] occurred did Beth realize it as *-ing* in Imitated, and at no time in Real did she reduce it. Be also aware that all of these phenomena are associated with informal registers of American English.

3.2 Instrumental

Figures 2 through 4 represent the results of instrumental comparison of the stressed words from the two performances. In each graph, the blue line represents Beth's Real variety, and the red line represents her Imitated variety. Figure 2 shows the comparison of mean F0 across the stressed vowel in each word token, listed as W1 through W87. While there were scattered areas of difference between the two performances, the overall difference was not found to be significant (Real: M = 181.439 Hz, SD = 44.594; Imitated: M = 187.117 Hz, SD = 41.133; $p = 0.117$).

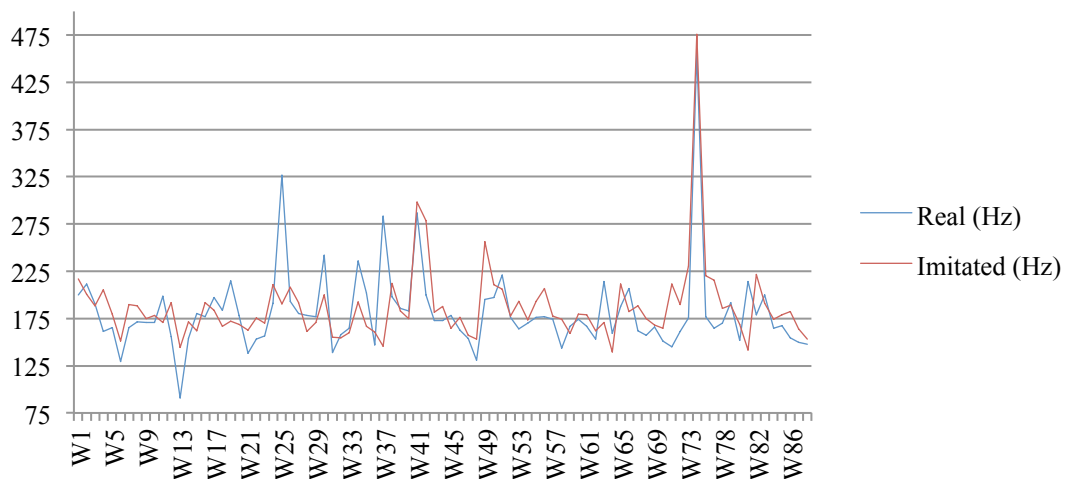
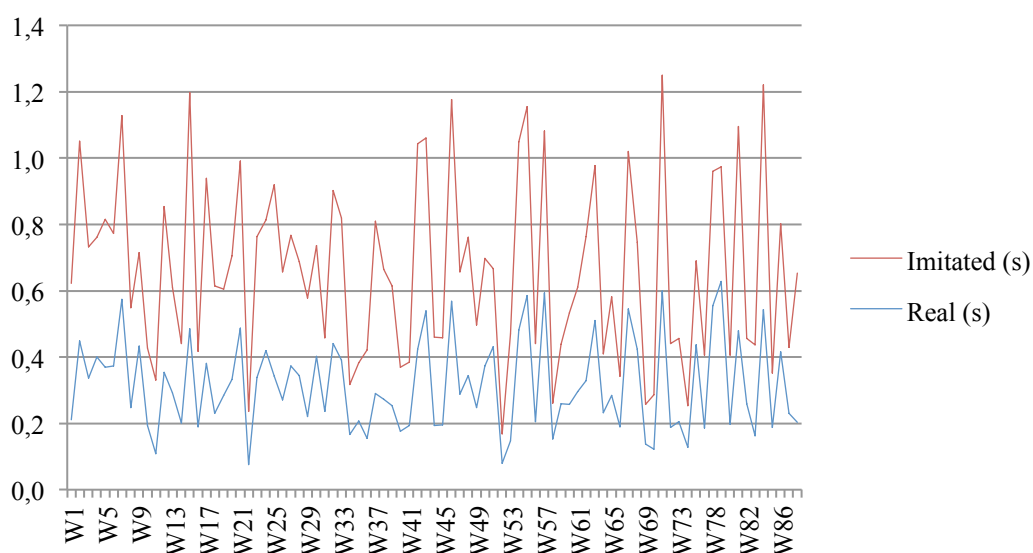


Figure 2. Mean F0 of stressed vowels (n.s.)

