

"Southern Accent" features in local news in both the Deep South and Southern periphery: Comparing Meridian, Mississippi to Tallahassee, Florida

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A comparison of two media markets and their phonological Southern United States English (SUSE) features found that Meridian, Mississippi, a 'Deep South' market, had more representations for SUSE features than a Southern periphery market of Tallahassee, Florida. 20 total broadcasters were included in this sample, with both markets including four anchors, two meteorologists, one sports anchor, and three investigative reporters. Mississippi broadcasters led in the SUSE feature of the PIN-PEN merger, quantified via Pillai score of 0.047, where a lower number indicates a stronger merger than Florida's 0.148. Mississippi broadcasters retained more of the Southern Vowel Shift (SVS), highlighted by a closer /e/-/ɛ/ proximity and a more distinct /a/-/ɔ/. These tendencies were even more apparent when preceding non-sonorant consonants, an important marker when comparing dialect features (Becker 2019). However, going against the hypothesis of a 'Deep South' market leading in all SVS features, Florida broadcasters (484 Hz) narrowly led Mississippi (489 Hz) in a more glide weakened /aɪ/, measured in Euclidean distance from the 20% duration to the 80% duration. While there existed instances of a purely monophthongal /aɪ/, most pronunciations were more diphthongal, which was likely due to the social salience of this stigmatized SUSE form (Labov et al. 2006). The only statistically significant predictor of /aɪ/ glide weakening was job title, where $p = 0.012$. For both markets, it was the sports anchors among all other job titles who led in the most glide weakened /aɪ/, possibly indexing covert prestige with SUSE pronunciations tied to their specific topic. For both markets, it was the investigative reporters who had the *least* glide weakened /aɪ/, likely because they occupy an entry level position among the on-camera broadcasters and they may seek to be hired in another, possibly non-Southern market and would avoid the socially salient glide weakened /aɪ/.

1. Introduction

In this phonological study of local news in the U.S. South, a comparison was made between one affiliate in the 'Deep South' and one on the periphery of the Southern dialect region for their representation of Southern United States English (SUSE) phonological features. Clear contrasts were expected. A city in the center of the region, Meridian, Mississippi (MS) was expected to lead in SUSE forms compared to a city in the edge of what is culturally considered the South: Tallahassee, Florida (FL). Both Mississippi and Alabama are consistently ranked the highest

for an emblematic Southern state (Elliot & Ionescu 2003) and both states are represented in the media market of Meridian, Mississippi (Media Market Map 2022). The Panhandle of Florida is seen as the boundary for what is culturally considered the South (Munzenrieder 2015) and the Tallahassee market covers part of the Florida Panhandle and part of southern Georgia (Media Market Map 2022). These expectations of MS leading FL in SUSE features will be explored solely phonetically, rather than morphosyntactic or lexical variation. The SVS schema that will be used to determine the presence or absence of Southern features comes primarily from the *Atlas of North American English* and their description of 'Southern accent' features found throughout the U.S. South (Labov, Ash & Boberg 2006)

This work is being done to quantify representation for 'Southern accent' features to Southern audiences. SUSE is the most widely stigmatized regional dialect in the U.S. (Lippi-Green 2012); Preston's work on perceptual dialectology has found that speech in the Southern states is rated as most "different" and least "correct" (Preston 1996). Given the national stigma SUSE has, how often can Southerners still hear SUSE directed to their own local markets? An unmarked, transregional dialect of Mainstream American English (MAE) may be favored over the localized features of SUSE. As Eckert (2018) explains, while some varieties like MAE may have *global prestige* that make it generally favored in all circumstances, *local prestige* may still exist for a marked variety when spoken in its own localized area. To test whether a difference exists between a core and peripheral area of the Southern region, Eckert's (2018) advice will be taken here that "linguists should be focusing not on centers, but on borders" (p.69); the borders of dialect areas are a context where the speakers are more aware of the meaning behind linguistic variation. Due to the Sunbelt Migration for the past several decades (Glaeser & Tobio 2008), these local audiences may comprise of a large contingent of non-Southerners, which could further reduce the presence of SUSE features on these broadcasts here in the 2020s.

It must be noted that the speech data here do not represent purely spontaneous speech, but rather the broadcasters mostly read this speech from a teleprompter. However, there is value in researching performed language. The focus of this study is representation of a stigmatized variety and the ideology behind who is and who is not hired to appeal to these local Southern markets. Queen (2013) advocates for the value in performed language, especially how the representation of features reflects society's ideology toward any given variety. Also importantly, Queen states that the more specified the intended audience, the more likely the variants used are authentic. The two markets explored here are outside of

major Southern metropolises like Atlanta or Charlotte because those larger markets would be expected to have a large contingent of their audience to *not* have roots in the South. As the two Southern markets in the present study are smaller in size than most media markets in the U.S. (Media Market Map 2022), the broadcasters have the opportunity to be more authentic in order to appeal to a more specialized audience. Regionalized speech does have positive aspects for ratings of friendliness, authenticity, and integrity (Edwards & Jacobsen 1987), all of which would appear to be qualities that would be favorable for television personalities seeking to appeal to audiences in their own living rooms. This study explores a duality of a ‘Southern accent’ in that it is generally stigmatized as being “less intelligent”, but it still rates higher for solidarity scores like authenticity (Preston & Robinson 2005).

