ACQUIRING A COMMON DIALECT:

The speech of military brats

Jennifer Tyson

Linguistics Senior Thesis

Spring 2001

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Jim Bowers, Pam Zinnel, and Dana Dufka (and their wonderful classes) of the DoDDS school at NAS Sigonella, without whom this project would never have happened. For their support and technical help, I would like to thank Eric Raimy, Stephanie Strassel, and William Labov. For general encouragement and a few clarifications, thanks to Susan Tyson and Capt. Bill Tyson, USN. Also thanks to Abigail Friedman for a title.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Appendix:

A. Data

B. Picture cards

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Children, language, and the mobile community

Jill[1] is five years old when her family moves from New York to London, and next thing you know, she's sounding like the kid next door, complete with words like "lorry" and "Mum" and an English accent. Kids are remarkable creatures. They adapt easily to new situations, mold themselves in whatever new fashion their surroundings ask of them. The same goes for their language, their speech patterns.

Most children grow up or spend the majority of their childhood within the same community, speaking the same variety, or dialect, of English as the people around them. Every region (or even social class) forms its own speech community, in which its members create a form of solidarity through their language, i.e., the manner in which a person talks. Think about New York City, or the deep South, or African Americans, or blue-collar inner-city workers. Each one talks differently, and the manner in which each talks identifies him, often by the time he has gotten barely a sentence out of his mouth. Oh, you say, I don't talk like any of those people; I speak "standard English." By saying such a thing, you have deliberately made yourself a part of a different speech community than the one you grew up in. A person can consciously layer a dialect that is viewed as non-stigmatized or of higher prestige over his native dialect of English. Of course, not all dialects (or vernaculars) are stigmatized; subtle differences in pronunciation may be a distinguishing feature, but such a feature may make no difference socially. Stigmatized or not,

---

1 While Jill herself is a fictional composite of children I have met through my various studies, the rest of the children included here are real, but their names have been changed to protect their privacy.

this is what defines a speech community: conscious or unconscious inclusiveness in a dialect.

So back to those incredibly flexible kids: change Jill's environment, and she changes her behavior, which includes her speech. Jill wants to fit in, to sound like her playmates at school and on the playground. Easiest way to pick on a person, right? Hey, she sounds different than we do, so she must *be* different! Maybe we won't let her play with us. So naturally, without even being aware of it, Jill starts imitating them, talking like them, or, as Peter Trudgill defines it, accommodating to the new dialect. She has become a part of their speech community and thus a more accepted member of their social group. Without a doubt, children do speak dialect; despite earlier suggestions that children do not acquire dialect until after they have fully acquired their first language, there is no period in which children do *not* use socially significant variants in their speech -- i.e., when they are not speaking some form of a dialect (Chambers 1995).

Even more remarkable is the fact that when her family moves back to New York, within a year Jill sounds like an American again -- it's back to "truck" and "Mom." But there is an "age threshold": "under the age of seven [an individual] will master the dialect like a native" (Chambers 1995, 85); after age 14 an individual will never fully acquire the dialect, and in between ability varies widely. Such it was in my case, for example: from birth until age 13, I lived in deep southern Virginia, playing with friends who spoke Southern dialects ranging from mild to quite strong. When I moved to California, I was swiftly accused of having a "Southern accent" (much to my embarressment), and even today I revert to it when I get very relaxed, particularly when I am around someone else who speaks a similar dialect.

However, peculiarly enough, my dialect is also partially eastern Pennsylvanian, in particular Pennsylvania Dutch: my family on both sides has lived just north of Philadelphia for several generations. Despite the fact that a child will speak like her friends in order to fit in, the parents still have a linguistic influence. It is strongest at the pre-school age: until she starts attending school, Jill will be a linguistic mimic of her parents, especially the primary care-giver (whoever spends the most time with her), if the parents' dialects are different from the local dialect

(J. Tyson 1999). But once she starts going to school, the parents are out of the linguistic picture; her peer group now has virtually total influence (Chambers 1995).

In Jill's case, she is an individual moving into a well-established community, which is the typical case. But what would happen if that speech community were *not* well established? What would happen if the membership of the community were constantly in flux, with virtually complete turnover every three to four years? This situation occurs in an "invisible sector" of the American population: that of hundreds of thousands of active duty military members, their dependents, and the civilians that support them at overseas military installations, of which there are dozens around the world. The U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force all have posts or bases at key locales around the globe, from the U.K. to everywhere in Europe to the Middle East to Japan and the Philippines. Active duty members (those people who are serving in the armed forces) serve rotational postings (a tour of duty) at different military installations, which means that they move every 1-6 years, on average. Active duty members bring their family members along with them, so the children of an active duty member (affectionately termed "military brats") are uprooted and plopped down in an entirely new community, new school, new friends, everything, quite frequently, sometimes in the middle of a school year.

B. Life on a military installation

The military community in general is a socially unique phenomenon. Military members come from across the nation, both socioeconomically and ethnically, and in the small community that forms a military installation, the members of all these different socioeconomic backgrounds come into regular contact with each other. Regional dialects may be less reinfornced, but social and ethnic markers can often still be maintained. There is a higher percentage of mixed-race marriages, and a greater commingling of ethnic groups in general. For children, this means that it is more likely that their peer groups will be more ethnically mixed than in a typical community in the United States.

There is for the adults, however, class separation in the differences between Enlisted (lower rank) and Officer (higher rank) populations. Enlisted servicemembers tend to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, with less formal education. Many do receive further education from the armed forces, particularly moving up through the ranks in a specialized class (e.g., journalism or technical services). Officers, on the other hand, are required to have a college degree before their commissioning. This difference is important linguistically because a person with less formal education has a stronger tendency to maintain a regional dialect. It is also important socially because there are fairly rigid social boundaries between the Enlisted and Officer ranks, mostly due to the fact that any Officer outranks any Enlisted servicemember. Awareness of her parent's rank varies from child to child, so the question of children socially segregating themselves by such labels may or may not have an effect.

In this study, I chose a Naval Air Station (NAS or base) in Italy with a total population of approximately 6000, 3500 of which are enlisted personnel, 350 are officers, and 2500 are family members. It is an isolated community; these Americans live their day-to-day lives in contact only with the other Americans stationed at that base. It is as though a small, isolated town were uprooted and placed overseas, the crucial difference being that its population changes constantly. All facilities needed for living (grocery store, hospital, daycare, school) are provided for on base; many families spend much of their time interacting *only* with the other Americans there and rarely with the local, non-English speaking population.

Housing situation. There are two sorts of housing arrangements for the American family: either base housing (a gated compound built by Americans where only Americans are permitted to live) or "on the economy" (housing among the local population, usually in a nearby town or city). There are 10 different housing communities for the base represented in this study: four are base housing (205, Mineo, Paternó, and Constanza); six are local Italian towns (Campo Rotundo, Misterbianco, San Pietro, Motta, San Gregorio, and Aci Reale). Base housing is populated entirely by families, so children will play pretty much exclusively with other American children, often other

peers from school. Those children living on the economy will often play with local Italian children, which of course does not have any effect on how the American children speak English, but it does reduce the amount of interaction they have with other English-speaking peers.

Children and school. Each overseas military installation has a Department of Defense Dependents' Schools, or DoDDS, school. NAS's school was K-12, with a total enrollment of approximately 1000. Of this, the elementary grades were much more heavily populated. The teaching staff tends to be more stable than that of the general active duty population, with teachers staying at the school at least three to four years, with some over ten years. This relative stability, however, will most likely have little or no impact on children's speech, because the teachers are not part of the children's social network or peer group.

These social aspects of military life may or may not have an impact on the children's speech.

C. The linguistic situation

Within a speech community like that of NAS, there is no stable, local, English-speaking population, as there would be in the case of Jill moving from New York to London. This, I shall assume, precludes a "local dialect." What happens to the dialect, then? One theory which could be applied is that of homogenization: when a brand-new community springs up, the dialect that forms is completely new, and curiously devoid of all dialectal markers in the old speakers' contributing dialects (Chambers, 58-63). Such was the case of the new colonies in America; virtually all of the Eastern seaboard, particularly in the late 18th century, could be classified as a single dialect quite distinct from the plethora of dialects that make up England.

However, this community is not a sudden, new community. It is a singular community whose members are constantly in flux: the dialects of new individuals enter; another individual leaves. Can the homogenization theory hold true? If it does not, what sort of dialect do the children of such a community speak? Are they accommodating to some new variation of a dialect? In

attempting to answer some of these questions, I will examine a single linguistic snapshot in time of NAS by testing certain sociolinguistic variables.

D. Sociolinguistic variables

This combination of the pressures of society and culture create dialect and attitudes toward language. When studying a dialect, one uses sociolinguistic variables, certain markers in a person's speech that vary reliably from dialect to dialect and are standard[2] within a dialect. The two most basic types of variables are lexical and phonological. A lexical variable is vocabulary, what word you choose to use. An example would be the American English "truck" versus the British English "lorry." A phonological variable is what is typically referred to as an "accent": it can be as simple and straightforward as the pronunciation of a word or a set of highly complex rules. An example of the former type would be the Bostonian "pahk the cah in Hahvad Yahd" (known as /r/ deletion); a more complex rule that is still not well understood is that of the pattern of (ae) raising (see below for definition) in Philadelphia.[3] The variables I have chosen are established as variant between dialects and can be evidence that a speaker is from a certain dialectal region.