Figure 3 shows the comparison between the lengths of stressed words in each performance. Here, the visual impression of difference corresponds to a statistically significant increase in Imitated word length ($p < 0.01$), perhaps mimicking the so-called Southern Drawl. On average, the Imitated words are around 3 ms longer (Real: $M = 0.316$ s, $SD = 0.140$; Imitated: $M = 0.349$ s, $SD = 0.148$; $p = 0.002$). So great is the difference that the Imitated performance is approximately 2 s longer than the Real.

Figure 3. Stressed vowel word length ($p < 0.01$)

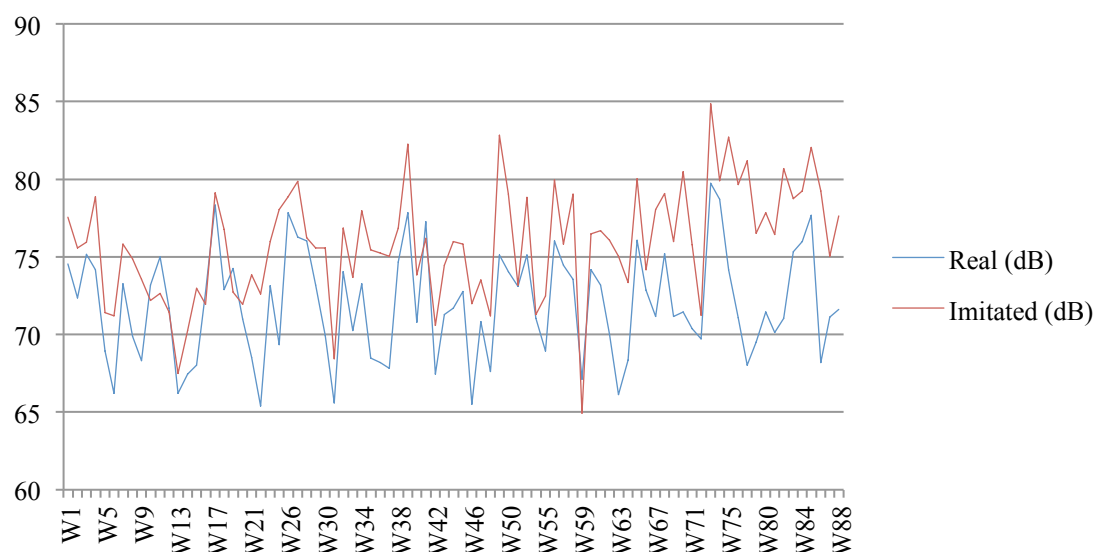


Figure 4. Mean intensity of stressed tokens ($p < 0.001$)

Figure 4 shows the distribution of mean intensity of stressed vowel tokens. Note that two tokens, W23 and W53, were not sufficiently stressed with respect to their external environments to allow for the calculation of intensity. Again, Imitated tokens show a visually discernible and significant increase ($p < 0.001$). On average, the difference between individual pairs from each performance was nearly 4 dB more forceful in Beth's imitation (Real: $M = 71.890$ dB, $SD = 3.432$; Imitated: $M = 75.857$, $SD = 3.654$; $p = 1.607 \times 10^{-20}$). Be aware, however, that the recording reveals Beth's noticeable animation before and during her Imitated performance presumably due to her excitement in offering an unsolicited interpretation of what she regards as a "real down-home Southern" variety.