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Southern Vowel Shift

For all regionalized speech features in the United States, it is the South that is the “touchstone of dialect recognition” (Preston & Robinson 2005). For what most people would refer to as a “Southern accent” is a series of phonetically identifiable characteristics within a vowel space. Although there are identifiable dialect features of the dynamic vowel trajectories of monophthongs (Stanley 2020), the focus of the analyses here will be the F1/F2 plots of vowels and their relation to each other for both individual and composite vowel plots. Labov et al. (2006) describe the schema that differentiates SUSE from other North American dialects as the SVS, which primarily affects the front vowels but also causes back vowels to shift forward in the vowel space. Another well-known feature of SUSE is a pre-conditioned merger of /ɪ/ and /ɛ/ before nasals. Not only did Labov et al. (2006) find this feature throughout the South, but it extended into some Midland areas of the country as well. Austen’s (2020) more recent study also found this feature prominent in the South, and African Americans led in this conditioned merger. As Brown (1991) describes, the PIN-PEN merger has “long been associated with American Southern *and* Black English Vernaculars” (1991, p. 303). [emphasis my own] The most socially salient feature of SUSE is the glide weakening of the phoneme /aɪ/, which is the first of three stages of the SVS (Labov et al. 2006). Not only is /aɪ/ more monophthongal than other regional varieties, but the nucleus of the vowel is also more fronted in the vowel space. This raised and fronted vowel causes the front lax vowels /æ, ɛ, ɪ/ to be raised higher in the vowel space. Stage II of the SVS is the raising of /ɛ/, along with the retraction and lowering of the tense vowel of /e/; Stage II is

complete when lax /ɛ/ is higher in the vowel space than its tense counterpart of /e/. Allbritten (2011) found that in participant ratings of accentedness, a closer /e/-/ɛ/ proximity, Stage II of the SVS, was an even stronger predictor of higher “Southern” ratings than Stage I of the SVS, the glide weakening of /aɪ/. Stage III of the SVS is the less attested closer proximity of /i/-/ɪ/ that was only found in the “Inland South” subregion in ANAE (Labov et al. 2006). Neither market in the present study is located in the “Inland South”. This schema will not be tested here among the Southern on-camera broadcasters to gauge their fidelity to the SVS. While the SVS causes the raising of the front lax vowels, mainstream speech in North America is showing a gradual process of another vowel shift, the Low Back Merger Shift (LBMS) that causes lowering and retraction of the same three front lax vowels. The triggering event of the LBMS is the near-merger of the back vowels /ɑ/-/ɔ/ (Becker 2019), which leaves a void in the vowel space where the front vowels retract. As Figures 1 and 2 establish below, the SVS and LBMS are mirror opposites in most respects, which allows for sharp distinctions possible to discern who is a “Southern shifted” speaker and who is not.

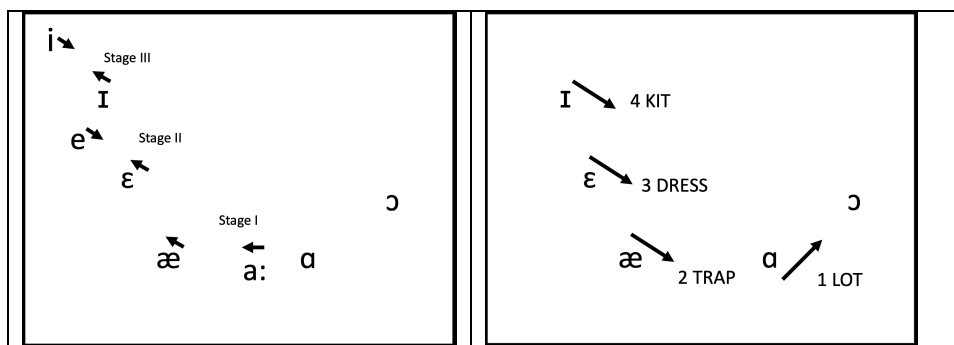


Figure 1. Southern Vowel Shift

Figure 2. Low Back Merger Shift

2.2. Southern Stigma

One cannot separate a “Southern accent” from the general stigma behind it. Even though there are positive qualities of solidarity associated with SUSE, there are pervasive attitudes towards this dialect’s association with unintelligence (Lippi-Green 2012). In language attitude studies “kind but unintelligent” was found to be an emblematic association of SUSE (Allbritten 2011:170). In an exploration of another peripheral area of the Southern dialect, but at its northern boundary (rather than the southern boundary), Cramer found that Louisville, Kentucky residents stated that their city was “not as *bad* as so far as accent-wise” [emphasis my own] (Cramer 2013:155). These phenomena of general stigmatization may contribute to what has been observed as a receding Southern accent, even

among those with roots in the area. Dodsworth & Benton (2017) described a generational decline for Southern features in an urban area in North Carolina. Chung's (2020) study found that among college students in Louisiana with Southern familial backgrounds, most of SUSE features were either muted or absent.

