

Elizabeth L. Coggshall (NYU)
libby.coggshall@nyu.edu
Paul Ellis (UConn)
ellis@math.uconn.edu

November 5, 2010
NWAV 39
San Antonio, TX

The Sixth Borough? Jersey City's Place in New York City English¹

1. Jersey City as the Sixth Borough of New York City
 - Jersey City, NJ, is located directly across the Hudson river from Lower Manhattan, one of the densest loci of economic activity in the US
 - Linguists have generally lumped Jersey City English the NYC dialect area (e.g., Labov 2007; Labov et al 2006; Wetmore 1959; Bronstein 1962)
 - Fishman et al (1971) does present a detailed study of Spanish in Jersey City in the 1960s
2. History of Jersey City (Shaw 1973; Varacalli 1985; Jersey City Master Plan 1965, 2000):
 - Pre-1850
 - White, Protestant, native-born: Dutch, German, and English; residential suburb; middle/upper class; 1850 Census: 6,856 people

¹ We would like to thank, first and foremost, the Jersey City residents who shared their stories with us. We would also be lost without John Beekman and the other fine people at the New Jersey Room at the Jersey City Library (<http://www.jclibrary.org/service/njroom.php>). We also thank the members of the NYU sociolab for their invaluable input. All mistakes are Paul's.

- 1850-1880:
 - White, mostly Catholic; Immigrants: mostly Irish and Italian, some English and German; working class; 1880 Census: 120,722 people²
 - Urban Center?
 - No influx of middle-class migrants from Lower Manhattan, as other nearby suburbs received.
 - Instead, it became an established urban center, based on industry and railroads.
 - 1880-1947: The Age of the Irish Political Machine
 - Population levels off
 - Boss Mayor Frank Hague 1917-1947
 - 1947-1980:
 - Economic decline; population decline; African-American, Puerto Rican, Polish; White flight; decline of the railroad economy
 - 1980-2010: Economic Recovery?
 - Arab, Indian, West Indian, African, Filipino
 - (Literal) rise of the Jersey City Waterfront
 - New residents who live in JC and work in NYC
 - JC-based finance industry
3. Our Speakers: A Slice of Jersey City
 - All of our White speakers are of German heritage (children or grandchildren of immigrants)
 - Most young White natives left for greener pastures
 - 3 out of 4 of our Black speakers are of Southern heritage

² See Shaw (1973) for a detailed account of the massive political upheaval during this time, including a plan to give control of the city government to the state, just so the Irish wouldn't take over.

4. Interviews

- Classic sociolinguistic interview methods
- Interviews lasted from an hour to two hours; were digitally recorded using a Zoom H2 recorder and a lavalier microphone
- Four speakers (Anna, Dorothy, Joan, and Martha) did not do the reading passage or word lists, and thus these are not used in our analysis

5. Vowels measured

IPA	Word/Environment
/i/	BEET (all environs, except before r, l, and nasals)
/u/	BOOT (all environs, except before r, l, and nasals; and after coronals and j) Also measured TOOT (after coronals) and POOL (before l), but not used in this analysis
/ɑ/	BOT (all environs, except before r, l, and nasals)
/aI/	BITE (before voiceless obstruents); BIDE (before voiced obstruents) Also measured BIND (before nasals), PYRE (before r), and BILE (before l), but not used in this analysis
/aʊ/	BOUT (before voiceless obstruents); BOUGH (before voiced obstruents and in open syllables)
/ɔ/	BOUGHT (all environs, except before r, l, and nasals)
/æ/	BAT (in the environments Labov found to be “lax”, except before velar nasals); BAD (“tense” environments, except before the front nasals); BAN (before front nasals); BANG (before velar nasals)

- At least ten tokens per vowel were measured (if possible)
 - All tokens of /aI/, /aʊ/, /æ/, and /ɔ/ were taken
 - Only two tokens per lexical item were used

- The vowels were measured ~30 ms from the onset and offset, with the help of a Praat script that recorded the values of the first three formants and the F0
- A total of 1,748 vowel tokens were used in the normalization and analysis
- Normalization was done using NORM (Thomas and Kendall 2007), with the Labov ANAE using Telsur G value method