VOWEL	N	Real F1		Imitated F1		F1 p	Real F2		Imitated F2		F2 p
		M^a	SD	M^a	SD		M^a	SD	M^a	SD	
TRAP	6	624	63	645	93	0.714	1863	201	2009	141	0.250
LOT	10	649	43	670	55	0.196	1078	133	1090	82	0.677
DRESS	13	570	44	573	47	0.805	1734	187	1801	283	0.275
FLEECE	9	423	35	449	82	0.218	2408	123	2378	238	0.570
KIT	14	531	39	531	61	0.973	1865	327	1863	305	0.987
THOUGHT	4	713	16	701	15	0.002^b	1061	24	1056	31	0.783

FOOT	3	561	32	579	32	0.156	1453	142	1400	59	0.464
STRUT	8	663	63	674	47	0.650	1439	177	1457	174	0.374
GOOSE	2	428	58	406	2	0.698	1645	684	1670	761	0.721
NORTH	2	452	21	545	34	0.252	790	32	904	81	0.181

Notes: *a* Larger means between pairs are shown in boldface for clarity

b Statistically significant ($p < 0.01$); italicized for clarity

Table 2. Monophthongal vowel quality (F1 and F2 in Hz)

As far as vowel quality is concerned, one of the most noteworthy aspects of both of Beth's performances was how similar they were. Indeed, most vowels showed no significant difference whatsoever, in either F1 or F2, from one performance to the next. Tables 2 and 3 show comparisons of mean monophthongal and mean diphthongal vowel quality, respectively. The only significant monophthongal difference (Table 2) is a reduction in F1 frequency for the THOUGHT vowel in the Imitated variety ($p < 0.01$), indicating raising from Real.

Likewise, the diphthongs (Table 3) show almost no change from one performance to another. Nevertheless, there is a difference with respect to the F2 of the FACE vowel onset ($p < 0.01$) wherein Imitated experiences a decrease, indicative of a centralization of this vowel with respect to Real. Several other diphthongs, specifically, the PRICE onset and offglide and the GOAT offglide, approach significance ($0.10 < p > 0.05$) but do not reach the threshold. Perhaps a larger number of tokens in a longer reading passage would have borne out this difference; the PRICE vowel, after all, such as in the word 'price,' is typically realized as [p^hja:s] in advanced Southern Shift speech.

	Real F1			Imitated F1		F1	Real F2		Imitated F2		F2
VOWEL	N	M ^a	SD	M ^a	SD	<i>p</i>	M ^a	SD	M ^a	SD	<i>p</i>
Onsets											
PRICE	5	629	93	707	45	0.086	1218	241	1277	112	0.524
MOUTH	3	617	58	632	68	0.259	1798	208	1823	244	0.353
FACE	6	625	32	640	37	0.154	1831	228	1717	220	0.010 ^b
GOAT	6	545	94	585	60	0.170	1104	278	1192	342	0.552

<i>Offglides</i>											
PRICE	5	573	32	625	86	0.237	1915	197	1715	329	0.082
MOUTH	3	651	30	666	36	0.710	1230	94	1297	72	0.161
FACE	6	483	41	465	29	0.405	2263	98	2308	82	0.295
GOAT	4	488	60	548	31	0.057	1107	274	1151	254	0.809

Notes: *a* Larger means between pairs are shown in boldface for clarity
 b Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$); italicized for clarity

Table 3. Diphthongal vowel quality (F1 and F2 in Hz)

Figure 5 shows a combined, non-normalized plot of the vowel means from both performances. It is curious to note that the significantly different vowels (THOUGHT and FACE) appear very close to one another whereas those that are statistically insignificant are in many cases quite distinguished from one another. This is mostly a function of the low N number associated with each token. Perhaps in a larger sample of Imitated speech, Beth would have demonstrated consistently greater separation of vowels throughout the spectrum.

