Sources of variation in the realisation of vowels in West AusE

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Quantitative phonetic analysis of social-indexical variation in AusE has developed considerable momentum in recent years and has started to shed important new light on the social trajectories of variation and change within an Australian context (e.g. Harrington et al. 1997, Cox & Palethorpe 2001, 2010, Loakes et al. 2010). This paper presents some preliminary findings from a project designed to analyse key dimensions of social-indexical phonetic variation within the Perth metropolitan area and to investigate the social and linguistic factors which govern this variation.

Findings are presented for the unscripted speech performance of 6 young speakers of WAusE recorded in dyads as part of a pilot for the main project. These are compared to the same speakers’ performance in a read speech task. The recordings have been analysed auditorily and acoustically in respect of a range of phonological variables; in this paper the focus is placed on low vowel monophthongs and on two diphthongs (GOAT and PRICE). The paper also presents findings relating to variability in the voice qualities deployed by the speakers. The findings are discussed in light of existing work on phonological variation and change in AusE and on the balance of social, stylistic, contextual, and lexical factors which correlate with the observed variability.

References