For this study, I chose five lexical and three phonological variables. The lexical variables are (listed in pairs/groups of alternatives): *tennis shoes/sneakers; soda/pop/Coke; pail/bucket; sack /bag; drinking/water fountain*. The phonological variables are: (ae) raising; *cot/caught* (or /ɑ~ɔ/[4]) merger; and *pin/pen* merger. While these phonological variables do not generally manifest as complex rules, they have been established by sociolinguists as highly relevant and indicative

---

2 With minor, individual, stylistic variations.

3 It is raised only in very complex phonological conditioning environments (Chambers 1992, 1995).

4 The distinction between these two vowels is that /ɑ/ is unrounded and low, while /ɔ/ is rounded and higher than /ɑ/.

features.[5] In (ae) raising, this usually mid-front vowel (as in *mad*) becomes higher, as in the dialect of New York City (/maed/ > /me:ʌ d/). A merger occurs when two vowels (often ones that share phonological similarities) that are usually distinct move into the same vowel space and become indistinguishable from one another. In Southern dialects *pin* (short "i" or /I/) and *pen* (short "e" or /ɛ/) are thus both pronounced /pIn/,[6] and *cot* (/kɑt/) and *caught* (/kɔt/) are both pronounced /kɑt/. These mergers do not apply singularly to the words in the examples, but extend to all vowels in that word class, such that the *pin/pen* merger will affect words like *Ben* and *been* (the one restriction here being that these vowels must appear only before nasals), and the *cot/caught* merger will affect words like *pot* and *bought*.

There are a number of social pressures that can have an effect on an individual's use of these variables in a dialect. Social salience is one; it is a pressure very similar to Jill wanting to sound like her new English friends, in that her dialect is clearly American, and certain features may be more stigmatized than others by British English speakers. In American English, dropping the "-g" at the ends of words like "looking" (pronouncing it "lookin'") is a socially salient marker, because it is generally stigmatized as being the dialect of the lower classes or African American speech. The merging of *cot* and *caught*, however, is not socially salient; it does not matter one way or another socially if a person merges these vowels. Another factor is the willingness to be part of the community -- does the child like being where she is? If she resists or rejects entirely her new environment, she might be slower in acquiring the dialect. Connected to that is the length of time she has been a member of this linguistic community. As a general rule, a speaker must be immersed in a new dialect for approximately a year before completely acquiring the new speech patterns (although this can vary, as is discussed later in this paper). Less time than that means we

---

5 William Labov's TELSUR study uses, in fact, both the mergers (among other phonological features) in mapping isoglosses.

6 Although it can be something closer to /pɛn/ in some dialects.

can expect only partial dialect acquisition. The pattern of dialect acquisition may also be weighted in the usage of lexical items first, because it is easier to hear and imitate vocabulary that is different in the new dialect than it is to hear the phonological differences (Chambers 1992). Newcomers to the speech community may pick up the lexicon before mastering more complex rules of phonology or pronunciation.

Once someone is within the new peer group, her dialect acquisition can also be highly dependent on ties with other community members, especially long-term residents of the community and/or core members (i.e., social leaders) of the social network, because "the people at the core demonstrate their loyalty by...using regional variants" (Chambers 1995, 78). Individuals may also identify themselves socially or ethnically as belonging to a certain group, such as an African American group. Also, as mentioned previously, a child's dialect can be affected by the extent of interaction with other Americans if she spends a lot of time with peers.

E. Dialect surveys and TELSUR

Beginning in the 1920s and 30s, an interest in mapping dialectal boundaries arose; this study of dialect geography (drawing lines to bundle regions together by a certain linguistic feature) concentrated mainly on (often) obscure lexical items, such as the boundary between who said *whiffletree* and who said *singletree*. By the mid 1960s, William Labov began work on the dialects of New York City based not on region but on social class through phonological features, and modern sociolinguistics was born. Modern sociolinguistics relies much more heavily on phonological and syntactic features than on lexical patterns.

The most recent and complete dialect survey of North America was done in the mid 1990s. It was called TELSUR (done via telephone surveys), and was headed by William Labov at the University of Pennsylvania. Mainly phonological, the TELSUR Project is the basis for the latest mapping of "linguistic changes in progress in North American English" (Labov, 1996). The data collected from TELSUR's extensive survey maps out dialectal boundaries on a number of different

phonological features (e.g., mergers such as *pin/pen*); these data indicate four major dialect regions: North, Midland, South, and West (Wolfram, 121). I will be relying heavily on the TELSUR data in my study.

In the spring of 1999, I conducted a study of military families posted at Ft. Meade, Maryland. I tested the speech of the children as contrasted to the speech of the parents and found that under a certain age, children were good linguistic mimics of one or both parents; after the child began school (even pre-school), the child began moving toward a different linguistic model. While it was a good study to determine the relative linguistic influence of parents on their children, it did not give me a good idea of what happens linguistically to the speech of a military brat. The children's showed the influence of the local community's dialect, instead of conforming to something else althogether. However, I thought I detected some patterning indicative of a unique overseas dialect, or at least the children who had recently spent time overseas patterned differently than the other children, thus spurring me to isolate only the children of a single speech community.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Subjects

I chose to work with primarily two classes: a first-grade class (ages 6-7) and a fourth-grade class (ages 9-10). Some of the first grade subjects were from a different class, so their social network is not well understood. On the first day, I observed classes, picking up casual conversation and allowing the children to accustom themselves to my presence. Upon noticing that the girls were generally more talkative (particularly with me) and more social, I decided to concentrate solely on the girls. After that, I began to pull children from the classroom for individual interviews. I attempted to reduce addressee effect[7] for the first graders by talking to them in pairs;

[7] This is a typical problem in sociolinguistic studies: the observer, simply by his or her presence, imposes unconscious constraints on the real informality of the subject's speech, or encourages the speaker to accommodate her style to that of the interviewer's.

often conversation would occur between them, allowing them to talk more freely and casually. Some social networking was exposed by how the subjects were chosen: for the first graders, I chose a girl, and she picked a friend; when we were finished, I asked them to pick the next person. For the fourth graders, I chose the first subject during each period, and she chose the next person. The fourth grade interviews were also slightly more formal, as they were conducted one-on-one. For the majority of the subjects, I also asked who were their favorite people to play with in the class. I also queried the teachers on their view of how the girls interacted socially. During the interviews, I encouraged the subjects to talk freely, tell me stories or whatever they wanted, so that the conversation was fairly casual.

The 32 subjects were previously based in a wide range of geographical, and therefore dialectal, regions. The heaviest percentage of the subjects was last located in the south, from Virginia to Florida (17 subjects); others come from the Middle Atlantic region (4 subjects), from the west (3 subjects), from Maine (one subject), and from other overseas postings (3 subjects). The implications of this geographical span will be addressed in the Dicussion.

B. Data collection

During the interview process, the following questions were asked (with other conversation in between, as was natural):

1. Name and age

2. How long have you lived here? Where were you before, and how long did you live there?

3. Where do you live?

4. What do your parents do? (i.e., which parent was active duty)

5. What's your favorite activity/food/thing about living here? What's your favorite thing to do with a friend?

6. Do you spend a lot of time on base?

7. Do you have brothers or sisters? Tell me about your family.

8. Tell me about your favorite movie/book.

9. Who are your favorite friends to play with in your class?

A series of picture cards was then displayed, and the child was asked to tell me what she called the item displayed. These were pictures of the lexical items and pictures and questions designed to evoke words containing the target phonemes for the phonological variables (see Appendix). In order to contrast /ɑ/ (elicited by pictures of *pot* and *hot*) to the vowel /ɔ/, I verbally presented the following sentences and asked the subject to change them to the past tense:

1. I buy something at the commissary/exchange. [bought, /bɔt/]

2. I think about my homework. [thought, /θɔt/]

3. I catch the ball. [caught, /kɔt/]

The subject was also presented with an advertisement about Glad plastic bags, with the text "Don't get mad. Get Glad," and asked to either read the captions or tell me about the pictures. This elicited target words *mad* and *glad* in a Reading Style (a more formal and therefore more careful style than Interview Style).

C. Data analysis

All conversations were recorded on a Panasonic microcassette recorder. As I interviewed the subject, I marked down lexical responses and first impressions of phonological features. I then used computer software to clip out relevant tokens to confirm and more closely examine those phonological features. No acoustic analyses were run on the samples, because such fine-grained analyses were unnecessary for the dialectal answers I was seeking.

III. RESULTS

In this section, the range of variation of each variable in the U.S. will be briefly described and then the basic patterning of the individual variables and of individual subjects will be summarized. A note first about referencing the subjects: those subjects who had been at NAS for at least a year will hereafter be referred to as "long-term residents," and those subjects who had been at NAS for less than a year will be referred to as "newcomers." The subjects are coded in the following manner: 1 or 4 for first or fourth grade; L for long-term resident or N for newcomer; and then the individual's sample number. For example: Kristy (1L07) is a first grader, long-term resident, sample number 7 (see Appendix: Data). All the subjects can be divided into different groups: first graders vs. fourth graders, and long-term residents vs. newcomers. Each different group will also be summarized separately, particularly if there is an outstanding difference.

A. Lexical variables

Sneakers/tennis shoes

The term *sneakers* is used to refer to athletic shoes in the Northeast, while *tennis shoes* is more typical in the West and South. Of the 31 responses, 16 used *sneakers*, 9 used *tennis shoes*, and 5 responded only with *shoes*. For the first graders, the majority used *sneakers* (63%), with only 16% using *tennis shoes* and 21% responding with *shoes*; however, more fourth graders said *tennis shoes* (50% for *tennis shoes* vs. 33% for *sneakers*). For first-grade long-term residents, *sneakers* remains the most frequently used lexical item (64%) and *tennis shoes* the least used (14%), and fourth-grade long-term residents also remain at 50% using *tennis shoes*, 33% using *sneakers*.

	sneakers	*tennis shoes*	other
1N (n=5)	60%	20%	20%
1L (n=14)	64%	14%	21%
4N (n=6)	50%	33%	17%
4L (n=6)	50%	33%	17%

Soda/pop/Coke

These three variations fall into three broad geographical regions: *soda* in the Northeast and West; *pop* in the Midwest; and *Coke* in the South. The term most used by the subjects was *soda*; of the 32 subjects, *Coke* was given only six times. Of these six usages of *Coke*, five were subjects who had been at NAS less than a year and were previously from the South.

	soda	*pop*	other
1N (n=5)	60%	0%	40%
1L (n=14)	79%	0%	21%
4N (n=6)	67%	17%	17%
4L (n=7)	100%	0%	0%

Bag/sack

Bag is the more widely used variant, with *sack* appearing only in the Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) region and New England. All 32 subjects used the lexical item *bag*. Again, due to the fact that there are no subjects recently come from the Midwest or Pittsburgh/western Pennsylvania areas and that there are no Naval bases in those regions, this consistency is unsurprising. Several subjects more specifically identified it as a "commissary bag,"[8] which may

[8] The commissary is the military equivalent of a grocery store.

to some extent indicate their more complete immersion or more time spent in the American culture on base.