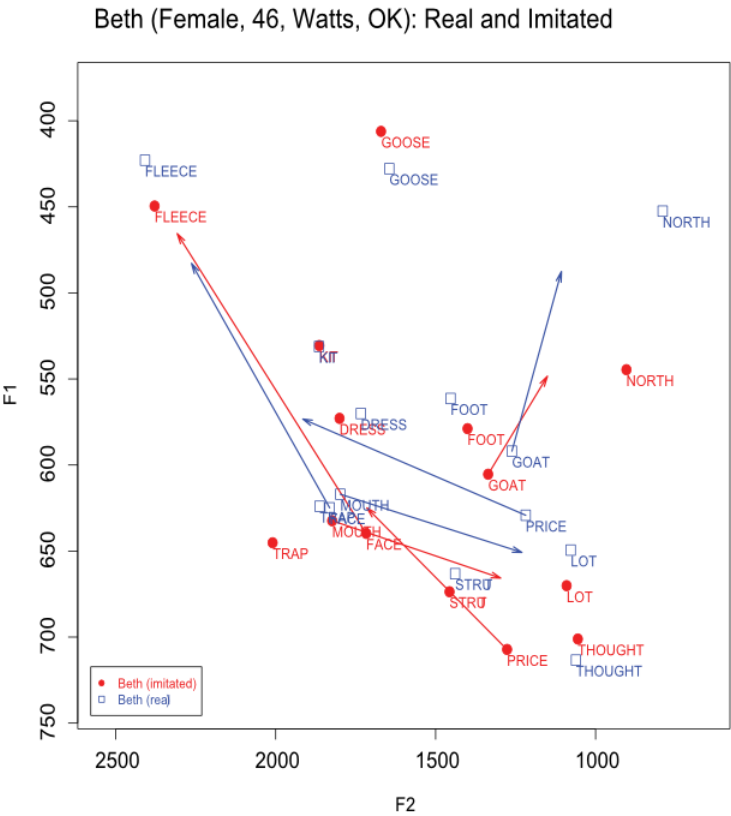


Figure 5. Combined plot of all vowel onset means from both performances

There are several other things to note about the general plot of vowel means. For starters, be aware of the general reversal of DRESS and FACE onset, indicative of the so-called Southern Shift (Figure 6), which is further characterized by the reversal of KIT and FLEECE onset, raising of TRAP, and additional movement of both PRICE and LOT. While Beth's TRAP vowel is noticeably raised (as is her non-significant Real PRICE, see above), and while her DRESS and FACE onsets have changed places, in neither performance do the other Southern Shift-participating vowels undergo characteristic movement. This would indicate that Beth is only a partial participant in the greater Southern Shift. Other Southern features in her vowels include fronting of GOOSE, GOAT, and even FOOT, but these have become widespread throughout the western U.S.

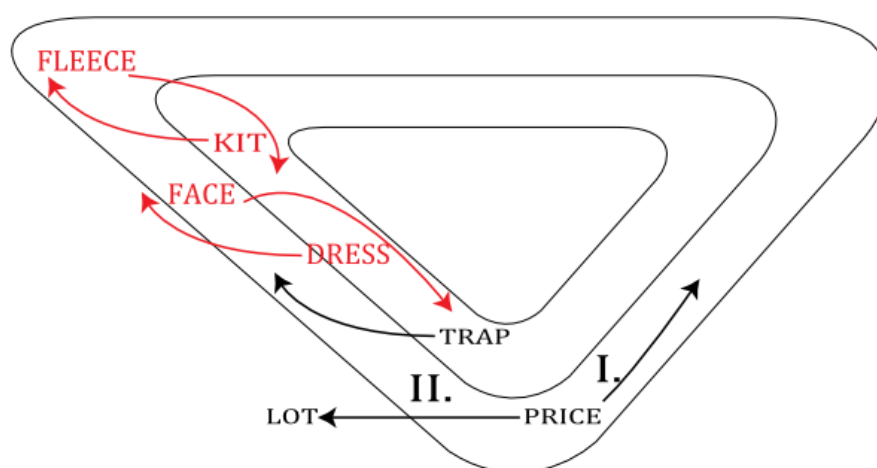


Figure 6. Southern Shift (adapted from Labov, Ash, & Boberg, 2006: 125)

Nevertheless, a careful glance at the vowel means exhibiting significant differences from one performance to another (Figure 7) reveals two interesting implications. First, the centralization of the FACE onset in the Imitated variety places greater diphthongal contrast between the onset and the offglide, with the onset moving closer to STRUT. This more central destination is the expected result of the Southern Shift of FACE. Second, the raising of THOUGHT in the Imitated variety increases the contrast between it and LOT. Merger of these two vowels is a feature of the Southern

Midland, not Southern proper dialects. Thus, the net effect of both of these significant differences is a movement toward what would be expected of Southern speech from one who is only a partial participant in its broader phonological vowel behaviors.

