

Raising on the Rise in Vancouver: Ideological Factors and Sociolinguistic Variation

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Pre-voiceless Canadian Raising of /aʊ/ (Chambers 1973), despite acoustic variation in its realization across Canada and despite its attestations in the Northern U.S. (Vance 1987, Dailey-O’Cain 1997, Niedzielski 1999), remains the stereotypical, most cited diagnostic to distinguish U.S. dialects of English from Canadian ones. Nonetheless, the expansive dialects labeled “the West” and “Canada” are notably difficult to differentiate and have only recently begun to be explored as internally variable entities (Boberg 2010, Boberg 2008, Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006, Fridland et al. 2016). Using data from eight speakers from Washington State and British Columbia, Sadlier-Brown (2012) argues that Canadian Raising, primarily the height of /aʊ/ raising, does reliably differentiate Canadian speakers from their American neighbors. Other studies have described /aʊ/ fronting as a change in progress and considered its relevance to raising (Chambers 1981, Hung et al. 1993, Rosenfelder 2005, Hall 2016). Chambers (2006) observes, however, that this fronting pattern has had little effect on weakening the Raising phenomenon overall. Hall (2016) finds overall more fronting of /aʊ/ in Toronto than in Vancouver, particularly among men. She speculates that /aʊ/ fronting may be nearing completion. Finally, Easson (1997) comments on the general lack of social awareness or consciousness speakers have for raised /aʊ/, finding little difference between stylistic contexts like word-list and free interview speech.

The current study revisits the acoustic and social realities of /aʊ/ for Seattle and Vancouver speakers. Does raised (and fronted) /aʊT/ consistently distinguish Vancouver and Seattle talkers? In Vancouver, do patterns among age and sex subgroups suggest a change in progress with respect to fronting or raising? How do ideological or attitudinal factors affect /aʊ/ realizations? The study analyzes 16,545 tokens of /aʊ/ taken from a word-list reading task completed by 19 Vancouver and 20 Seattle talkers along with their responses to sociocultural interview questions. Formant measurements for F1 and F2 were extracted at five time-proportional points along the duration of the diphthong, and the data were Lobanov normalized (Lobanov 1971, Adank et al. 2004). Trajectory shapes were compared in the mixed-effects linear regression models for F1 and F2 by making an ordered factor in R.

As Chambers (2006) points out, Canadian Raising of /aʊT/ has remarkably not weakened among Canadian speakers, despite changes in its acoustic manifestation. The current data suggest that raising may be on the rise among women and younger speakers in Vancouver. While Seattle talkers do show significant differences between /aʊT/ and /aʊD/, they demonstrate weaker, less phonologized patterns of raising than Vancouver talkers. Thus, raising continues to act as a valid differentiator for these Canadian and U.S. dialects. For Vancouver, the analysis reveals substantial and significant differences for /aʊT/ compared to /aʊD/, which are large enough to be auditorily perceptible (90 Hz). Women and younger speakers show characteristics of greater /aʊT/ raising and greater differentiation of their /aʊT/ and /aʊD/ tokens, but all sub-groups are participating robustly in phonologized /aʊT/ raising. The role of F2 in /aʊ/ raising is less clear and may be subject to greater variation between speakers and speaker sub-groups than F1. Based on significantly higher F2 values for women and younger speakers, more /aʊT/ raising may be accompanied by more /aʊT/ fronting. While Vancouver speakers rarely offer metalinguistic commentary about Canadian Raising as a feature of their speech, speaker responses to ideological cultural questions do act as a significant predictor of linguistic behavior for /aʊ/ raising. Specifically, higher ratings of national pride predict significantly lower F1 values for /aʊT/ relative to /aʊD/, indicating more contextual raising. Findings from this study confirm that,

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/aʊT/ raising indexes nationality, and despite a lack of overt and explicit commentary about Canadian Raising, a link between Canadian pride and raising does exist for Vancouver talkers.

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