Pail/bucket

Pail is generally used in the north (northern Pennsylvania on up), while *bucket* is found elsewhere. Like *sneakers/tennis shoes*, this lexical item also shows a usage split between the first and fourth graders. For the first-grade long-term residents (n=14), six used *pail*, while eight used *bucket*. Likewise, half of the subjects stayed in concordance with their former dialect, and the other half flipped. A couple of examples demonstrate this lexical uncertainty: Marie (1L18) had both lexical items, and replied, "A pail...or a bucket. Same thing." Cynthia (1L12), however, had a definite opinion about which was the correct item to use; when her partner Ilse (1L17) responded with *pail*, Cynthia leaned over and whispered, "Bucket," to which Ilse replied, "A pail is a bucket." Clearly, the difference between these two terms is either not of great importance to these subjects or they could possibly be acquiring a new term, and the terms are momentarily merged.

On the other hand, the fourth graders show a tendency towards using *bucket*. Of the long-term residents (n=7), five used *bucket* while only two used *pail*. Both of those subjects are a little idiosyncratic in their lexical choice: Erin (4L28) shows the same ambiguity toward the terms, identifying it as "a pail...or a bucket"; Anna (4L26) uses *pail*, even though it is in opposition to her previous dialect and contrary to what most of her peers are using.

	pail	*bucket*
1N (n=5)	40%	60%
1L (n=14)	43%	57%
4N (n=6)	33%	67%
4L (n=7)	29%	71%

Water fountain/drinking fountain

The majority of the subjects use *water fountain*. Several of the first graders at first responded with *sink*, usually swiftly correcting themselves to *fountain* or *water fountain*. A possible explanation for this is that there are sinks in the classroom, and the children usually drink from that rather than going to the water fountain in the hall. None of the fourth graders showed this inclination and were much more consistent in their responses of *water fountain*.

Two subjects replied differently: Kristy (1L07), with *drinking fountain*, and Jessie (4N20), with *water faucet*. Jessie moved from Maine only two months ago, however, so this could be a possible explanation. However, *faucet* is not used there, so a pragmatic confusion could also produce this result.

B. Phonological variables

(ae) raising

The range of variation in (ae) raising across the U.S. is quite broad. In general, variations of this variable are characteristic of urban northern areas, such as Philadelphia, New York City, and the Great Lakes region. The subjects were consistent in the lack of (ae) raising, which is unsurprising as none of the subjects came from any of the abovementioned regions: there are virtually no military installations in these areas.

The one exception is the fourth-grader Beth (4N23), who does demonstrate clear (albeit inconsistent) (ae) raising. When (ae) appears in spontaneous speech, it is raised; when asked to repeat, she does not raise. Curiously, her younger sister Becca (1N03) does not raise, although their lexical patterns are very closely matched, an observation I will discuss later on. In drawing the conclusion that there is no (ae) raising in the NAS dialect, Beth's peculiarity can be ignored, as she has been at NAS for less than a year, and therefore is still conforming to some previous

dialect.

The only irregularity is that four first graders raise in a certain environment. When shown the picture of a "pot," these subjects responded with "pan" -- and raised the (ae) there. In this case, since they do not raise anywhere else, it is most likely a case of raising before a nasal, which occurs in virtually every U.S. dialect (Strassel 2000).

/ɑ~ɔ/ merger[9]

The majority of the subjects merge. In the first grade, all but two subjects make the merger: Becca (1N03) and Ann (1L09). The fourth graders follow an identical pattern, with only two subjects demonstrating a non-merger, one a newcomer (Beth, 4N23) and one a long-term resident (Micky, 4L29). Of all the long-term subjects, 90% (18 of 20 responses) make the merger.

	Yes	**No**
1N (n=5)	80%	20%
1L (n=13)	92%	8%
4N (n=5)	80%	20%
4L (n=7)	83%	17%

Pin/pen merger

Like some of the lexical items, this merger splits in its frequency between the first and fourth graders. In the first grade newcomers, four merge, while one does not. The long-term first graders demonstrate confusion as to which way the merger goes, with the long-term residents (n=13) split almost perfectly in half: seven with the merger, six without.

The fourth graders almost unequivocally do not merge: of six newcomers, only two do

[9] Occasionally numbers will not add up due to a subject's non-response. For the /ɑ~ɔ/ merger and the *pin/pen* merger, there are two no responses each (1L12 and 4N24; 1N04 and 1L07, respectively).

merge; of the seven long-term residents, six do not have the merger. The one subject who does, Micky (4L29), will be discussed later, as she is an unusual case.

	Yes	No
1N (n=4)	50%	50%
1L (n=13)	54%	46%
4N (n=6)	67%	33%
4L (n=7)	14%	86%

IV. DISCUSSION

Modern dialect geography and sociolinguistics focus mainly on the phonological features of the dialect, because these aspects are less stigmatized and can mean little when it comes to social prestige (Wolfram, 75) and are therefore more resistant to change and less easily identifiable by the untrained ear. Therefore, my discussion of the patterning will rely most heavily on the phonological data, with some lexical analysis to clarify a point, especially with only three diametric phonological indicators used. J.K. Chambers (1992) discusses lexical versus phonological acquisition of a dialect, stating that while "lexical replacements are acquired faster than...phonological variants" (677), they are also notoriously whimsical, "an element of arbitrariness" to how lexical items are used in an individual's dialect (679). An individual may use different dialectal words in referring to the same object in a single conversation, with no seeming impetus. Wendy (4N24), for instance, responded to the picture item with *pail*, yet earlier refers to "buckets...of water."

The discussion of the impact of the subjects' current dialects hinges greatly on their most recent dialect region, i.e., the place where an individual and her family were last posted. The wide range of dialectal regions makes for an interesting and challenging outcome. In interpreting the results, I assume that all subjects were participants in their most recent dialect. If the child came

from somewhere in the United States (which is the case for 29 of the 32 subjects), "the children would have attended public schools and in most cases be fully integrated into the local culture" (W. Tyson, 2000), so the likelihood of the individual not acquiring the local dialect is very slight. Another potential source of linguistic impact is the parents or primary caregiver(s). At a young age, children do pattern most substantially after their parents; however, once they enter school, the peers become the primary influence for a child. For this reason, the linguistic background of the parents in this study were not noted.

I will also briefly address the issue of children and sociolinguistic awareness. In Labov's earlier works in the 1960s, he states that children do not become aware of the social implications of their speech usage until adolescence. While Chambers (1995) says that "there is no period in the language acquisition sequence when individuals do not use socially significant variants" (155-56), the conclusion of children's sociolinguistic awareness is not made. As a beginning, I would be inclined to say that even young children, such as my first graders, are aware of their language use and its social impact on their peers. To give a lexical example from my data, when Sarah (1L13) identified an item as a *bucket*, her partner Kristy started giggling at her. Sarah rebuked her indignantly, "It's a bucket!" When I asked what Kristy was giggling at, Sarah stated furiously, "She's makin' fun of me!" This rough example will be played out in greater detail in later discussion of the *pin/pen* merger.

To begin with, despite the large percentage of children most recently from a southern dialectal region, none of the subjects displayed what is known as the Southern Shift, a phonological transformation of the vowels that gives the southern dialect its characteristic "drawl." On the whole, a superficial glace at the corpus gives me the impression that these children all speak what one might call a brand of "General English," a "dialect" without much in the way of sharply defined regional features, such as the Southern Shift or Boston /r/-lessness. Perhaps it might well be expected that long-term residents of NAS might have lost such speech characteristics, because regional features may be socially stigmatized, thus pushing linguistic patterning toward some brand

of homogenization. But even so, the 11 newcomers, of which five come from a southern region, display no "non-standard" linguistic features.[10]

A. TELSUR dialect regions

Using Labov's TELSUR survey, I compiled a rough guide to the pertinent phonological features of each dialectal region. The relevant areas (i.e., the regions that the subjects came from) and their corresponding features are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Regional phonological features, according to TELSUR.

Region	(ae) raising	/ɑ~ɔ/ merger	*pin/pen* merger
New England (Maine)	possible	Yes	No
Mid-Atlantic (PA, MD)	Yes (complex)	No	No
South (VA, TN, FL, TX)	No	No	Yes
West (CA, HI)	No	Yes	Variable: Yes (Southwest) No (CA & Northwest)

This chart is the basis for comparison of subjects' responses.

B. Smoothing out the lexical patterns

The majority of the lexical responses are quite clear cut: *soda, bag,* and *water fountain* are without a doubt the standards for this NAS dialect. The split between the first- and fourth-grades on *sneakers/tennis shoes* is most likely an age factor. Possibly, the fourth-grade preponderance of *tennis shoes* is due to the fact that they simply have a greater vocabulary at their command. Indeed, many of the first graders would initially respond simply with *shoes,* and were often hard

[10] There is one extremely debatable exception: that of Erin (4L28), who seems to have a very faint trace of Southern Shift, so slight that I didn't catch it all during the initial interview. Her case will be discussed more in depth later on.

pressed to come up with another lexical item to identify the object. The fourth graders were much more ready with a response; few gave the initial response of *shoes*. One subject, Sandy (4N21), even made a semantic differentiation between *tennis shoes* and *sneakers*: she at first replied that they were either "tennis shoes or sneakers," but upon further reflection concluded that "they look more like tennis shoes."[11] Young children, as they acquire language, tend to first acquire terms with a very broad semantic space (such as *shoes*), not acquiring more semantically narrow terms until later on (Helfrich 1979).