In an exploration of accent representation in media, Dragojevic et al. (2016) observed 89 randomly selected show in primetime TV of scripted and reality shows and found that a non-standard¹ native variety of North American English was only present in 6.5% of speakers; in addition to being grossly underrepresented, non-Standard speakers were found to be *misrepresented* as more overweight, less intelligent, and least praised. Those findings back up what was found for SUSE speakers being portrayed mostly negatively on television from decades ago (Harkins 2001). Media has the power to reinforce stereotypes, as well as silence speakers through underrepresentation. Boberg's (2021) study of accent in North American film and television throughout several decades found that phonological patterns in media, in their attempt to appeal to audiences, had largely reflected sound change patterns in diachronic analyses from the earliest to the most contemporary observations. Among Boberg's findings was that SUSE was found to be in a general decline from actors from the South. This decline among Southern actors was largely led by women. Labov (2001) states that cross culturally and cross linguistically, women tend to adhere to standard language features more generally when norms are overtly described, as in the case of general stigma of SUSE. Change away from the SVS has been led by women in several studies (Dodsworth & Benton 2017; Dodsworth & Kohn 2012; Fridland 2001). Quantifying SUSE features from Southern speakers in this study comes from on-air broadcasters in a professional setting. Bell's (1991) sociolinguistic work on language in the news media has found that broadcasters do, in fact, style shift. That phenomenon was partially dependent on the size of their audience, as larger audiences received more so-called "standard" language. The same broadcaster would use more casual features, such as a flapped /t/ word medially, when speaking to a smaller audience in New Zealand than when speaking to a national audience. In the UK, there was a notable occurrence where a BBC anchor was officially asked via email to "moderate" her Welsh accent (BBC 2017). Linguistic discrimination is an unfortunate condition of life in many arenas. If SUSE features are not widely heard in smaller Southern markets, then the ongoing diffusion of local features may be accelerating.

¹ This categorization of a non-standard native variety of North American English included not only SUSE, but also speakers of NYC English, eastern New England, the Upper Midwest and African American English.

Stuart-Smith et al. (2013) found that Glasgow residents' engagement in a London-based dramatic TV series aided in non-local dialect features propagating, stating that television can be a factor in linguistic change for how it not only just reflects, but *propagates* change.

3. Methodology

Recordings from these two affiliates came in consecutive months in late 2020 and then early 2021, with Tallahassee broadcasts recorded from December-January and Meridian from February-March. Local affiliates stream their live broadcasts for free on their website and screen capture software² was used to record the live broadcasts. Each recording had to be edited so that each individual speaker had their own individual sound file for each broadcast. Anchors, meteorologists, and sports anchors each averaged approximately 30 minutes of speech that was analyzed phonetically. To get a range of phonetic environments, no "repeat segments" were included within a speaker's sample for a single episode. Three investigative reporters from each affiliate were also recorded and edited to create their own sound file, but each investigative reporter only typically spoke for between one and two minutes per broadcast during their segment and these speakers had the smallest sample size. The reporters averaged about 15 minutes of speech data. For every job title, whichever persons were given the most airtime were the ones who were chosen to be featured in this study. This was not only for convenience. If the affiliate featured those speakers more, then those are who the audience would hear more often and thus would make for better participants in the current study. In addition to occupation title and geographic region, SUSE features will also be explored via age, ethnicity, and gender.

For the 20 speakers to be analyzed phonetically, the edited sound files needed to be transcribed. Google Docs provides free transcription for voice to text that was used for all speakers, with the researcher double checking each transcription for fidelity. The transcriptions and corresponding sound files were uploaded to DARLA (Reddy & Stanford 2015) to ascertain the vowel formants for all stressed vowels. 40,010 stressed vowel formants were provided by DARLA and allowed for precise measurements for not only the mean F1 and F2 frequencies, but duration and the trajectories at the 20%, 35%, 50%, 65%, and 80% marks of all vowels. All speakers had to be normalized to make apt comparisons for several different speakers, each with their own vocal tract. All speech was normalized using the *vowels* package in R (R Core Team 2018;

² <https://filmora.wondershare.com/>

Kendall & Thomas 2011) and done via the Labov ANAE (speaker extrinsic) method, which is an effective method when normalizing several speakers (Thomas & Kendall 2007). The ANAE method also gives its output in Hz, which is consistent with the input and allows for direct comparisons for distances between vowel phonemes among several speakers.

4. Findings

4.1. Vowel Plots

An aim of this study was to gauge whether the broadcasters had tendencies towards local SUSE features or non-local mainstream speech features. The monophthong vowel plots in the charts below show a juxtaposition between two broadcasters, one broadcaster who is Southern shifted and one who is not. For all 11 monophthongs plotted, evident patterns are highlighted. Figure 1 exemplifies a mainstream speaker who works in national broadcasting, CNN's Anderson Cooper³. In contrast, Figure 2 exemplifies the SVS, coming from a local anchor included this study from Mississippi (MS). In Figure 2, this speaker adheres to Stage II of the SVS for a “swapped” /e/ and /ɛ/. SUSE is the only North American dialect where the tense vowel /e/ is lower in the vowel space than its lax counterpart /ɛ/ (Labov et al. 2006) and Figure 2 matches that pattern and with a raised /ɛ/ and lowered /e/. Contrastingly, Figure 1 shows an evident gulf between these two vowels. Throughout most of the United States, the vowels /e/ and /ɛ/ are becoming farther apart in apparent time, with the former raising and the latter both lowering and retracting (Stanley 2020). Other differences highlighted in Figure 2 that align with SVS patterns is the fronting of /u/ and /ʌ/. The MS anchor's /æ/ is fronted ahead of the front vowels of /e/ and /ɪ/, whereas Cooper's /æ/ is not. The MS anchor also has a more distinct /ɑ/ and /ɔ/. The two speakers have a different range of pitch and thus have slightly different x and y axes for F1 and F2, but each speaker's vowel phoneme proximities are indicative of dialect patterns through these monophthong plots.