6. Raising and In-Gliding of /ɔ/

- A quintessential NYCE feature (Babbitt 1896; Labov 1966/2006, 1994; Becker 2009, 2010; Coggshall and Becker 2010; Wong 2007; Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner 1972)
 - Coggshall and Becker (2010) show that younger White speakers from NYC are increasingly not using this feature, but African Americans are keeping it alive
 - Wong (2007, 2010) shows that some American-born Chinese in NYC use this feature

7. Results for /ɔ/

Speaker	/ɔ/ F1	Raised?
Dorothy	524	yes
Charlie	558	yes
Anna	568	yes
Martha	569	yes
Terrence	571	yes
Joan	626	yes
Claudette	704	no
Camille	713	no
Lynn	721	no

- A lower F1 equals a higher vowel

- An F1 less than 700 means the vowel is raised, as per Labov et al (2006: 125)
- The oldest White speakers (Dorothy, Charlie, and Anna) have the highest BOUGHT
- Claudette, Camille, and Lynn, all Black, have the lowest BOUGHT
 - Camille spent time in North Carolina (up-gliding BOUGHT country)
 - Lynn spent time in Nebraska (moving towards a low back merger (Labov et al 2006: 61))

8. /aI/ vs. /aʊ/ Nucleus-Glide Differentiation

- In most varieties of American English, the nucleus for /aʊ/ is equal to that of /aI/, in a low, central position; on a vowel plot, these two vowels create a “V”
- Labov (1966/2006) found that, for many NYC speakers, the nucleus of /aʊ/ was moving forward, and the nucleus for /aI/ was moving backwards
 - Labov (1966/2006: 244) refers to this as “nucleus-glide differentiation” because these movements make the nucleus farther from the glide terminus; on a vowel plot, these two vowels create an “X”
- Labov (1994: 49-54) shows that this change started taking place with (mainly White, working class) speakers born around 1900; African Americans were not participating in this change, some even reversing the change
- Coggshall and Becker (2010) found that White New Yorkers had /aI/ nuclei farther back than those of African American New Yorkers

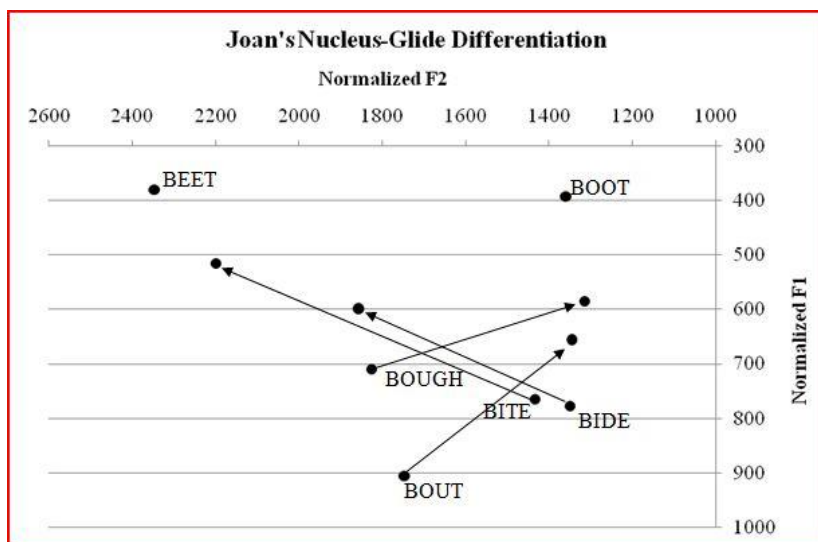
9. Results for Nucleus-Glide Differentiation

Speaker	/aʊ/ onset F2	/aI/ onset F2	/aʊ/-/aI/
Joan	1787	1391	395
Anna	1774	1425	349
Martha	1760	1428	332
Terrence	1682	1423	258
Claudette	1733	1513	220
Charlie	1725	1553	171
Lynn	1620	1453	167
Dorothy	1709	1567	142
Camille	1538	1474	64

- Averaged normalized F2 of BOUT and BOUGH; BITE and BIDE
 - Larger F2 = fronter nucleus
 - The F2 of /aI/ is subtracted from that of /aʊ/ to give an indication of the difference; the larger the number, the bigger the differentiation
- Speakers are arranged from largest difference (Joan) to least (Camille)
 - The three most extreme speakers are Joan, Anna, and Martha, all White
 - The Black speakers are not going in the opposite direction
- BIDE and BOUGH show the most extreme differentiation
 - BIDE is farther back than BITE
 - BOUGH is further front than BOUT