Of the six *Coke* responses, the majority match up with the subject's most recent dialect. Becca (1N03), Carrie (1N02), Alice (1L06), Kay (1L08), Beth (4N23), and Wendy (4N24). All of these subjects recently came from a southern dialect, where *Coke* is commonly used for the generic term. All long-term residents (including the 13 other Southerners) use the term *soda*, and the supremacy of this term is made clear by two subjects in opposition: Wendy (4N24) and Micky (4L29) are both formerly from a southern dialect region, but while Wendy uses *Coke*, Micky uses *soda*. The key difference between them is that Micky is a long-term resident of NAS (two years), while Wendy arrived less than a year ago.

There are two anomalies among the responses for *soda/pop/Coke*: Kay, who responds with *Coke* despite having been at NAS for two years, and Beth (4N23), who hesitantly offers *pop* when asked for more about the picture item. Kay simply may have had semantic confusion, responding with the most familiar term (i.e., if her family drinks Coke); despite the fact that her previous dialect was Virginia, it is highly unlikely that she would not have conformed to what is obviously a standard lexical item among her peers. *Pop* is generally a Midwestern term, and Beth's most recent dialect is Virginia Beach, nearly into North Carolina, certainly not a region where *pop* would be used. Where she picked up this term is unknown.

---

11 What precisely her differentiation was is unknown, due to the poor quality of my recording, and I was unable to understand her response.

C. Children and dialect

As I brought up in the introduction, it is sometimes questioned whether or not children really have dialect. Studies of children and language acquisition most often focus on their *correct* acquisition of the more technical aspects of linguistics, such as syntax and phonology -- not necessarily if they are acquiring their dialect correctly.

However, I would again like to assert that children *do* have dialect, even though it is a highly changeable and malleable thing. Their speech patterns are not random conglomerations of all the speech they hear; like any adult, children's speech contains evidence of dialectal markers that reflect their speech community. For example, two newcomers (who also happen to be sisters) conform to the patterns of their previous dialect (nearly) perfectly (Table 2).

Table 2. Dialectal conformity.

			(ae) raising	/ɑ~ɔ/ merger	*pin/pen* merger
Southern dialect	Coke	bucket	N	N	Y
Becca (1N03)	Coke	bucket	N	N	Y
Wendy (4N24)	Coke	bucket	N	-	Y

Immersion in a local dialect is also evident by the new subjects who still use the lexical item *Coke*, as described in the section above. Notice that there are only two subjects represented as being in perfect accordance with the former dialect; however there are a total of 11 newcomers. A number of these other newcomers come very close to matching their recent dialectal patterns, but with very key changes, a pattern that becomes the focus of the discussion. The following sections will examine in closer detail the phonological patterns.

D. Pin/pen merger

Throughout the U.S., the merger of *pin* and *pen* is still socially stigmatized as part of a

lower-class or Southern dialect (Wolfram 1998). While these children may be unaware of such negative connotation, it did appear to be a socially salient feature, as it attracted the most attention: of all the variables, this was the one the subjects noticed,[12] either the distinction or lack of distinction that either the speaker or the others made, specifically among the first grade subjects. Some subjects commented spontaneously on it, while others would either comment or even correct their partner's response. The pair of Kathy (1L15) and Josey (1L19) show both a decided awareness of the merger and a very pertinent clashing of features.

> Kathy: A safety pin [/pIn/], pen [/pIn/].
> JT: You think they sound alike to you? Yeah?
> Kathy: It rhymes too.

Kathy is quite aware of the merger. When it is Josey's turn to respond, Kathy feels obliged to correct her "wrong" pronunciation.

> Josey: Pen. [/pɛn/]
> Kathy [indignantly]: /pɛn/?! /pIn/!
> Josey: Oh.

Despite exchanges such as this, subjects did not change their pronunciation. Josey is not consciously accommodating in the short term, not making use of social awareness, or just not aware that using such a linguistic marker is also a social marker. She may change in the long term to such pressures as Kathy (and other peers), but it is not a conscious process.

Perhaps the most interesting exchange was between Marie (1L18) and Carrie (1N02). Carrie did not have the merger and supplied the target words readily enough, but Marie was having difficulty naming *pin*. As Carrie tried to help, a tremendous argument over the correct vowel ensued.

> Marie: Pin [/pɛn/]! I already saided it!
> Carrie: I said /pIn/, not /pɛn/.
> Marie: Oh, /pIn/.
> JT: Do you know what she's talking about, then?... It's not a needle, but a --

---

[12] I believe that the reason for this is due to the manner in which *pin* and *pen* were presented to the subjects: the two picture cards were sequenced together, and I would sometimes ask the subjects to repeat the two items right next to each other.

Carrie: Those things you put in clothes so they stay up.
JT: Like a safety....
Marie: Pin [/pɛn/]!
JT: Yeah.
Marie: Safety /pIn/...safety /pɛn/.

Here the case seems to be that Marie seems to be completely unconscious of any distinction between the two vowels. She does not perceive them to actually be a minimal pair; the two vowels are completely interchangeable. She can hear the difference when Carrie points it out, but does not actually make the distinction in her own speech. What makes this exchange especially fascinating is the differences between the subjects: Marie has been at NAS for over three years, having previously been based in southern Virginia; thus she is still strongly conforming to the Southern dialect, which lacks the distinction. Carrie, on the other hand, has been on base for only three and a half months, having just moved from Florida -- therefore, she too should be making the merger like Marie. However, she most emphatically does not and is perfectly aware of it.

This sort of confusion was the general pattern throughout the first-grade corpus. There seems to be little consensus on which way this minimal pair should be pronounced. Often subjects flip their pronunciation to its opposite (e.g., a non-merger becoming a merger), disregarding any sort of possible accommodation. In fact, of the long-term residents, the proportion of those who flipped the feature to those who did not is relatively high: of 13 subjects, seven flipped their pronunciation to be against their former dialect, while six did not. Of those seven, five changed to making the distinction, while two changed to a merger (Figure 1). Since they now have heard the two words being pronounced in different ways, they may be easily confused and flip to the pronunciation they most recently heard. Another reflection upon the confusion is the quality of the merger: typically, when the vowels of *pin* and *pen* are merger, they merge to /I/. However, several subjects actually merge to /ɛ/ instead, and three of the five subjects who do are long-term first graders (Marie, Sarah, and Jane). While Marie and Jane make the merger in concordance with their previous regional dialect (Virginia and Florida, respectively), Sarah has reversed from what should be a non-merger (California) to merging to /ɛ/. Perhaps the best explanation for her unusual merger

could be due to the phonetic difficulty of the vowel: the presence of the following nasal seems to be what triggers the merger, although the phenomenon is not well-understood (Raimy).

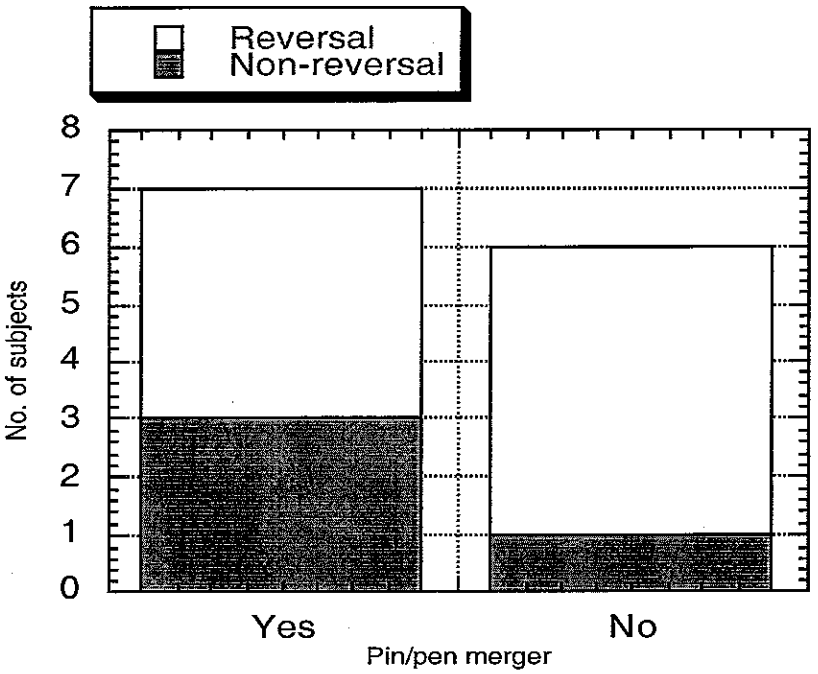


Figure 1. First grade reversals of the *pin/pen* merger.

Among the fourth graders, the overall percentage of non-mergers is much higher, with only two subjects, both newcomers, making the merger. One possible explanation for this evening out is increased literacy: orthography can influence making a distinction out of a merger and "can direct the splitting of merged phonemes in the old dialect when the split is orthographically distinct" (Chamber 1992, 698). While orthography is not always a reliable source of phonetic information for speakers of English, the written representation of the vowels in *pin* and *pen* are quite clear. Many of the first graders are not yet good readers,[13] so perhaps they are not fully aware of the orthographic (and therefore perhaps phonological) difference in the vowels, thus facilitating linguistic confusion and prompting the subjects to change to the merger (Figure 2).