³ All speech comes from this interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qL2jEJDIIo>

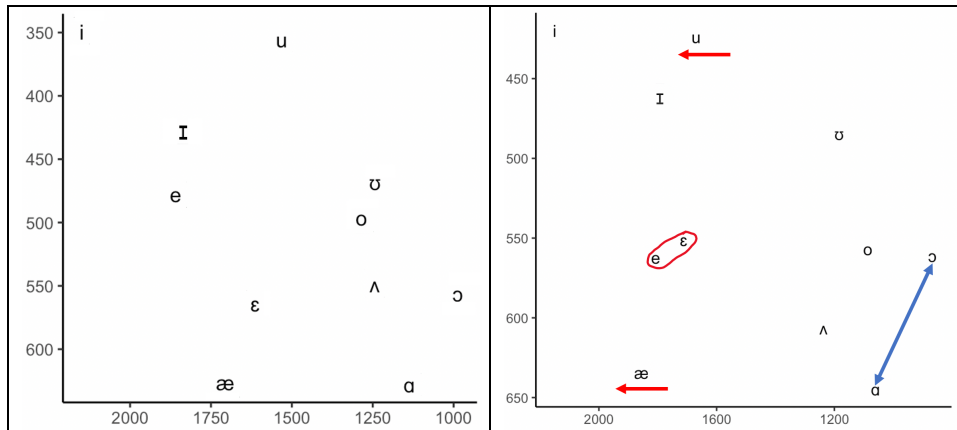


Figure 1. National - Anderson Cooper

Figure 2. MS Local news anchor

Figures 3 and 4 both represent a normalized, composite plot of 10 speakers each – four anchors, two meteorologists, one sports anchor, and three investigative reporters. The Labov *Atlas of North American English* method of normalization has output measured in Hz, which allows for precise and transparent means of comparing distances between vowel point. A vital part for describing dialect differences is Euclidean distance (EuD), which is used to measure the space between two vowel points (Fox & Jacewicz 2009). Notably, these two composite plots are largely similar. Both cities’ composite plots generally show patterns of the SVS, including a closer proximity for /e/ and /ɛ/, a fronted /æ/, /u/, and /o/. However, as highlighted by the arrows below, it was the MS speakers who clearly had a closer /e/-/ɛ/ proximity than their FL counterparts. The EuD between /e/ and /ɛ/ for the MS speakers was only 238 Hz, with the FL speakers having a noticeably more distinct /e/ and /ɛ/ at 342 Hz. Allbritten (2011) found this feature of /e/-/ɛ/ proximity to be the best predictor of participants rating speakers as more “Southern” and the MS broadcasters lead in this regard. There are no other statistically significantly differences for any other vowels in adherence to the SVS for these two composite vowel plots, but FL speakers having a raised /e/ when comparing F1 is statistically significant using a t-test, at $p < 0.0001$ ($t = 16.6$), via the combined 3,672 instances of the /e/ phoneme between the two markets.

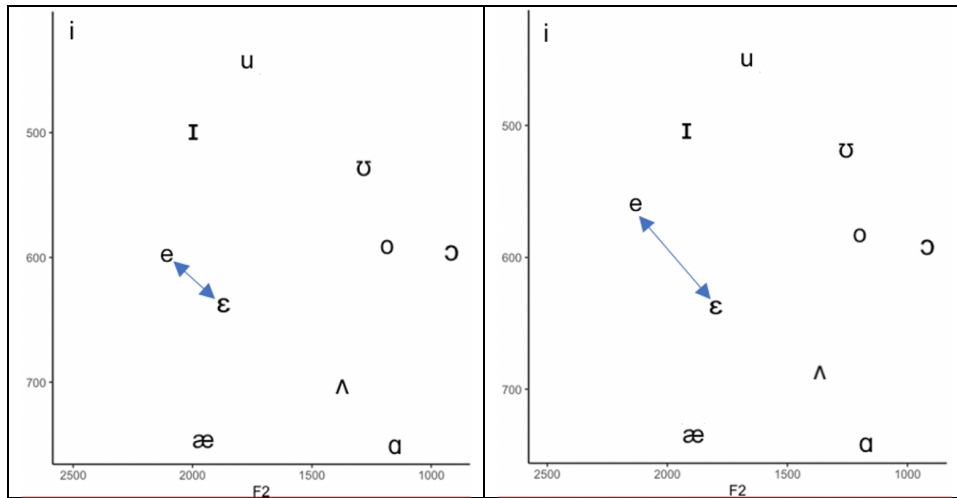


Figure 3. Broadcasters' composite plot for Meridian, MS

Figure 4. Broadcasters' composite plot for Tallahassee, FL

The conditioned merger of /ɪ/ and /ɛ/ before nasals, i.e., the PIN-PEN merger, offers a more focused look at a SUSE feature between the two markets. This feature causes the two distinct vowels to merge when preceding the nasal consonants of /n/, /m/, and /ŋ/ (Labov et al. 2006). Being a conditioned merger, this is a less prevalent, as well as a more subtle feature. All instances of /ɪ/ and /ɛ/ before nasals are plotted for both markets below, with 999 for Meridian in Figure 5 and 826 for Tallahassee in Figure 6. The ellipses in both figures delineate two thirds of all instances of each phoneme, with the lower red representing /ɛ/ and the higher green representing /ɪ/. Notice how both figures show considerable overlap for this conditioned merger, but the MS broadcasters are more merged in this case. It is the broadcasters in the 'Deep South' who lead in this Southern feature, as quantified using the Pillai score included in each Figure⁴ with a possible range of 0 – 1. A lower Pillai score represents a higher degree of overlap. While most vowels pattern similarly across the 11 monophthongs in Figures 4 and 5, the MS speakers clearly have a lower Pillai score at 0.047 to 0.148. Austen (2020) also found the PIN-PEN merger widespread throughout the South and that African Americans led in this merger. For the two markets in the study, the composition of Meridian broadcasters is 50% African American and Tallahassee is only 20% African American⁵. These data corroborate Austen's (2020) findings, as the 7 African Americans in this study had a more merged PIN-PEN at 0.065 rather than the less merged 0.214 for the 13 European Americans.

