ABSTRACT

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Previous research on dialects of American English has found three overarching patterns for vowels: the Northern Cities Shift (Fasold, 1969), the Southern Vowel Shift (Feagin, 1986), and a Third Dialect that encompasses the Midlands and the West. However, findings since the 1980s have shown that different areas within this non-Northern, non-Southern conglomerate are linguistically divergent. Northern California, for example, is exhibiting a lowering and backing of front lax vowels (Eckert, 1986, 2008c), which means that ‘him’ is pronounced closer to ‘hem’, and ‘bed’ is pronounced more like ‘bad’. This study examines the vowel spaces of fifteen middle class, white, 20-30 year old speakers raised in Santa Barbara, California. The data is drawn from recordings of two reading passages: The Boy Who Cried Wolf (Deterding, 2006) and Comma Gets A Cure (McCullough et al., 2000). By completing an automated formant analysis using Praat scripting, this study examines whether California Vowel Shift has spread to this speech community in Southern California homogenously or heterogeneously. The data is further examined in R with regards to gender, particularly in how males, females, and non-binary individuals are exhibiting the features of this vowel shift. Using mixed-effects models, I found that women have a lower and more backed /ɛ/ realization than the other three genders. Furthermore, women who stayed in California for their college years are more likely to have a complete split between pre-nasal and non-pre-nasal /ae/ tokens. Men exhibited a more raised /æ/ before /k/ compared to females, which indicates that they have not fully adopted the shift. There is no effect of gender on other phonemes, and no effect of a speaker’s level of education.