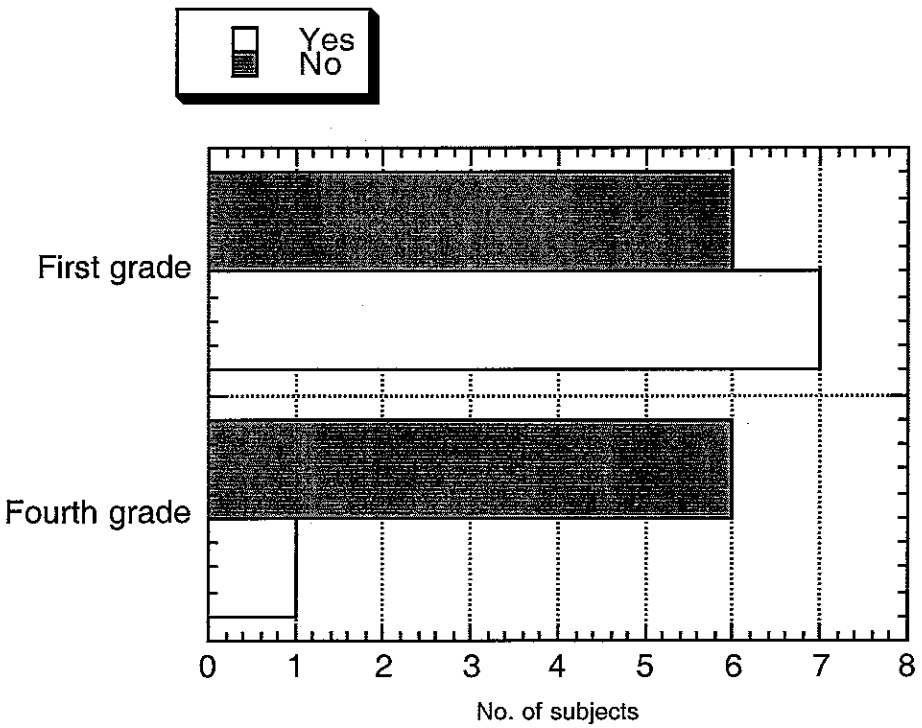


Figure 2. *Pin/pen* merger: First vs. Fourth grade

[13] The majority of the first grade subjects had difficulty reading the advertisement I used as part of the interview (see Appendix).

E. /ɑ~ɔ/ merger

This feature is a little more clear-cut in its interpretation. Unlike the *pin/pen* merger, there is little confusion as to how to pronounce these two vowels. Strangely enough, however, the majority of the subjects do make the merger, which is quite in opposition to the majority of the dialectal backgrounds these children are coming from (see Figure 1.1, above): of the 14 long-term first graders, 10 have made the /ɑ~ɔ/ merger, in opposition to their former dialect. Only the West has the merger without exception. The South, where the bulk of the subjects are coming from, does not have the merger -- so what is the motivation for suddenly switching to having the merger?

There are several broad-ranging factors that are most likely the culprits of motivation. To continue with Chambers' theory regarding mergers and orthography, the orthography of words containing these two vowels are fairly obscure -- going solely by the written spelling of words does not tell you transparently how the vowel is to be pronounced or the difference between them, in contrast to how the vowels of *pin* and *pen* are written. While there are a greater number of words belonging to the *cot/caught* category than to the *pin/pen* category, a factor which would make the collapsing of the two vowels a greater hindrance to word distinction, the orthographic form of the vowels are so diverse that orthography is really no help at all. The low, unrounded vowel /ɑ/ can be spelled "o" (as in *pot* or *hot*) or "a" (as in *pasta*); the higher, rounded vowel /ɔ/ can be spelled "au" (as in *caught*), "ou" (as in *bought*), "aw" (as in *lawn*); or even "a" (as in *fall*). So orthography is not much help, even for the more literate fourth graders.

Losing the distinction between /ɑ~ɔ/ is also a change in progress: it is spreading from the West, where the merger is predominant, towards the South and East. Children and females are noted for leading a linguistic change such as this (Chambers 1995), therefore seeing the merger occurring with high frequency among all young, female subjects is not entirely surprising.

Another factor is that while the South does not make the merger, the quality of the merger is quite different than the distinction made in other parts of the eastern seaboard. In the Mid-

Atlantic region, the vowels are distinguished by their actual quality, in that they are actually different from each other: one is low and unrounded, the other higher and rounded. In the South, however, the distinction relies on something else entirely, that of the vowel's offglide. The actual nucleus of the vowel is identical, but "/ɔ/ is distinguished from /ɑ/ by a back upglide" (Labov 1997). Because the quality of the distinction has suddenly changed, or because the children are getting mixed input on how to make the distinction, they lose it altogether.

In 1990, Ruth Herold investigated a community in Pennsylvania that experienced a sudden influx of a large population speaking a wide range of dialects. The consequence, she discovered over a period of years, was that since a distinction between a set of vowels was no longer reliable; formerly distinct vowels such as /ɑ/ and /ɔ/ were collapsed into a merger. Likewise, the children of NAS are experiencing a very mixed bag of dialects, where some distinguish between /ɑ/ and /ɔ/ and others do not, and in all different manners -- they can no longer rely on the distinction and thus begin to show the merger. In the face of linguistic confusion, these children in a sense "give up" the battle of distinguishing the vowels and collapse them into a single vowel, /ɑ/.

F. Dialect accommodation

Overall, the peculiar flip-flopping of phonological features that is occurring starts to show a pattern. The long-term subjects seem to be accommodating, or making changes in their speech patterns to conform to a singular "norm."[14] But what sort of linguistic norm are these children accommodating to? Let us look at the cases of three fourth graders who have come from other overseas postings for a possible explanation.

Sandy (4N21), Kris (4L27), and Rachel (4L30) all came from other overseas postings: Sandy from La Maddelena (the Azores), Kris from Japan, and Rachel from Turkey. However, despite coming from such radically different regions of the world, they all have virtually identical

[14] I put "norm" in quotes because I cannot hypothesize a pre-existing dialectal standard.

patterning, both lexically and phonetically (Table 3). Even more interesting is that while Kris and Rachel have been at NAS for over a year, Sandy has been there only two months. (For the sake of clarity, *soda, bag,* and *water fountain* have been disregarded, since there is so little overall variation.)

Table 3. Subjects formerly posted overseas.

Subject			*(ae) raising*	*/ɑ~ɔ/*	*pin/pen*
Sandy	tennis shoes	bucket	N	Y	Y
Kris	-	bucket	N	Y	N
Rachel	tennis shoes	bucket	N	Y	N

While the pattern of no (ae) raising, /ɑ~ɔ/ merger, and no *pin/pen* merger (hereby referred to as N/Y/N) is not a pattern unused in the continental United States, it is found in the western region of Pennsylvania, specifically Pittsburgh (a region that *none* of the subjects came from) or in a large part of the West (which only three subjects come from). The other predominant pattern common in the first grade long-term residents is N/Y/Y, a Southwestern phonological pattern -- even more unusual, since there are no subjects from that region. The fourth grade long-term group consistently uses the N/Y/N pattern, with six of the seven long-term residents conforming to the pattern.

Four other long-term residents pattern identically (both lexically and phonologically) with Kris and Rachel: Josey (1L19), Britney (4L31), Hallie (4N25), and Mary (4L32). Without exception, these four subjects have accommodated to the N/Y/N pattern (possibly against their former dialect). While other long-term residents of NAS do not match up perfectly with these first three examples, the frequency of the /ɑ~ɔ/ merger among long-term residents is significant. As shown in Figure 3, it is fairly clear that the subjects are linguistically converging on a standard pronunciation for these vowels, i.e., as /ɑ/.

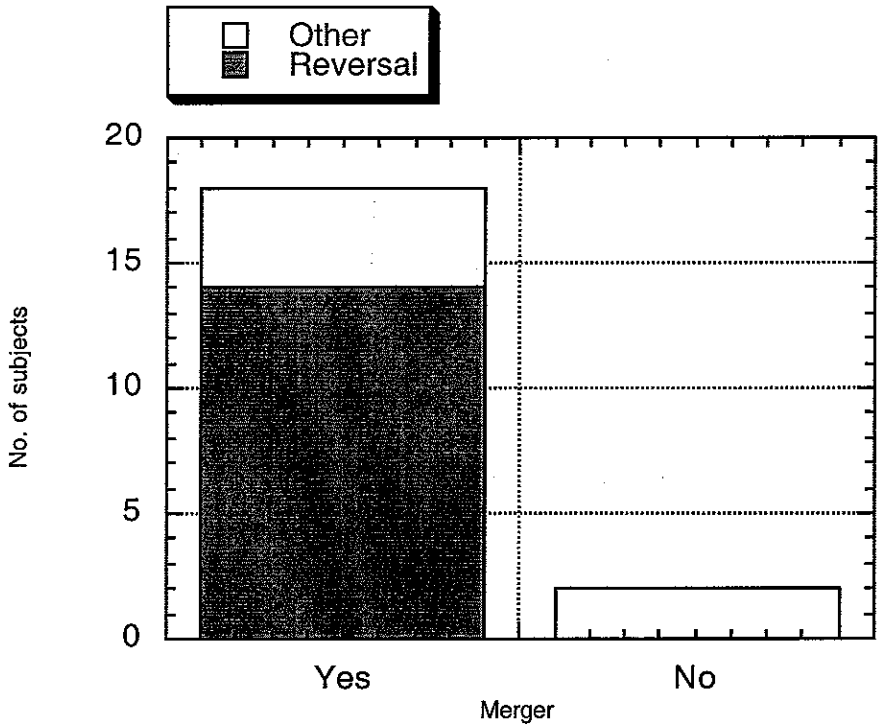


Figure 3. Long-term resident behavior in /ɑ~ɔ/ merger.

There are a number of individuals who have reversed their features to display either the N/Y/N pattern or the N/Y/Y pattern. Dana (1L16) could present a very strong case: three years ago, she moved from Philadelphia to NAS. The likelihood that Dana would have fully acquired the local dialect (and possibly some ethnic linguistic markers, as she is half African American) is very high: the Navy shipyard is located within the city limits of Philadelphia, therefore drawing Dana's family closer to the heart of a very marked dialectal region. However, she shows absolutely no markers of that region, a region where dialectal markers are very much present; in fact, her current phonological pattern is N/Y/Y. Alice (1L06), Abigail (1L10), Josey (1L19), Erin (4L28), Britney (4L31), and Mary (4L32), all long-term residents, have reversed *both* mergers, so that they now follow the N/Y/N pattern; Mindy (1L14) and Dana (1L16) have reversed both to conform to the N/Y/Y pattern. The other long-term residents have reversed one of their features to conform to one of the patterns.