⁴ The Pillai score came via the *manova* (Multivariate Analysis of Variance) function in R

⁵ The Appendices document the demographic information of all broadcasters in this study

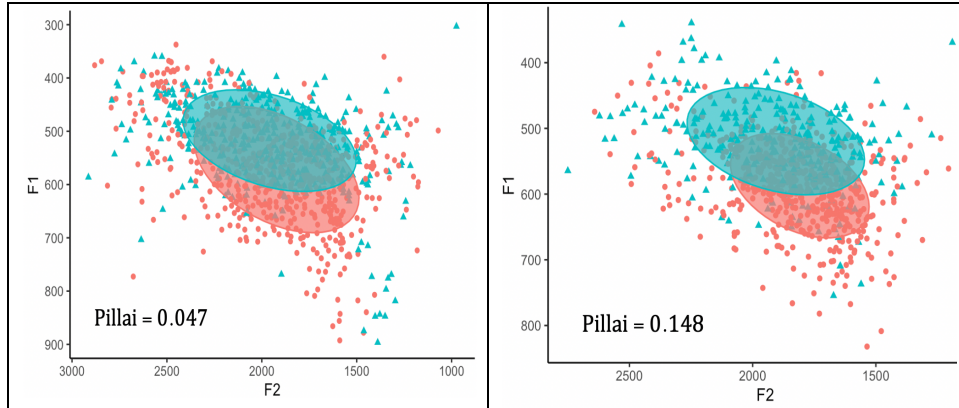


Figure 5. Meridian, MS PIN-PEN – merger of pre-nasal /ɪ/-/ɛ/

Figure 6. Tallahassee, FL PIN-PEN – merger of pre-nasal /ɪ/-/ɛ/

Vowel qualities are heavily dependent on the consonants they precede (Stanley, 2020). While the composite vowel plots of Figures 3 and 4 incorporate all 40,010 vowels in this study, it is important to observe environments where vowels are less affected by the preceding consonant. The PIN-PEN merger illustrated above shows how in a sonorant, pre-nasal context, /ɛ/ raises towards /ɪ/, but how do these phonemes and others function when preceding only plosives, fricatives, and affricates? Among other environments, does this /e/-/ɛ/ distinction narrow or widen? Becker (2019) states that because vowels can be strongly affected by a preceding sonorant, that non-sonorant environments offer a better understanding for dialect patterns when exploring F1/F2 vowel plots.

In Figure 7, the FL vowels are listed in IPA and the MS vowels are differentiated via the Arpabet⁶ (two-character equivalents to IPA), with FL speakers listed as IPA characters. Several of these phonemes pattern together between the two markets, including the phonemes /æ/, /ɑ/, and /ʌ/. However, there are noticeable differences that are highlighted between the two markets. The /e/-/ɛ/ divide, a notable feature of the SVS, is wider when solely considering non-sonorants. In this non-sonorant environment for MS speakers, the EuD is 256 Hz (compared to 238 Hz for all environments), but for FL speakers the /e/-/ɛ/ Euclidean distance is 427 Hz (compared to 238 Hz in all environments). Another SUSE feature that becomes more apparent for MS speakers in non-sonorant environments is the /ɑ/-/ɔ/ distinction. The MS /ɔ/ (charted as the Arpabet equivalent

⁶ The Arpabet and their IPA equivalents are listed as follows: /i/=IY, /ɪ/=IH, /e/=EY /ɛ/=EH, /æ/= AE, /ʌ/=AH, /ɑ/=AA, /ɔ/=AO, /o/=OW, /ʊ/=UH, /u/=UW

“AO”) is clearly raised compared to the FL /ɔ/ counterpart, with a raised /ɔ/ a feature of SUSE, as is the more fronted /o/ (charted as the Arpabet equivalent “OW”) that is evident by the MS speakers (Labov et al. 2006). Both features are highlighted by the hollow arrows. The filled arrows indicate the FL patterns of more mainstream features, like a retracted /ɪ/ and a more distinct /e-/ɛ/. When vowels are least impacted by their preceding sounds, as is the case before non-sonorants, it is the ‘Deep South’ market of MS that clearly leads in SUSE forms.

