

Adult linguistic stability and the gathering of linguistic evidence

David Bowie
University of Central Florida
Department of English
dbowie@pegasus.cc.ucf.edu

International Conference on Linguistic Evidence
3 February 2006

METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS IN LINGUISTICS

- ▶ Certain methodological assumptions must be satisfied
- ▶ Many of these are so obvious they remain unstated
- ▶ Two examples
 - ▶ Grammaticality judgments must use native speaker intuitions
 - ▶ A sociolinguistic study of a variety must use examples of that variety
- ▶ Other assumptions are less obvious

THE ASSUMPTION OF ADULT LINGUISTIC STABILITY

- ▶ Grows out of the apparent time construct
- ▶ Claims that speakers remain essentially linguistically stable
 - ▶ Limited to adult lifespan
 - ▶ Assumes no significant external pressure on the linguistic system
 - ▶ Incompletely tested
- ▶ Studies have come to conflicting conclusions
- ▶ May be limited to core systems (e.g., phonology, not lexicon)

TESTING THE ASSUMPTION

- ▶ Two studies of Waldorf, Maryland
- ▶ Study of /aɪ/-monophthongization
 - ▶ Builds on earlier apparent-time analysis
 - ▶ Adds data from an oral history archive and the LAMSAS survey
- ▶ Study of intraspeaker variation
 - ▶ Uses data from three speakers, each interviewed twice
 - ▶ Interviews occurred just under 1½ years apart
 - ▶ Nobody (interviewer or interviewees) knew they were re-interviews

WALDORF

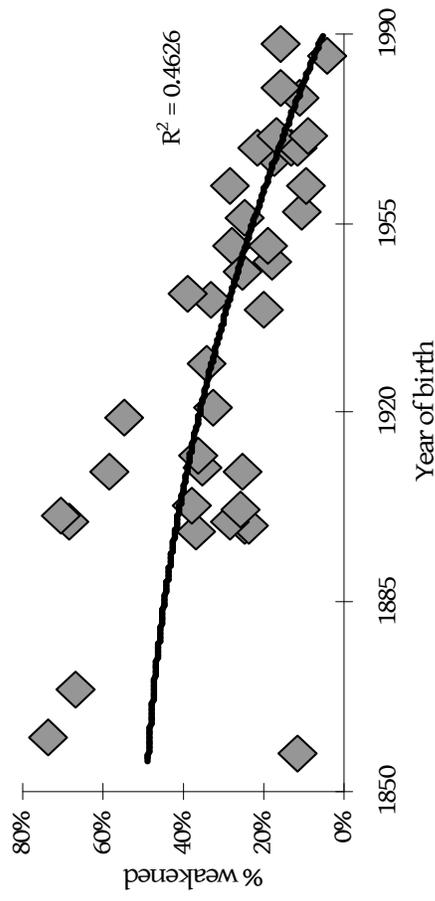
- ▶ Medium-sized city (population 55,691) in Maryland, USA
- ▶ Located 23 miles south-southeast of Washington DC
- ▶ Several Southern American English features present

/aɪ/-MONOPHTHONGIZATION DATA

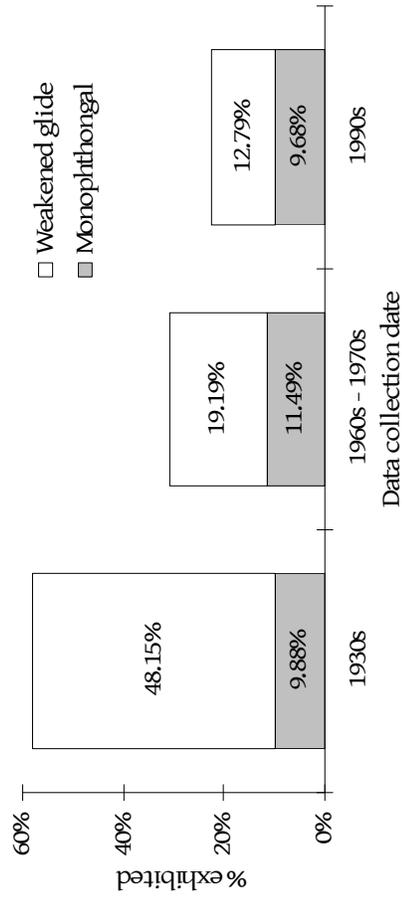
- ▶ My earlier apparent-time analysis (collected 1990s)
 - ▶ 25 speakers born 1909 to 1980
- ▶ Southern Maryland Studies Center oral histories (collected 1960s/1970s)
 - ▶ 9 speakers born 1898 to 1912
- ▶ LAMSAS survey data (collected 1930s)
 - ▶ 5 speakers born between 1857 and 1901

/aɪ/-MONOPHTHONGIZATION RESULTS

- ▶ By year of birth (i.e., apparent time)



- ▶ By year of data collection (i.e., real time)



- ▶ Logistic regression shows separate effects of real and apparent time
- ▶ Real time measures have at least as strong an effect as apparent time