The totals are high: seven of the 12 (58%) first-grade long-term residents (two subjects had a "no response," thus disallowing a full patterning) follow the N/Y/Y pattern, and four (33%) follow the N/Y/N pattern (Table 4). Among the fourth graders, six of the seven (85%) long-term residents followed the N/Y/N pattern (Table 5). In light of this evidence, I would propose that these children are converging on a singular dialect unique to the subjects as a whole.

Table 4. First grade long-term subjects.

Subject	*Name*	*Previous res.*	*(ae) raising*	*/a~ɔ/ merger*	*pin/pen merger*
1L06	Alice	TN	N	Y	N
1L07	Kristy	VA	N	Y	-
1L08	Kay	FL?	N	Y	Y
1L09	Ann	VA	N	N	N
1L10	Abigail	FL	N	Y	N
1L11	Jane	FL	N	Y	Y
1L12	Cynthia	FL	N	-	N
1L13	Sarah	CA	N	Y	Y
1L14	Mindy	PA	N	Y	Y
1L15	Kathy	CA	N	Y	Y
1L16	Dana	Philly	N	Y	Y
1L17	Ilse	MD	N	Y	N
1L18	Marie	VA	N	Y	Y
1L19	Josey	VA	N	Y	N

Table 5. Fourth grade long-term subjects.

Subject	*Name*	*Previous res.*	*(ae) raising*	*/a~ɔ/ merger*	*pin/pen merger*
4L26	Anna	MD	N	Y	N
4L27	Kris	Overseas	N	Y	N
4L28	Erin	FL	N	Y	N
4L29	Micky	TN	N	N	Y
4L30	Rachel	Overseas	N	Y	N
4L31	Britney	FL	N	Y	N
4L32	Mary	FL	N	Y	N

If this dialect is indeed the case, why aren't all of the long term residents following the same pattern? Ann (1L09), for instance, does not have the /ɑ~ɔ/ merger, despite having been at NAS for two years: she stands out as the sole non-merger among the first graders. The non-merger of /ɑ~ɔ/ is in accordance with her previous dialect of southern Virginia, yet she has switched to a non-merger of *pin/pen*, which is *against* the Southern dialect. Her partner, Abigail (1L10), who likewise is a long-term resident and was previously from a Southern dialect region, also does not make the *pin/pen* merger, but does make the /ɑ~ɔ/ merger (thus conforming to the NAS dialect) -- both she and Ann live in 205 housing and say they play together a lot. The fact that they spend so much time together could account for Ann's switch to making the distinction between *pin/pen*, but why she hasn't merged /ɑ~ɔ/ is a mystery.

Peculiarities such as this could simply be due to individual motivations and personal preferences that any sociolinguist in a brief overview of a study such as this will never be able to unearth. Lexical variation also reflects this possibility, since lexical items are much more subject to conscious control by the individual. As mentioned earlier, there is the case of Erin (4L28), who moved from Florida two years ago. Although she has reversed both the mergers, she still retains a very slight Southern Shift -- perhaps not enough to be noticed (and therefore remarked upon) by her peers, but enough for her to unconsciously identify herself regionally or socially. She may also be resistant to her new environment; when asked during the interview if she liked living at NAS, she replied, "Well, sort of," and also said she had "not too many" friends. Her lack of strong identification with a peer group may influence this retention of a regional marker.

G. Social networks and socio-ethnic correlations

Erin demonstrates the linguistic effects of a social network, a group effect which plays an important role in enforcing linguistic norms. The most applicable method of examining the network

is by sociometrics, is a way of exploring the links that create a network, whose "basic approach...is to question each member of the network about their relationship" to other members (Chambers 1995, 73). Naming, of course, is not equal, and some members will be more frequently identified than others. The members that are the most frequently named are core or central members, and others will be attached to this core by varying degrees. Clusters within a group will sometimes form, what we would call a "clique." How a network forms can influence how the other members of the group speak. For these first- and fourth-graders, the development and relative importance of social networks may perform a linguistic role.

I will discuss the fourth grade class and only one of the first-grade classes (Ms. Davis') and not the other (Ms. Grey's, which includes ten of the first graders: Kay, Meg, Ann, Abigail, Marie, Carrie, Nancy, Jane, Cynthia, and Ilse), as I did not observe Ms. Grey's class and thus have only piecemeal idea of the social structure. I will, however, discuss a few individual relationships among them. One unusual feature does reveal itself when the two classes are separated: the split between the lexical items *pail* and *bucket* become reduced in Ms. Davis' class. Among the long-term residents, *bucket* is used with higher frequency (71%, or 5 of 7 responses), while among the long-term residents of Ms. Grey's, it is still split nearly evenly and marginally in favor in *pail* (42%, or 3 of 7 responses, use *bucket*; 57%, or 4 of 7 responses, use *pail*). That in itself could be an argument for the girls of Ms. Davis' class acting as a single social unit.[15]

First grade. It was clear after a short observation time that Kristy (1L07) and Sarah (1L13) were the core members of the class, an observation made even more abundantly clear by the other girls, virtually all of whom named Kristy and Sarah right off as their favorite girls to play with. Kristy's and Sarah's strong social dominance does not, however, seem to play out linguistically. The two girls themselves are different lexically, despite the fact that they play mostly with each other both in

[15] Although with such a small number of subjects, the argument is fairly weak.

class and out of school (both live in 205 housing); two of their phonological features match up ((ae) raising and /ɑ~ɔ/ merger), while the *pin/pen* merger is an unknown due to Kristy's lack of response.

There are two girls, however, who both name Sarah as their favorite person, to the exclusivity of others (with the exception of their partner), and who both have the N/Y/Y phonological pattern. Although Kathy's (1L15) phonological patterns match Sarah's, her lexical responses are, I believe, more strongly tied to Josey (see below). Mindy (1L14) likewise does not match Sarah in lexical responses; she does, though, match Kristy. The phonological markers are the more important ones, because she has reversed both mergers from her previous dialect pattern, while her lexical pattern is still preserved.

Social connections between various girls play out in unpredictable fashions, sometimes lexically, sometimes phonologically, and sometimes neither. A good example of lexical imitation is Kathy (1L15) and Josey (1L19), who sit next to and play with each other a lot each other in class, although they live in different housing. Their strong reciprocal social tie is reflected in their linguistic features. Both girls are both in the minority in their usage of *tennis shoes* -- they are in fact the only long-term residents who do. They also both supplied the term *sand bucket*, adding the extra modifier where virtually no one else did.[16] Likewise, Tara (1N01) and Dana (1L16) have the same lexical features. Both use *sneakers,* with Tara in opposition to her former dialect, perhaps in imitation of Dana. Tara, however, does not exhibit the *pin/pen* merger, where Dana does. But Tara has been as NAS only three months, and the minor change in her lexicon is indicative of that; it cannot be expected that her phonological features will change that quickly (although in continuing to conform to the Western dialect, she does already follow the N/Y/N pattern). To use an example from the other set of first-grade subjects, Ann (1L09) and Abigail (1L10) show the influence of their friendship by being in the minority of subjects who do not have the *pin/pen* merger: both

[16] Micky (4L29), a fourth grader, also called it a *sand bucket.*

girls live in 205 housing and play with each other a lot both during and after school.

On the whole, despite the social centrality of Kristy and Sarah, individual links between the girls in the class are stronger when it comes to the influence of linguistic features.

Fourth grade. The social network of the fourth-grade class is more complex than the first-grade, and the importance of peer status and who a girl hangs out with becomes apparent. Desire to become part of a clique is more of a driving force for these girls; Britney (4L31) and Wendy (4N24) are described as "inseparable" by their teacher, and I too observed that the two were rarely separated. Once again, as with Kristy and Sarah, however, their tie does not play out in their linguistic markers, although it is perhaps accountable by the fact that Wendy has been at NAS for less than a year. Hallie (4N25), also a newcomer, wants to be a part of Britney's and Wendy's group; her lexical and phonological patterns match perfectly with Britney's. Several of the newcomers have also begun to reverse phonological features to accommodate to the N/Y/N pattern. Jessie (4N20), Yasmine (4N22), and Hallie (4N25) have already completed this.

Even though some of these subjects switch their features, the long-term subjects especially are converging without a doubt to a singular norm. Having more after-school activities (thus decreasing time spent with the parents and other family members and increasing time spent with peers), the importance of being like one another, the rising importance of social networks,[17] and being part of the group intensifies this accommodation. It is also likely that since the fourth graders have been peer-centered for more years now than the first graders, the fourth graders are therefore more sensitive to and integrated into a linguistic norm.

Ethnicity. A possible case for ethnicity and desire to be included in a certain social grouping might

[17] Yasmine (4N22), for instance, spent several minutes explaining a very complex social network or clique that she was part of.

be that of Micky (4L29). She is a fourth-grade long-term resident, having been at NAS for two years, yet she differs from the rest of the long-term residents on both mergers: she does not merge /ɑ~ɔ/ and does merge *pin/pen*. (N/N/Y). Micky is a diffident, awkward, African American girl, shy and eager to fit in. Both she and her teacher say that she plays mostly with children from other classes; more significantly, she plays almost exclusively with other African American children. Her social identification becomes clear in other markers in her speech, features that are unique to AAVE.[18] Besides the two mergers, which are markers of AAVE, she has 100% deletion of word final (ng)[19] in Interview Style -- the sole instance when she did pronounce the (ng) was in Reading Style. Other AAVE markers she used were: pronunciation of *asked* as the stigmatized and very apparent methathesized form, /aekst/; stopping of word-initial /θ/ (/θʌ/ > /dʌ/);[20] and occasional deletion or glottalization of word final (d) (/glaed/ > /glae_/ or /glaeʔ/) (Mufwene 1998). With this sort of linguistic reversal, or going against the linguistic current of the rest of her classmates, Micky unconsciously identifies herself with a different social group, that of her African American friends.

Yasmine (4N22), on the other hand, despite also being African American and also identifying her social group as other African Americans, does *not* exhibit AAVE features. While she does have a high frequency of (ng) deletion, it shows consistently *only* when she is extremely interested in what she was talking about.