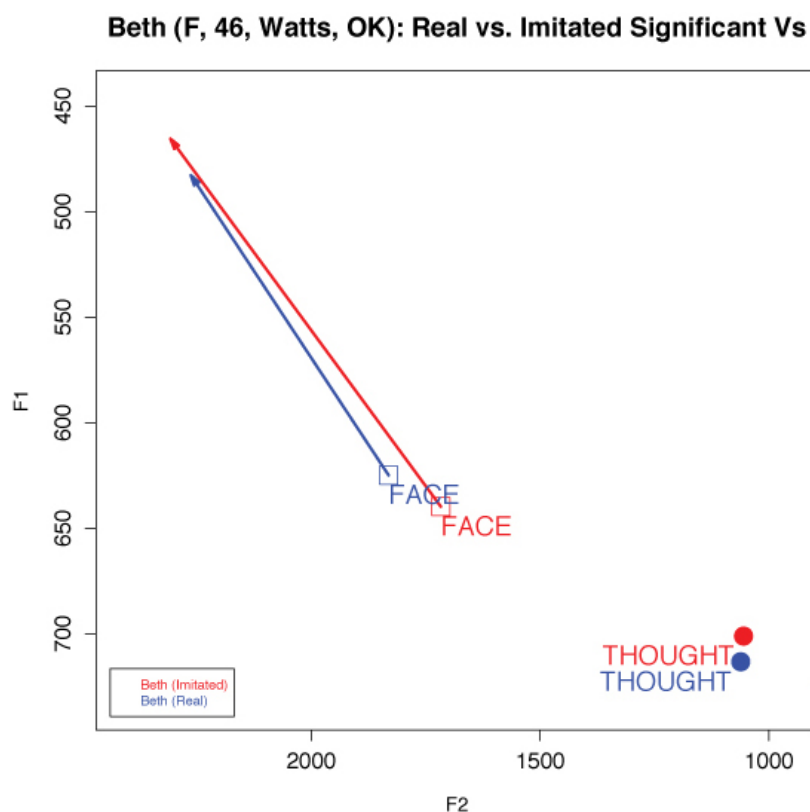


Figure 7. Combined plot of significant vowel onset means from both performances

4. Discussion

4.1 Quantitative Summary

The purpose of this study has been to examine the differences between Beth's two reading passage performances, including evidence of perception and attitudes about the dialects involved. So far, only the quantitative results have been discussed. Key findings from this component have included a number of features about Beth's "real down-home Southern" variety, such as the following: a 10.4% increase in mean word length; a 5.5% increase in mean intensity, 0% realization of [ING] as *-ing*; THOUGHT

raising; FACE onset centralization; and numerous reductions and/or substitutions (e.g., *gonna*, *'em*, *'membered*, *Wally World*). But what do these phenomena have to say about Beth's perceptions of either the Southern Midlands dialect or the relevant dialects of the South?

4.1.1 Perception Implications

To begin with, the word length increase in the Imitated variety is probably a reflection of Beth's perception of the so-called Southern Drawl, which involves, in phonetic terms, the diphthongization of certain historical monophthongs, but which, to the layman, may simply sound like slower speech in general. This may be reinforced by the fact that the Southern monophthongization of PRICE is typically associated with a lengthening of the vowel. Similarly, her general F1 reversal of DRESS and the FACE onset and the subsequent centralization of the FACE onset in the Imitated variety both produce greater contrast between front onsets and offglides, a feature associated with Southern Shift movement and diphthongization of the front diphthongs and historical monophthongs. Her generally raised TRAP also participates in the Southern Shift of front vowels, as does her fronting of GOOSE and GOAT (as well as FOOT, though this is not historically typical of Southern English; cf. Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006: 149). Her Imitated raising of THOUGHT, too, contributes to greater contrast between low back vowels, which have merged in much of the western U.S. but not in the South (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006: 147). All of these features would seem to indicate that Beth perceives herself as something of a Southern speaker, but capable of being much more Southern. It also demonstrates a subtle but nuanced understanding of certain Southern vowel phenomena.