INTRASPEAKER VARIATION DATA

- ▶ 3 speakers interviewed as part of a larger study
- ▶ All lower middle-class Euro-American lifelong residents of Waldorf
- ▶ Pseudonyms: Theona (b. 1919), Elise (b. 1946), and Helen (b. 1978)
- ▶ Interviewed 1997 and 1998
- ▶ Initial 10 to 15 minutes of each interview were used
- ▶ All data came from informal chatting and gossiping
- ▶ Every stressed vowel was selected and acoustically analyzed
- ▶ Helen: 605 (1997) and 530 (1998) tokens
- ▶ Elise: 512 (1997) and 442 (1998) tokens
- ▶ Theona: 397 (1997) and 345 (1998) tokens

INTRASPEAKER VARIATION RESULTS

- ▶ All results compare each individual's interview with the re-interview
- ▶ Changed vowel classes marked with ⇄ (p<.01) or ⇄ (p<.001)

Helen	▶ i ⇄	▶ IC	▶ IN	▶ e ⇄
▶	▶ εC ⇄	▶ εN ⇄	▶ æC ⇄	▶ æN
▶	▶ ai	▶ aiT	▶ aiT	▶ a ⇄
▶	▶ oL ⇄	▶ Λ ⇄	▶ o#	▶ oC
Elise	▶ i ⇄	▶ IC	▶ IN	▶ e
▶	▶ εC	▶ εN	▶ æC ⇄	▶ ai
▶	▶ ai	▶ a ⇄	▶ aiR ⇄	▶ oL ⇄
▶	▶ Λ ⇄	▶ o#	▶ oC	
Theona	▶ i ⇄	▶ IC	▶ IN	▶ e
▶	▶ εC	▶ æC	▶ ai ⇄	▶ ai
▶	▶ Λ ⇄	▶ o# ⇄	▶ oC ⇄	▶ oR

- ▶ Changed variables of interest
- ▶ Long-o word-finally vs. word-internally
- ▶ Helen and Theona: Consistently no difference by environment
- ▶ Elise: Change from more word-final fronting to no difference
- ▶ Raising of /ai/ before voiceless obstruents
- ▶ Helen: Change from raising to no raising
- ▶ The *pin-pen* merger
 - ▶ Elise: Change from maintaining distinction to merger
 - ▶ Helen: Consistent maintenance of distinction
- ▶ Raising and fronting of short-*a* before nasals
 - ▶ Helen: Consistent raising and fronting
- ▶ Speakers are inconsistent over even a relatively short period of time

SO WHAT?

- ▶ Adult linguistic production is unstable
- ▶ It is unclear whether production truly changes or is simply inconsistent
- ▶ Data from speakers needs to be viewed with caution
 - ▶ This is equally true for *all* subfields of linguistics
 - ▶ This may be true of perceptual data, as well
- ▶ Data from one individual at one point in time is always inconclusive
- ▶ It is unclear whether averaging behavior over time would be helpful
- ▶ We have very little knowledge of the distribution of linguistic behavior
- ▶ Some crucial needs
 - ▶ A closer investigation of the distribution of linguistic behaviors
 - ▶ At the individual level: From point in time to point in time
 - ▶ At the communal level: Distribution of individuals' behaviors
 - ▶ A comparison of linguistic behaviors
 - ▶ Whether some behaviors are more malleable than others
 - ▶ Whether all linguistic behaviors have similar distributions
- ▶ Fulfilling these needs will allow stronger generalizations
- ▶ Fulfilling these needs will ensure claims more accurately reflect reality

SELECTED REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Bailey, Guy. 2005. Real and apparent time. In J.K. Chambers, Peter Trudgill, & Natalie Schilling-Estes, eds. *The handbook of language variation and change*, 312-332. ---, Tom Wikle, Jan Tillery, & Lori Sand. 1991. The apparent time construct. *Language variation and change* 3:241-264.
- Blondeau, Hélène. 2001. Real-time changes in the paradigm of personal pronouns in Montreal French. *Journal of sociolinguistics* 5:453-474.
- Bowie, David. 2001. The diphthongization of /ay/: Abandoning a Southern norm in Southern Maryland. *Journal of English linguistics* 29:329-345.
- . 2005. Language change over the lifespan: A test of the apparent time construct. In Suzanne Evans Wagner, ed. *Papers from NAWAV 33*, 45-58.
- Labov, William. 1981. What can be inferred about change in progress from synchronic descriptions? In David Sankoff & Henrietta Cedergren, eds. *Variation omnibus*, 177-200.
- . 1989. The child as linguistic historian. *Language variation and change* 1:85-97.
- Nahkola, Kari & Marja Saanilahti. 2004. Mapping language changes in real time: A panel study on Finnish. *Language variation and change* 16:75-92.
- Sankoff, Gillian, Hélène Blondeau, & Anne Charity. 2001. Individual roles in a real-time change: Montreal (r->R) 1947-1995. *Etudes & travaux* 4:141-157.
- Tillery, Jan & Guy Bailey. 2003. Approaches to real time in dialectology and sociolinguistics. *World Englishes* 22:351-365.

I would like to thank the Southern Maryland Studies Center at the College of Southern Maryland in La Plata, Maryland for allowing me to use their oral history archive for part of this study.