10. An Illustration of Nucleus-Glide Differentiation: Joan

- Joan has the largest difference, and in her vowel chart, we can see the X pattern made by the glide trajectories of /aI/ and /aʊ/ (next page)



Codas That Condition Raising of Short-a in New York City
(from Labov 2007)

p	t	tʃ	k
b	d	dʒ	g
m	n		ŋ
f	θ	s	ʃ
v	ð	z	ʒ
	l	r	

11. The Short-a Split: Labovian vs. Nasal

- The raising of /æ/ in certain environments, known as the short-a split, is a well-studied and complicated aspect of NYCE (Babbitt 1896; Labov 1966/2006, 2007; Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner 1972; Cohen 1970; Trager 1940³; Becker and Wong 2009; Coggshall and Becker 2010; Wong 2007; Becker 2010)
- The basic distinction between “tense” and “lax” (Labov et al 1972) is based on the coda: /æ/ is tensed before voiced stops, voiceless fricatives, and the front nasals; lax elsewhere (Labov 2007:354-5); this is what we refer to as a Labovian split

- But there are many exceptions (see Labov et al 1972: 49-50; Becker and Wong 2009)
- Becker and Wong (2009) show how this system is non-existent in NYC speakers of color, and breaking down among the younger White speakers
- A nasal short-a system (Labov 2007: 353) is pervasive for much of the rest of the US
 - “The most general conditioning factor in the raising of /æ/ is the effect of a following nasal consonant” (Labov et al 2006: 175)
 - A nasal system is also common for African American speakers (Thomas 2001)
- Thomas (2001) suggests /æ/ is moving lower and backer for many White American speakers
- Thomas (2007) suggests a general raising of /æ/ for many African American speakers

³ Trager based his study on speakers from Newark, NJ

12. Results for Short-a

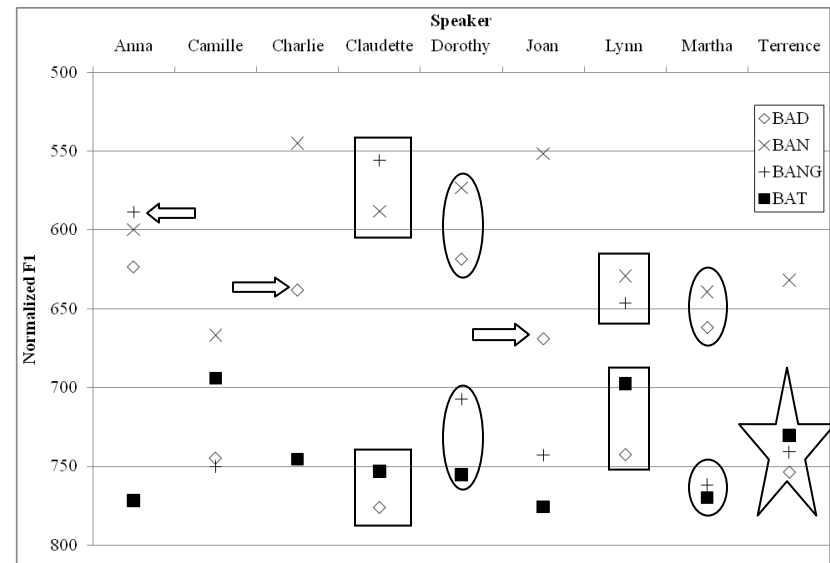
- F1 of onsets are used to compare the different classes (Becker and Wong 2009)
 - A lower F1 is a higher vowel
- BANG based on many fewer tokens than the other classes
 - Charlie had no tokens of BANG

Speaker	BAT	BAD	BAN	BANG	Split?
Anna	772	623	600	587	Labov + BANG
Camille	694	745	667	750	none??
Charlie	745	638	545	n/a	Intermediate Labov
Claudette	753	776	588	556	Nasal
Dorothy	755	618	573	707	Labov
Joan	776	669	552	743	Labov
Lynn	698	743	629	646	Nasal
Martha	770	662	639	762	Intermediate Labov
Terrence	730	754	632	741	Nasal + BANG

- For a Labovian split, the white diamond (BAD) and the X (BAN) would be equally high; the + (BANG) and the black square (BAT) would be equally low, as in Martha and Dorothy (circled)
- For a nasal split, the X (BAN) and the + (BANG) would be equally high; the white diamond (BAD) and the black square (BAT) would be equally low, as in Claudette and, to a lesser extent, Lynn (rectangled)
- Charlie and Joan appear to have a BAD lowering, a step towards losing the short-a split (Becker and Wong

