

## ABSTRACT

ADAM JAMES BARNHARDT. "I didn't go to college with anyone that country": Age-Stratified Indexicality of Southern-Shifted Vowels. (Under the direction of Professor Robin Dodsworth.)

In this project, I investigate the perceived social indexicality of Southern-shifted vowels in a context where Southern variants are becoming less common. My hypotheses were as follows: **H1**: Younger listeners are more likely than older listeners to rate Southern-shifted speech as being associated with socially negatively evaluated, less educated, socially conservative, non-local, and rural speakers. **H2**: Members of the youngest listener group are more likely than older listeners to rate younger Southern-shifted speech (relative to middle-aged or older Southern-shifted speech) as belonging to less educated, socially conservative, non-local, and rural speakers. I test these hypotheses with a matched-guise test given to 52 participants in Alamance County, NC. Every listener heard both the Southern and non-Southern guises (with corresponding Southern-shifted and non-Southern shifted vowels) from three speakers, estimated the age of each, and then rated them across 8 axes of social identity. Results from these tests showed first that listeners rated the Southern guises as significantly less educated, less intelligent, less welcoming of diversity, and more conservative. A significant interaction between estimated speaker age and Southernness indicated that listeners believe Southern guises to belong to older speakers (compared to the corresponding non-Southern guises), and younger listeners especially believed this. Relating to my hypotheses: H1 was not supported. H2 was supported by the models for two axes, intelligence and likelihood of college attendance. This suggests an age-specific fractal recursivity of indexicality assigned to Southern-shifted vowels relating to advanced age, lesser education, and unintelligence. This is explored in a discussion of the enregisterment of Southern US English and of the changes in speaker norms known to be occurring in the vicinity of Alamance County, and which are likely to be taking place elsewhere in the South.