Be aware, however, that other features of Beth's Imitated speech do not necessarily index Southern English. These features include her phonological and lexical reductions and substitutions, including her [ING] realization. Rather, they are usually associated with informal register. This suggests that Beth perceives Southern speakers as being more informal than at least Southern Midlands speakers. Additionally, Beth's Imitated variety was much more forceful (i.e., exhibiting a higher mean intensity) than

her Real variety. Perhaps this reveals perceptual associations with the South and loud talk or possibly even masculinity. More likely, though, this is probably an effect of her excited performance. It is a feature worth bearing in mind, at any rate.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

If the features described above imply certain perceptions about the dialects of Oklahoma, then one should be able to see reinforcement of the attitudes underlying the perceptions elsewhere in Beth's interview. Excerpts 1 through 4 present some such evidence. In sum, she ultimately displays somewhat contradictory attitudes about her local variety and what she identifies as Southern accents throughout her interview, ranging from the negative (Excerpts 1 through 3) to the positive (Excerpt 4). Note that in these excerpts, bolding is used to draw attention to key words and phrases.

With respect to negative attitudes about her normal English variety, Beth describes the situation in which, while living and working at an art gallery in Palo Alto, California, she first became conscious of it (Excerpt 1).

Excerpt 1. Experiences in California and in Oklahoma

1 Beth: It really never occurred to me until I moved out of state. I graduated from
2 college, and went to California after I got my art degree, and I worked in,
3 um, an art studio and framing shop. It was a gallery. And, um, I noticed
4 when I would do customer service out front, people were looking at me
5 strangely. And I really, honestly did not have a clue. Um, and finally one
6 day, I just got really bothered by it and went back to the back to talk to my
7 manager <laughs> about it. And he got really tickled, and he told me. He
8 said, "You really don't <laughs> get it, do you?" And I said, "No. I mean,
9 what?" <sniffs> And he's, he, he explained, you know, that, "Wow, I mean
10 that you really have, um, a Southern accent!" And he was being nice
11 about it, but, basically, he was telling me that I sounded like a hick.
12 <laughs> And, uh, it- And I really never got it until I lived in California for
13 a little while, and had been around Californians, came back here, and then,

14 um, moved back home, and heard how people were talking back here. And,
 15 wow! I thought, 'Oh, my God! That's how I <laughs> sounded to those
 16 people. I get it now.'

In Lines 4-5, Beth reveals evidence of her first negative attitude about her dialect, i.e., that it attracted undesirable attention. While it is at first not apparent to her what is causing this strange behavior of customers, she directly attributes it to her speech in Line 10. It is worth noting that she identifies her dialect here as specifically Southern—or at least she does so through the words of her manager. In the same line, she also describes how his calling her variety Southern was “being nice about it,” but that she in fact sounded “like a hick” (Line 11). In other words, she—not her manager—equates a Southern speech with hicks, a derogatory term for low status rural individuals. She also distances herself from the Californians to whom she sounded strange in Lines 15-16 by referring to them as “those people.” Taken together, this is a largely negative portrayal of her normal language variety, but it also seems to indicate a level of identity with Southern speech that may prove important later on.