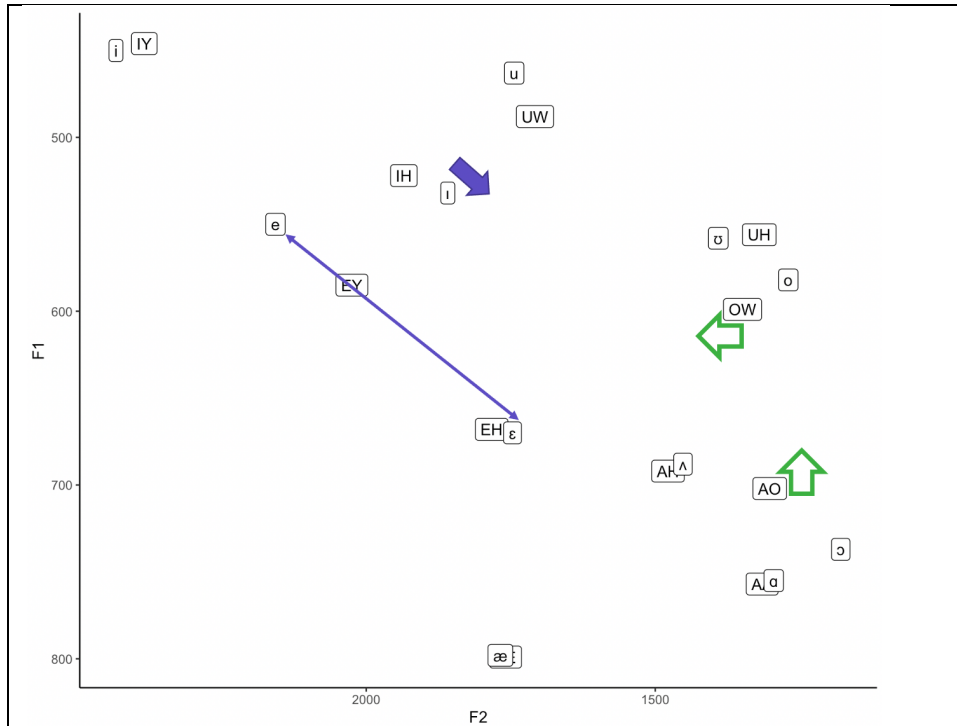


Figure 7 – Composite plot of all speakers preceding non-sonorant consonants

Figure 8 shows the same plot of all vowels in non-sonorant contexts but highlights the Low Back Merger Shift Index (LBMSI), as exemplified by Becker (2019) and Boberg (2019). For the front vowels, the LBMSI runs as the mirror opposite of the SVS, thus the LBMSI explains the fidelity or divergence from the SVS. Both Becker (2019) and Boberg (2019) state that the /i/ phoneme is an “anchor vowel” that stays relatively stable in the vowel space and the proximity of the three front lax vowels is indicative of the changing patterns of Mainstream American English, with the three front lax vowels all retracting and lowering. For Figure 8, the EuD for both markets of the three front lax vowels to the /i/ phoneme shows that the FL speakers have more retracted front vowels and are thus less “Southern”. The LBMSI total Euclidean distance between /i/ and the front

vowels for the MS speakers is 1814 Hz, which is shorter than (and thus less “Southern”) than the FL speakers’ 2051 Hz. In another relevant quantitative measure, it is the ‘Deep South’ speakers that lead in SUSE forms.

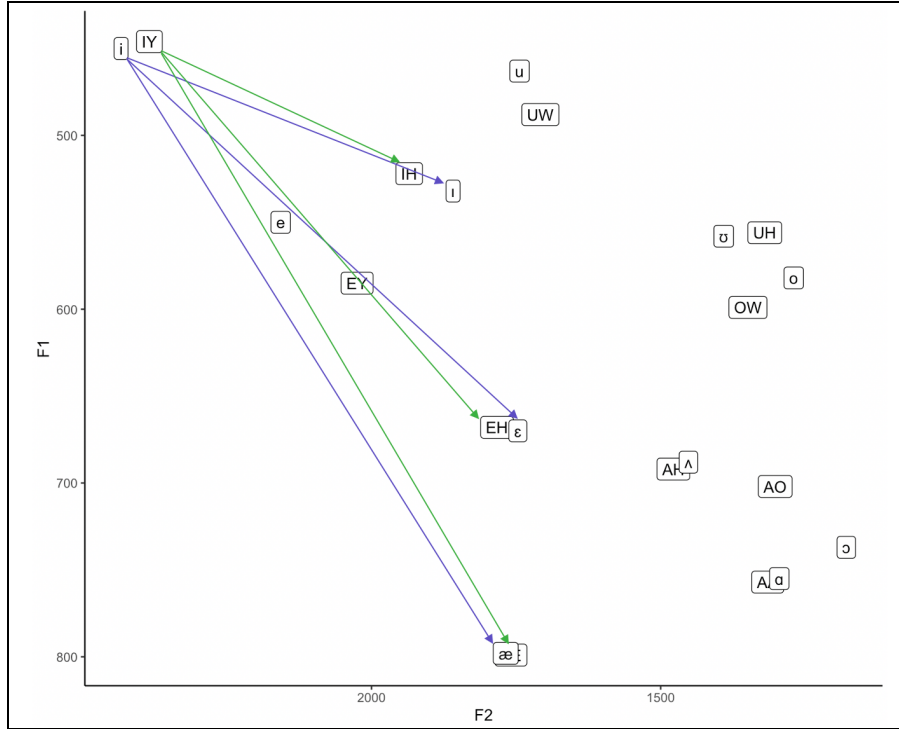


Figure 8 – Composite plot of all speakers preceding non-sonorant consonants, indicating the Low Back Merger Shift Index