2009); Anna has the short-a split except for BANG being high (the arrows)

- Terrence (starred) has a nasal split in that BAT and BAD are equally low, but BANG is also low; only BAN is raised
- Camille is a mystery; perhaps she has no split at all
- The Black speakers (Camille, Claudette, Lynn, and Terrence) do not appear to have higher /æ/ than the White speakers; quite the opposite in fact, except, perhaps, for the lowest tokens



13. Summary of the findings

Speaker	/ɔ/ Raising?	Nucleus-Glide Differentiation?	Short-a Split?
Anna	Yes	Yes	Labov + BANG
Camille	No	No	None?
Charlie	Yes	Yes?	Intermediate Labov
Claudette	No	Yes?	Nasal
Dorothy	Yes	No?	Labov
Joan	Yes	Yes	Intermediate Labov
Lynn	No	No?	Nasal
Martha	Yes	Yes	Labov
Terrence	Yes	Yes?	Nasal + BANG

- Exceptions to NYCE in **bold**.

14. Why are they using NYCE features?

- We've shown how Jersey City has been and continues to be quite separate from NYC
 - These speakers don't have any motives or anything to gain from using NYCE features
- The stigmatization of NYCE: "we see that most other dialect boundaries of the eastern United States represent the limits of the expansion of prestige patterns, while the New York City boundary represents a circumscription of an area of negative prestige. This is not a recent pattern, but rather one which must date from at least the early part of the nineteenth century." (Labov 1966/2006: 339)
- Johnstone et al's (2002) formulation of place identity would suggest a stronger differentiation of JC from NYC: a site of conflict (between cities, as well as old-timers from the gentrifiers) based on localness
 - Lynn: "I'm proud to be from New Jersey"

15. Why not?

- Perhaps the NYCE dialect region is not as special as we thought: stigmatization, schtigmatization
- Perhaps we're not looking at the right features: Other features may not conform as neatly
- Perhaps the label is NYCE a misnomer, and these features are indicative of a larger, regional place identity

References

- Babbitt, E.H. 1896. The English of the lower classes in New York City and vicinity. *Dialect Notes* 1: 457-464.
- Becker, Kara. 2009. Is coffee talk lost? BOUGHT-raising on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Paper presented at NWAV 38. Ottawa.
- Becker, Kara. 2010. *Regional Dialect Features on the Lower East Side of New York City: Sociophonetics, Ethnicity, and Identity*. PhD dissertation, New York University.
- Becker, Kara, and Amy Wing-mei Wong. 2009. The short-a system of New York City English: An update. *Penn Working Papers in Linguistics* 15.2: 11-20.
- Bronstein, Arthur J. 1962. Let's take another look at New York City speech. *American Speech* 37: 13-26.
- Coggshall, Elizabeth L., and Kara Becker. 2010. The vowel phonologies of African American and White New York City residents. In M. Yaeger-Dror and E. R. Thomas, eds. *African American English Speakers and their Participation in Local Sound Changes: A Comparative Study*. A Publication of the American Dialect Society # 94. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press. 101-128.
- Cohen, Paul. 1970. *The Tensing and Raising of Short (a) in the Metropolitan Area of New York City*. MA thesis, Columbia University.