Excerpt 2. English in Oklahoma

1 Lily: (continued from Excerpt 1) Uh-huh. Yeah, yeah. Ooh, wow. Okay. What do
 2 native Oklahomans sound like?
 3 Beth: <laughs>
 4 Lily: <laughs>
 5 Beth: <imitating accent> Well! <laughs> Oh, very hick-like! Oh, as an example,
 6 um—and I can say that because I am one—um, you, you know, some of
 7 the things that really stand out to me that I was just clueless about before,
 8 you know, people say things like- And, we just butcher the English
 9 language. Like, instead of 'doesn't' and 'wasn't,' we say 'dudn't' and
 10 'wudn't.' And even when I point that out to people who have lived here,
 11 uh<sniffs>, and are native Oklahomans, they <laughs> say, “No, we don't.”
 12 And I, And I catch them saying it, and point, and point it out to them,
 13 and they're like, “Oh, <laughs> my God! We do that!” “Yes, we do.”

Excerpt 2 also presents numerous negative attitudes about Beth's local English variety, this time much more direct and critical and but as conflicted. When asked by the researcher, Lily (a pseudonym), to describe her own speech and that of fellow Oklahomans, Beth uses harsh language, including "very hick-like" (Line 5) and "we just butcher the English language" (Lines 8-9). She also twice mentions that she "points out" examples of what she considers language butchery to other Oklahomans (Lines 10 and 12) in order to draw their attention to it. Perhaps her impetus for her desire to do so comes from the fact that she only became aware of her "hick-like" speech while living away from other speakers of her variety; her fellow Oklahomans may not have had such experiences and may be "just clueless" (Line 7), as she was before moving to California.

Again, though, notice her statement of identification in Line 6: "I can say that because I am one." Here, as with her use of "those people" to refer to Californians in Excerpt 1, she volunteers evidence of her identity as an Oklahoma speaker. While she does not identify Oklahoma directly with the South in this excerpt, she does so elsewhere. It is also worth pointing out that she equates membership in her speech community with the ability to comment on it using harsh language. This point gets indirect reinforcement from her statement in Excerpt 1 that her manager, presumably not Oklahoman, "was being nice" by calling her accent "Southern" when she interpreted his comment as meaning "that I sounded like a hick." Apparently, Beth makes a division between those who can perceive the "Southern accent" of Oklahoma (i.e., those outside the speech community—recall that, in these excerpts, she and other Oklahomans are not aware of it until pointed out) and those who can comment on it (i.e., those within the speech community).

Excerpt 3 is Beth's final negative critique of Southern speech in Oklahoma. It occurs immediately between the two reading passage performances and serves as her request to record the Imitated variety. Here, she specifically references her upcoming imitation as both "Southern" (Line 3) and "Oklahoma" (Line 5). She also specifically identifies this variety as being "like her brother-in-law" (Line 7), whom she mentions sneeringly in the recording. Furthermore, she expresses what appears to be a statement of expected disbelief in the existence of "dialects that are really severe" (Lines 11 and

13). This statement is ironic given the fact that, aside from nine instances of phonological or lexical reduction or substitution, her two performances—one normal and one “really severe”—require sophisticated instrumentation to distinguish from one another!

Excerpt 3. Do-over request

- 1 Beth: I was really hoping that you would ask me to read this, um, <laughs> the
- 2 way that I thought maybe real, um, <laughs> re- real, real, RE:al
- 3 down-home [Southern-
- 4 Lily: [Okay.
- 5 Beth: [Oklahoma <indistinct>
- 6 Lily: [Well, go ahead! Go ahead! <laughs>
- 7 Beth: Like maybe my brother-in-law, [or, you know-
- 8 Lily: [Oh, all right.
- 9 Beth: Okay. I would love to.
- 10 Lily: Okay.
- 11 Beth: Because there are actually people that really do sound like that, in, uh,
- 12 in my friend [“Shelly”]’s family an’—we were talking about that last night,
- 13 actually, about dialects that are really severe.

Perhaps the most important fact to take away from Excerpt 3 is that, while Beth clearly identifies as an Oklahoman, she does not identify as a “real down-home Southern” Oklahoman. Although this fact is not directly stated in the excerpt, it can easily be inferred from her descriptions of the variety, which are even harsher than her critical descriptions in Excerpt 2. Also worth noting is the fact that Beth, while not identifying as a “real down-home Southern Oklahoma” speaker, suggests by her willingness to perform the variety that she is capable of sounding like such a speaker by changing very little of her normal dialect behaviors. Once again, this would seem to indicate that Beth views this variety as a matter of informal register or style, and not a bona fide dialect in its own right.