4.2. Glide Weakening of /aɪ/

While the ‘Deep South’ MS speakers have led their FL counterparts in all SUSE forms thus far, the socially salient feature of /aɪ/ glide weakening has yet to be discussed. A glide weakened /aɪ/ is characterized by a shorter distance between the beginning and ending of the /aɪ/ phoneme’s vowel duration. Mainstream speech for this phoneme is a diphthong, but this phoneme more is more monophthongal in SUSE. While general patterns of the SVS were evident in the composite vowel plots discussed previously, this socially salient feature of /aɪ/ glide weakening is more muted in comparison. Of the 3,272 instances of /aɪ/ among all 20 speakers in this study, the pronunciation was generally diphthongal rather than monophthongal. This more mainstream and less localized pronunciation is likely because this feature is the most stigmatized feature of what is a generally stigmatized dialect. Quantifying rates /aɪ/ glide weakening

involves measuring the phoneme at 20% duration and then comparing the 80% mark. Within the vowel space, the distance between each /aɪ/ pronunciation is plotted at 20% and 80% duration. Measuring exactly how diphthongal this phoneme is is also realized via EuD. (Fox & Jacewicz 2009). If /aɪ/ were to be produced as a monophthong, then there would be little if any space between the beginning and end of this phoneme. Because /aɪ/ is canonically a diphthong in mainstream speech, the EuD for a “standard”, mainstream /aɪ/ would be greater than that of a Southern shifted speaker with a more monophthongal variant.

Table 1 shows that it is the FL speakers who have a more glide weakened /aɪ/ than the MS speakers, for what is likely the most socially salient feature of this dialect. However, there is not as much inter-affiliate difference as there was with /e/-/ɛ/ proximity and the PIN-PEN merger. The FL speakers narrowly lead with a shorter EuD of 484 Hz, but the MS speakers have a very close total of 489 Hz when considering all 3,288 pronunciations of this phoneme.

Meridian, MS /aɪ/ Euclidean distance	Tallahassee, FL /aɪ/ Euclidean distance
All environments – 489 Hz	All environments – 484 Hz
Pre-voiceless 467 Hz	Pre-voiceless 492 Hz
Pre-voiced 498Hz	Pre-voiced 475Hz
Syllable final – 493 Hz	Syllable final – 504 Hz

Table 1. Comparison of /aɪ/ Euclidean distance between both affiliates

Table 1 shows that neither market shows a large range of when considering /aɪ/’s preceding environments. The FL speakers fit observed patterns, in that Southern speakers have a more glide weakened /aɪ/ when preceding voiced segments and are more diphthongal before voiceless consonants (Reed 2020). The MS speakers do not follow this pattern, having a more glide weakened /aɪ/ before *voiced* consonants. This may be due to observed tendencies where African Americans realize voiced stops as glottal stops (Farrington 2019; Thomas 2007), allowing for differences in qualities of the preceding vowels; African Americans compose 50% of the broadcasters in this MS sample, but only 20% of the broadcasters in the FL sample. Still, /aɪ/ pronunciation remains relatively consistent for all 20 speakers regardless of the preceding phonetic segment.

Figures 9 and 10 illustrate the explanatory power of job title as a predictor among the 20 broadcasters in this study. Notably, the boxplots below show a range that does include a purely monophthongal /aɪ/ at the left end of the whisker of the box plot for each affiliate job title, but the median pronunciation of the darkest middle line represents more of a diphthong

than a monophthong as its typical pronunciation. Both affiliates have approximately the same average EuD comparing the beginning and end to the /aɪ/ phoneme. However, both affiliates show a pattern where the investigative reporters, an entry level on-camera position, have the least “Southern” /aɪ/, as highlighted via the outline. Additionally, both affiliates have the sports anchor as the job title with the most “Southern” /aɪ/. While the investigative reporters were likely to avoid a more glide weakened /aɪ/ due to expanding their hireability to other (possibly non-Southern) markets, the sports anchor is someone with a permanent position reaching an audience who discusses traditionally masculine topics such as local football teams. Historically, masculine topics have been tied to *covert prestige* (Trudgill 1972), a direct rejection of prestige norms that value generally stigmatized forms as an asset rather than a liability. This covert prestige appears to be evident among sports anchors broadcasters but certainly not among the investigative reporters who clearly adhere to global prestige norms. For the positions that receive the most airtime, the anchors and meteorologists, there are slightly differing patterns between these two affiliates. It is the MS anchors who have a more Southern /aɪ/ in comparison to their FL counterparts, but the FL meteorologists lead in a more glide weakened /aɪ/ than their MS counterparts. In a multiple linear regression model (lm) for categorical predictors of continuous data, “job title” as a predictor of the rate of /aɪ/ glide weakening was the only statistically significant via, where $p = 0.012$.