---

18 African American Vernacular English.

19 This feature stood out to me from even the initial interview; impressionistically, none of the other subjects deleted word-final (ng) with such completeness as Micky did.

20 Inconsistent: when she was more excited, such as telling me about her favorite movie, she used the stopped form.

H. Age difference and language acquisition

Among the newcomers, some subjects are already moving toward accommodation to the NAS dialect; while their changes may not yet be perfectly in alignment, many have switched one of their phonological markers and perhaps a lexical item or two. The most dramatic rearrangement of phonological features in the shortest amount of time is that of Carrie (1N02): in a mere three and a half months, she has accomodated to the NAS dialect, such that they are possibly in opposition to her former dialect region of Florida.

Table 1.4. Rapid dialect accommodation.

	(ae) raising	/ɑ~ɔ/ merger	*pin/pen* merger
Carrie	N	Y	N
Florida dialect	N	N	Y

Interestingly enough, while her phonological features have so readily changed, she still clings to the lexical term *Coke* -- her lexical markers would be expected to change more swiftly. Her partner Marie (1L18) (both tell me that they play together a large amount during school), a long-term resident, does use *soda* and *pail*, and Carrie also uses *pail*, while the Southern dialect uses *bucket*. Changing such an innocuous term such as *pail* and leaving a clearly unusual term as *Coke* is odd. However, as previously noted, lexical items are notoriously whimsical in their usage.

Children such as these first graders are still in rapid, head-on language acquisition mode: they rapidly learn language and accommodate to whatever they are hearing. If we operate under the assumption that subjects fully acquired the features of the previous dialect, Carrie could demonstrate a clear case of how rapidly language change can occur -- just three and a half months for her. Other subjects show the same tendencies, such as Tara (1N01) and Nancy (1N04), who both have one of their mergers disagreeing with their recent dialects. Becca (1N03), on the other hand, still shows no signs of accommodation; despite having been at NAS for seven months, her

entire linguistic pattern (phonological pattern N/N/Y) is in accordance with her recent Southern dialect (see Table 1), and in opposition to the NAS dialect (although she displays no evidence of a Southern Shift).

Linguistic diversity among the first graders may also be due to the fact that they are more likely to spend more time with their parents than do the fourth graders. As discussed in the previous section, social networks for the first graders are looser and less important in terms of linguistic force. Combined with more parent-centered activity, the first graders may still be showing effects of patterning after their parents.

The age difference is also played out in the muddle that is the *pin/pen* merger among the first graders. As explained above, while the fourth graders are almost exceptionless in their non-merger, the first graders do not accommodate either way. Because of this mode of rapid language acquisition, perhaps part of the reason for this discrepancy is their susceptibility to change. New linguistic phenomena are presented to these children on a daily basis, and change happens swiftly and easily. The fourth graders are less susceptible to change, and thus have greater uniformity.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Despite isolation -- or perhaps *because* of it -- these children reflect the trends of today's emerging General English dialect. In fact, Stephanie Strassel of the University of Pennsylvania's Linguistic Data Consortium believes the phonological pattern demonstrated in this study to be that of a newly emergent General English (Strassel 2000). The /ɑ~ɔ/ merger is "quite large and is growing rapidly," said Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998, 70); it's beginning to be considered "part of mainstream of 'standard' English rather than a mere regional variation." Even without assuming that military brats arrive at an overseas base speaking different dialects, it is a remarkable phenomenon that after a year there is a convergence. The linguistic variation that these children

receive motivates a homogenization.

Can this dialect be extended to other military bases? Would a child who remained overseas but only moved to different bases keep essentially the same dialect? Without much hesitation I would be inclined to say yes. While the size, population composition, and location varies widely from base to base, there is little reason to believe that the same principles that are acting at NAS would not be in operation at these other bases.

From overseas isolation and the implosion of conflicting dialects, military brats come out of an overseas tour speaking a homogenized General English. An undeniably American "melting pot" creates linguistic homogeny.

APPENDIX

A. Data

1. Vital statistics
2. Lexical features
3. Phonological features

B. Picture cards

1. Vital statistics

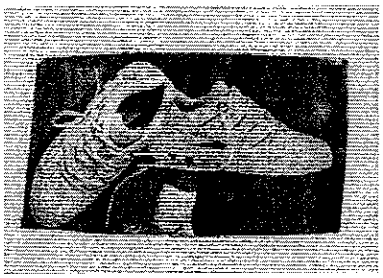
Sample	Name	Age	Time here	Previously lived	Duration	Current residence	Ethnicity
1N01	Tara	7	3 mos	CA		Mineo	black
1N02	Carrie	7	3.5 mos	FL	3 yrs	Mineo	white
1N03	Becca	7	7 mos	VaBeach	4 yrs	Mineo	biracial
1N04	Nancy	7	<1 yr	TX	2 yrs	Motta	white
1N05	Meg	7	1 yr	CONUS	Kindergarten	San Pietro	white
1L06	Alice	7.5	1 yr, 5 mos	TN		Constanza	white
1L07	Kristy	6.5	2 yrs	VA		205	white
1L08	Kay	7	2 yrs	FL?		Misterbianco	white
1L09	Ann	7	2 yrs	VA		205	white
1L10	Abigail	7	2 yrs	FL		205	white
1L11	Jane	7	2 yrs	FL	at least 1 yr	205	white
1L12	Cynthia	7	2 yrs	FL		?	white
1L13	Sarah	7.5	2 yrs	CA		205	white
1L14	Mindy	7.5	2 yrs	PA		Mineo (2 wks)	white
1L15	Kathy	7	at least 2 yrs	CA		Mineo	white
1L16	Dana	6	3 yrs	Philly		Paterno	bi: blk/Port.
1L17	Ilse	7	3 yrs	MD		Motta	black
1L18	Marie	7	3-4 yrs	VA		San Gregorio	white
1L19	Josey	6	6 yrs	VA		Campo Rotundo	white
4N20	Jessie	9	2 mos	ME	4 yrs	Campo Rotundo	white
4N21	Sandy	9.5	2 mos	La Maddelena	2 yrs	Misterbianco	white
4N22	Yasmine	9	6 mos	MD	started 4th; 5yrs	Motta	black
4N23	Beth	10	7 mos	VA Beach	4 yrs	Mineo	bi
4N24	Wendy	10	<1 yr	Pensacola, FL		Mineo	black
4N25	Hallie	9.5	1 yr	Hawaii	3 yrs	Mineo	white
4L26	Anna	10	1 yr, 7 mos	MD		Masculacia	mixed: Greek
4L27	Kris	9	1.5 yrs	Japan		TLA (soon 205)	white
4L28	Erin	9	2 yrs	FL		Mineo	white
4L29	Micky	9.5	2 yrs	TN		205	black
4L30	Rachel	10	2 yrs	Turkey		Aci Reale	white
4L31	Britney	9	2.5 yrs	FL	several yrs	Misterbianco	white
4L32	Mary	10	3 yrs	FL		205	white

Sample	Name	Time	Former res.	L1 tennis shoes/sneakers	L2 soda/pop	L3 pail/bucket	L4 sack/bag	L5 drinking/water fountain
1N01	Tara	3 mos	CA	sneakers	soda	bucket	bag	water fountain
1N02	Carrie	3.5 mos	FL	sneakers	Coke, Coca-cola	pail	bag	water fountain
1N03	Becca	7 mos	VaBeach	shoes	Coke	bucket	bag	water fountain
1N04	Nancy	<1 yr	TX	tennis shoes	soda	bucket	bag	water fountain
1N05	Meg	1 yr	CONUS	sneakers	Coke > soda	pail	bag	water fountain
1L06	Alice	1yr 5mo	TN	sneakers	Coke	bucket	bag	sink
1L07	Kristy	>2 yrs	VA	sneakers	soda	pail	bag	drinking fountain
1L08	Kay	2 yrs	FL?	shoes	Coke	bucket	bag	fountain
1L09	Ann	2 yrs	VA	sneakers	soda	pail	bag	water fountain
1L10	Abigail	2 yrs	FL	shoes	soda	pail	bag	water fountain
1L11	Jane	2 yrs	FL	sneakers	Sprite, drink	bucket	bag	water fountain
1L12	Cynthia	2 yrs	FL	sneakers	soda	bucket	bag	water fountain
1L13	Sarah	>2 yrs	CA	shoes	soda	bucket	bag	sink - fountain
1L14	Mindy	2 yrs	PA	sneakers	soda	pail	bag	water fountain
1L15	Kathy	2 yrs	CA	tennis shoes	soda	sand bucket	bag	water fountain
1L16	Dana	3 yrs	Philly	sneakers	soda	bucket	bag	water fountain
1L17	Ilse	3 yrs	MD	Nike > sneakers	soda	pail	bag	water fountain
1L18	Marie	>3 yrs	VA	sneakers	soda	pail or bucket	bag	water fountain
1L19	Josey	6 yrs	VA	tennis shoes	soda	sand bucket	bag	water fountain
4N20	Jessie	2 mos	ME	tennis shoes	soda	pail	bag	water faucet
4N21	Sandy	2 mos	O	tennis shoes	soda	bucket	bag	water fountain
4N22	Yasmine	6 mos	MD	shoes	soda	bucket	bag	water fountain
4N23	Beth	7 mos	VaBeach	sneakers	Coke > pop*	bucket	bag	water fountain
4N24	Wendy	<1 yr	FL	sneakers	Coke	pail ('buckets...of water')	bag	water fountain
4N25	Hallie	1 yr	HI	tennis shoes	soda	bucket	bag	water fountain
4L26	Anna	1yr 7mo	MD	sneakers	soda	pail	bag	water fountain
4L27	Kris	1.5 yrs	O	*	soda	bucket	bag	water fountain
4L28	Erin	2 yrs	FL	Nikes > shoes	soda	pail or bucket	bag	water fountain
4L29	Micky	2 yrs	TN	sneakers	soda	sand bucket	bag	water fountain
4L30	Rachel	2 yrs	O	tennis shoes	soda	bucket	bag	water fountain
4L31	Britney	2.5 yrs	FL	tennis shoes	soda	bucket	bag	water fountain
4L32	Mary	3 yrs	FL	tennis shoes	soda	bucket	bag	water fountain