There are a number of instances of attitudinally neutral identification with the broader context of Oklahoma dialects. Apart from those mentioned above, including her use of “those people” in Excerpt 1 to refer to Californians and “I can say that because I

am one” in Excerpt 2 to justify her criticism of Oklahoma speech, there’s also a brief exchange in which Lily asks Beth, “Do you think you talk like other Oklahomans?” Beth’s answer is simple: “Yes. I think pretty much, yeah.” While not obviously value-laden, these comments reinforce Beth’s membership in the Oklahoma speech community, which in turn indexes her fundamental identity as an Oklahoman.

On the positive end of the attitudinal spectrum, Beth does offer a heartfelt account of her upbringing that, while not specifically indexing the local speech of Watts, does reinforce her attachment to and identity with her small hometown of Watts (Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4. Recollecting schooldays in Watts

- 1 Beth: Uh-huh. And we didn’t have any art classes in school. And I remember my
2 teachers in that little school were just precious. Um, they saw something
3 early on. <clears throat> And so, <sniffs> because we didn’t have any art
4 classes, they would foster that, uh, in me. And so they would encourage me
5 to make banners for pep rallies and ask me to do their bulletin boards, and
6 then when, um, I, uh, got into high school, um, the teachers actually paying
7 for me to have art lessons in another town.
- 8 Lily: Really?
- 9 Beth: They did.
- 10 Lily: That is just, that’s so wonderful.
- 11 Beth: They did. I could go on and on about that little town and how precious
12 it was to me and those teachers and how caring they were.

Twice in this excerpt (Lines 2 and 11) Beth uses the word “precious” to describe the people and community of Watts, even saying that she “could go on and on about that little town ... and those teachers and how caring they were” (Lines 11 and 12). Clearly, Beth’s attitude toward Watts and its people is one of fondness, regardless of how “down-home” their accent may have been.

5. Conclusion

To summarize, Beth identifies as a Southern Oklahoma speaker, but not as a “real down-home Southern Oklahoma” speaker. The primary reason for this is that she appears to perceive Southern Oklahoma vernacularity as situated along a stylistic scale of more or less formality, the low end of which she terms “severity.” Vowel quality is not especially salient to performance on either end of the scale, but the more “down-home” register is associated with slightly more Southern than Southern Midlands dialect features, including front vowel diphthongization and movement as a result of the Southern Shift, back vowel fronting, and low back contrast. Beth also identifies an out-group/in-group distinction with respect to the Oklahoma speech community, one in which perception of the dialectal variety clearly does *not* equate with the right to evaluate it. In other words, whether or not the local speech is Southern, it is the Oklahoman’s exclusive privilege to comment on it.

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Appendix: Paragraph Elicitation Text

First Time Through: Real

Mike was planning to throw a party on Tuesday night and decided to check his list one more time before he went shopping. He already had plenty of stuff to drink and he had enough plates and cups. His brother Dave was going to bring some fish he'd caught and maybe put them on the grill. Mike thought he should get some chips, pretzels, and a few other snacks to start the meal. He looked around to see if he had anything sweet but then remembered that his friend Linda was baking a cake. When he looked in the cupboard, he saw that he was out of coffee. He wrote it down on his list and hoped it was on sale. Then he went to the garage, got in his truck, and went to the Wal-Mart.

Second Time Through: Imitated

Mike was plannin' to throw a party on Tuesday night, and decided to check his list one more time before he went shoppin'. He already had plenty of stuff to drink and he had enough plates and cups. His brother Dave was gonna bring some fish he'd caught and maybe put 'em on the grill. Mike thought he should get some chips, pretzels, and a few other snacks to start the meal. He looked around to see if he had anything sweet, but then 'membered that his friend Linda was bakin' a cake. When he looked in the cupboard he saw he was out of coffee. He wrote it down on the list and hoped it was on sale. Then he went to the g'rage, got in his truck, and went to Wally World.