- Fishman, Joshua A., Robert L. Cooper, and Roxana Ma Newman. 1971. *Bilingualism in the Barrio*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Johnstone, Barbara, Neeta Bhasin, and Denise Wittkofski. 2002. "Dahntahn" Pittsburgh: Monophthongal /aw/ and representations of localness in southwestern Pennsylvania. *American Speech* 77.2: 148-166.
- Labov, William. 1966/2006. *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*. NYC: CUP.
- Labov, William. 1994. *Principles of Linguistic Change: Internal Factors*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Labov, William. 2007. Transmission and diffusion. *Language* 83.2: 344-387.
- Labov, William, Sharon Ash, and Charles Boberg. 2006. *The Atlas of North American English*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Labov, William, Malcah Yaeger, and Richard Steiner. 1972. *A Quantitative Study of Sound Change in Progress*. Philadelphia: US Regional Survey.
- Liebling, A. J. 1971. *The Earl of Louisiana*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Shaw, Douglas Vincent. 1973. *The Making of an Immigrant City: Ethnic and Cultural Conflict in Jersey City, New Jersey*. PhD dissertation, University of Rochester.
- Thomas, Erik R. 2001. *An Acoustic Analysis of Vowel Variation in New World English*. A Publication of the American Dialect Society #85. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Thomas, Erik R. 2007. Phonological and phonetic characteristics of African American Vernacular English. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 1.5: 450-475.
- Thomas, Erik R. and Tyler Kendall. 2007. NORM: The vowel normalization and plotting suite. [Online Resource: <http://ncslaap.lib.ncsu.edu/tools/norm/>].
- Trager, George L. 1940. One phonemic entity becomes two: The case of "short a." *American Speech* 15.3: 255-258.
- Varacalli, Joseph. 1985. Ethnic politics in Jersey City: The changing nature of Irish-Italian relations, 917-1981. In F. X. Feminella, ed. *Italians and Irish in America*. Staten Island, NY: American Italian Historical Association. 199-224.
- Wetmore, Thomas H. 1959. *The Low-Central and Low-Back Vowels in the Eastern United States*. Publication of the American Dialect Society #32. University, AL: University of Alabama Press.
- Wong, Amy Wing-mei. 2010. New York City English and second generation Chinese Americans. *English Today* 103.26 (3): 3-11.
- Wong, Amy. 2007. Two vernacular features in the English of four American-born Chinese. *Penn Working Papers in Linguistics* 13.2: 217-230.

Appendix A: Table of Speakers

Speaker	Year of Birth	Ethnicity	Neighborhood	Education	Job	Other Places Lived	Relationship to NYC
Charlie	1931	White (German)	Downtown	high school	autoworker in Newark		none
Anna	1918	White (German)	Downtown	College	teacher		none
Dorothy	1921	White (German)	Downtown	College	teacher		Went to NYU
Joan	1951	White (German)	Greenville	College	teacher	western NJ	Hung out as teenager
Martha	1955	White (German)	Greenville	College	physical therapy	The Bronx	moved to the Bronx
Lynn	1961	Black (African American)	Greenville	some college	unemployed	Nebraska, Asbury Park, NJ	worked there
Terrence	1964	Black (African American)	Greenville	some college	IT	Asbury Park, NJ	hung out as teenager
Claudette	1971	Black (African/Haitian)	Duncan Projects	College	unemployed		hangs out there, worked there
Camille	1984	Black (African American)	Marion Gardens Projects	College	health	North Carolina	repulsion

Appendix B: Table of (Normalized) Results, onsets only

Vowel	BEET		BOT		BOOT		BIDE		BITE		BOUT		BOUGH		BOUGHT		BAT		BAD		BAN		BANG	
Speaker	F1	F2	F1	F2	F1	F2	F1	F2	F1	F2	F1	F2	F1	F2	F1	F2	F1	F2	F1	F2	F1	F2	F1	F2
Anna	462	2155	705	1418	476	1063	632	1316	789	1534	820	1799	779	1749	568	1146	772	1783	623	1980	600	2002	587	1824
Camille	432	2312	742	1337	430	825	750	1461	611	1488	735	1464	720	1612	713	1116	694	1862	745	1799	667	2118	750	2077
Charlie	381	2298	762	1465	397	1040	746	1436	771	1671	765	1797	781	1653	558	1142	745	1844	638	2005	545	2186	n/a	n/a
Claudette	386	2564	808	1383	413	1285	792	1386	686	1639	816	1677	781	1789	704	1130	753	1911	776	1766	588	2360	556	2395
Dorothy	405	2506	680	1439	397	1227	734	1486	790	1649	856	1620	839	1799	524	1314	755	1965	618	2157	573	2304	707	1844
Joan	380	2347	788	1381	392	1360	777	1349	765	1433	710	1825	710	1825	626	1018	776	1786	669	1957	552	2196	743	2038
Lynn	399	2219	816	1276	477	1140	797	1386	729	1521	820	1553	747	1686	721	1113	698	1733	743	1723	629	1985	646	2089
Martha	413	2341	763	1310	512	1101	744	1378	755	1477	786	1759	815	1760	569	1181	770	1743	662	1930	639	2023	762	1694
Terrence	444	2432	770	1404	473	1127	745	1341	765	1505	744	1573	795	1790	571	967	730	1800	754	1827	632	2166	741	1849