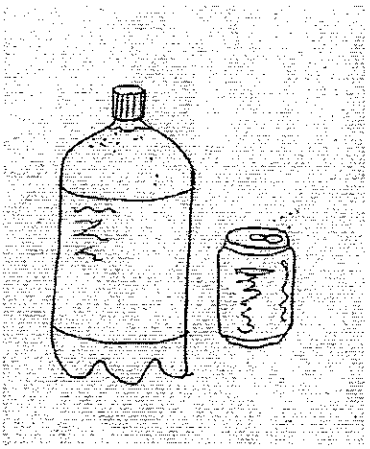
Sample	Name	Age	Time	Former res.	P1 (ae) raising	P2 /a~o/ merger	P3 pin/pen merger
1N01	Tara	7	3 mos	CA	N	Y	N
1N02	Carrie	7	3.5 mos	FL	N	Y	N
1N03	Becca	8.5	7 mos	VaBeach	N*	N	Y
1N04	Nancy	7	<1 yr	TX	N	Y	-
1N05	Meg	7	1 yr	CONUS	N	Y	Y
1L06	Alice	7.5	1yr 5mo	TN	N	Y	N
1L07	Kristy	6.5	>2 yrs	VA	N	Y	-
1L08	Kay	7	2 yrs	FL?	N*	Y	Y
1L09	Ann	7	2 yrs	VA	N	N	N
1L10	Abigail	7	2 yrs	FL	N	Y	N
1L11	Jane	7	2 yrs	FL	N	Y	Y
1L12	Cynthia	7	2 yrs	FL	N*	-	N
1L13	Sarah	7.5	>2 yrs	CA	N	Y	Y
1L14	Mindy	7.5	2 yrs	PA	N	Y	Y
1L15	Kathy	7	2 yrs	CA	N	Y	Y
1L16	Dana	6	3 yrs	Philly	N	Y	Y
1L17	Ilse	7	3 yrs	MD	N*	Y	N
1L18	Marie	7	>3 yrs	VA	N	Y	Y
1L19	Josey	6	6 yrs	VA	N	Y	N
4N20	Jessie	9	2 mos	ME	N	Y	N
4N21	Sandy	9.5	2 mos	O	N	Y	Y
4N22	Yasmine	9	6 mos	MD	N	Y	N
4N23	Beth	10	7 mos	VaBeach	Y	N	N
4N24	Wendy	10	<1 yr	FL	N	-	Y
4N25	Hallie	9.5	1 yr	HI	N	Y	N
4L26	Anna	10	1yr 7mo	MD	N	Y	N
4L27	Kris	9	1.5 yrs	O	N	Y	N
4L28	Erin	9	2 yrs	FL	N	Y	N
4L29	Micky	9.5	2 yrs	TN	N	N	Y
4L30	Rachel	10	2 yrs	O	N	Y	N
4L31	Britney	9	2.5 yrs	FL	N	Y	N
4L32	Mary	10	3 yrs	FL	N	Y	N

* *except* for "pan"

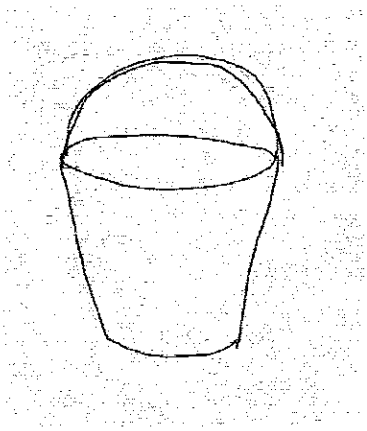
B. Picture cards: In the order presented to subjects, accompanied by target word.



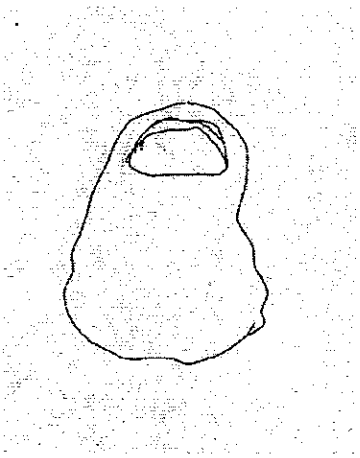
1. Lexical item: athletic shoes



2. Lexical item: *soda/pop/Coke*

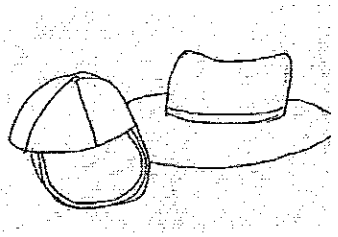


3. Lexical item: *bucket/pail*

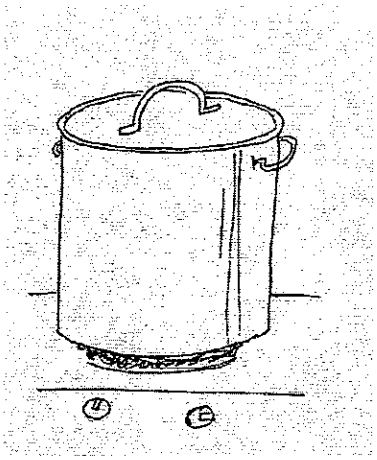


4. Lexical item: *bag/sack*

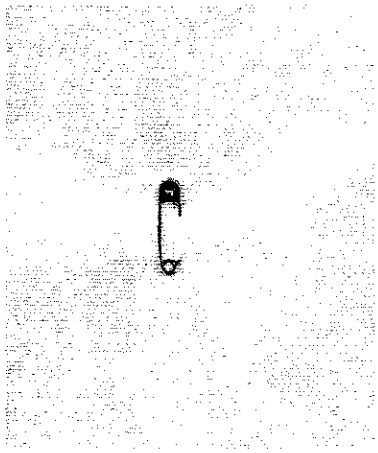
5. Phonological, (ae) raising: *cat*



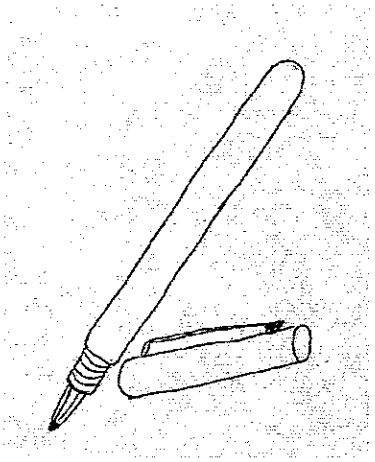
6. Phonological, (ae) raising: *hat*



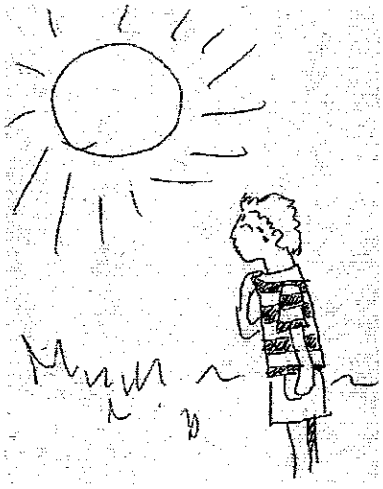
7. Phonological, /ɑ~ɔ/ merger: *pot*



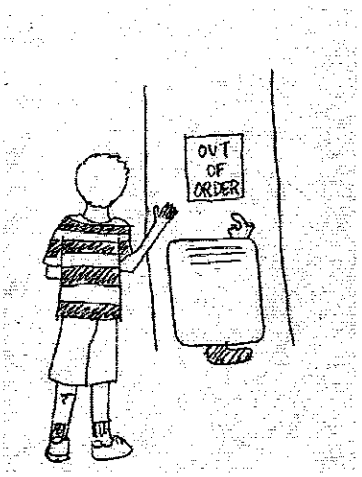
8. Phonological, *pin/pen* merger: *pin*



9. Phonological, *pin/pen* merger: *pen*



10. Phonological, /ɑ~ɔ/ merger: *hot*



11. Lexical item: *water/drinking fountain*

Phonological, (ae) raising: *mad*

11. Phonological, (ae) raising: *mad, glad*

REFERENCES

Chambers, J.K. "Dialect Acquisition." *Language* 68: 673-705, 1992.

Chambers, J.K. *Sociolinguistic Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1995.

Dufka, Dana. Personal correspondence. October, November 2000.

Helfrich, Hede. "Age Markers in Speech." *Social Markers in Speech*, Klaus R. Scherer and Howard Giles, eds. Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 1979.

Herold, Ruth. "Mechanisms of Merger: The Implementation and Distribution of the Low Back Merger in Eastern Pennsylvania." University of Michigan,1990.

Kurath, Hans. *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1949.

Labov, William, Sharon Ash, and Charles Boberg. "A National Map of the Regional Dialects of American English." http://www.ling.upenn.edu/phono_atlas/NationalMap/NationalMap.html. July 1997.

Labov, William. "The Phonological Atlas of the United States." http://babel.ling.upenn.edu/phono_atlas/home.html. 1996.

Mufwene, S., J. Rickford, G. Bailey, and J. Baugh, eds. *African American English: Structure, History, and Use.* New York: Routledge, 1998.

Raimy, Eric. Personal communication. 8 November 2000.

Strassel, Stephanie. Personal communication. 4 December 2000.

Trudgill, Peter. *Dialects in Contact.* New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1986.

Tyson, Jennifer. " 'He's like a chameleon:' The dialect of military brats." Swarthmore College, 1999.

Tyson, William J, Capt. USN. Personal correspondence. 15 November 2000.

Wolfram, Walt, and Natalie Schilling-Estes. *American English.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1998.

Zinnel, Pamela. Personal correspondence. 15 November 2000.