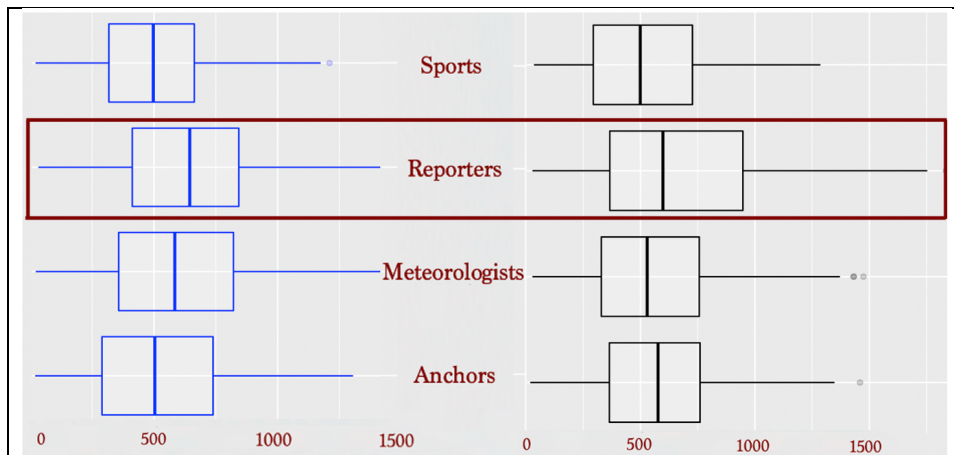


Figure 9 – MS broadcasters EuD /aɪ/ glide weakening via job title

Figure 10 – FL broadcasters EuD /aɪ/ glide weakening via job title

Other factors such as age, ethnicity⁷, and gender were not statistically significant for /aɪ/ glide weakening. As evidenced in Table 2, the greatest

⁷ In this 20-broadcaster sample, there were no other ethnicities other than African American or European American.

difference for any of these three binomial categories is age. Those age 40 or older had a 10 Hz shorter distance than their under 40 counterparts, being only 2% shorter. The pronunciation of /aɪ/ was largely not dependent on the social categories of ethnicity, age, or gender in these normalized data.

African American	495 Hz
European American	483 Hz
Women	491 Hz
Men	483 Hz
Age 40 and over	480 Hz
Under age 40	490 Hz

Table 2. All 20 broadcasters and average EuD /aɪ/ glide weakening

5. Analysis

This study's hypothesis that a central market in the region would retain more features of the SVS than a market located the region's periphery was largely supported. While there was a general overlap when considering most phonemes for each affiliate's composite vowel plot, the meaningful SUSE feature of a closer /e/-/ɛ/ proximity showed that the MS speakers were clearly more 'Southern' when observing the patterns from the 8,511 instances of these two vowels. Non-sonorant environments, which are the environments that least affect the preceding vowel's qualities, still gave a 4,678-vowel sample for /e/-/ɛ/. These non-sonorant environments showed the MS speakers had more of a raised /ɔ/ and a more fronted /ɪ/ and /o/ in comparison to the FL broadcasters. All three of those features are indicative of the SVS. Additionally, the MS speakers also clearly led with a stronger PIN-PEN merger when quantified via a Pillai score. Going against the hypothesis, the FL speakers did marginally lead in a more glide weakened /aɪ/. This difference in Euclidean distance was slight, at only 5 Hz. These findings suggest that while SUSE features exist on these broadcasts and that the 'Deep South' market did lead in most features, the socially salient feature of /aɪ/ glide weakening is likely too stigmatized to be featured regularly. Meanwhile, a more subtle feature like the PIN-PEN merger was used regularly by nearly all broadcasters.

6. Discussion

This study of Southern speech directed to Southern markets was a window into representation of stigmatized speech forms in a contemporary setting. Through this lens of who is hired to appeal to Southern audiences in the

2020s and how often SUSE features are on air, an apparent conclusion is that /aɪ/ glide weakening between these two affiliates was so similar because this phoneme is largely pronounced in a mainstream, non-local manner. For this variable, there was no significant difference whether the speakers were in Mississippi or Florida, women or men, African American or European American, and finally older or younger than 40. Significant differences were also not evident when considering the preceding environment on /aɪ/ glide weakening. Due to its sparse representation, a monophthongal /aɪ/ appears to be a liability for these on-camera broadcasters. However, job titles did account for largely orderly differentiation as a significant predictor of /aɪ/ glide weakening. The sports anchors for both affiliates led in a glide weakened /aɪ/ because, in their context, a glide weakened /aɪ/ could be an asset to connect with the audience. Investigative reporters, getting the least amount of airtime and having the highest rates of turnover, were unsurprisingly at the other end of this spectrum of /aɪ/ glide weakening. These overall patterns for /aɪ/ glide weakening appear to be a “new normal” for Southern broadcasters reaching contemporary Southern audiences; /aɪ/ glide weakening remains only on the margins. Meanwhile, many other more subtle SUSE features can be heard and will likely be heard in the future. If you were to tune into these local affiliates, expect to hear “pin” and “pen” as merged, but do not expect to hear the monophthongization of /aɪ/.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Demographic information for Meridian, Mississippi

Position	Gender	Ethnicity	Age 40	Southern College?
Anchor	Female	European American	Under	Yes
Anchor	Female	African American	Under	No
Anchor	Male	European American	Over	Yes
Anchor	Male	European American	Under	Yes
Meteorologist	Male	European American	Over	Yes
Meteorologist	Female	European American	Under	Yes
Sports	Male	African American	Under	Yes
Reporter	Female	African American	Under	Yes
Reporter	Female	African American	Under	No
Reporter	Male	African American	Under	Yes

Appendix II: Demographic information for Tallahassee, Florida

Position	Gender	Ethnicity	Age 40	Southern College?
Anchor	Male	European American	Over	Yes
Anchor	Male	European American	Under	No
Anchor	Female	European American	Over	No
Anchor	Female	African American	Under	Yes
Meteorologist	Male	European American	Over	Yes
Meteorologist	Male	European American	Over	No
Sports	Male	European American	Under	Yes
Reporter	Female	European American	Under	Yes
Reporter	Male	African American	Under	Yes
Reporter	Female	European American	Under	Yes