The Inception and Development of the Canadian Shift in the US Midland
David Durian, The Ohio State University

In recent studies of vowel variation in the US Midland (Durian, 2008, Bigham, 2010), the Canadian Shift has been found to be a vowel shift active in the vowel systems of many speakers born after c. 1950. As demonstrated in these studies, the Canadian Shift in the Midland appears to operate following the same general parameters it follows in both Canada and California\(^1\). That is, it typically involves the /a~/\(\text{ɔ}\)/ (near-) merger linked to the retraction of /æ/ as a chain shift, along with the retraction of /e/ and /I/ linked to the retraction of /æ/, either as a part of the same chain shift (as per Clarke, et al, 1995; Labov, et al, 2006) or as a part of a separate parallel shift (as per Boberg (2005) and Durian (2009)).

In the present study, we build on previous studies by tracing the development of the Canadian Shift in the US Midland back to its inception, using a mix of both real and apparent time data collected in the Columbus, OH. Specifically, we trace the inception and development of the Canadian Shift across the entirety of the 20th Century in Columbus via the instrumental analysis of normalized format data collected from interview recordings elicited from 62 speakers born between 1896 and 1991. Included in the analysis are data from speakers belonging to 4 generational birth year cohorts (speakers born 1896-1913, 1924-1938, 1945-1968, and 1976-1991), all of whom are further divided evenly into matched sex (male vs female) and social class (working vs middle) groupings.

Results of our series of linear mixed effects regression and vowel class correlation analyses reveal several significant trends not reported in previous studies of Midland vowel variation. First, our analyses reveal that, although the Canadian Shift is indeed most active among speakers born c. 1950 and later, speakers born as early as the 1924-1938 cohort also show some evidence of realizing early stages of the shift. Second, our analyses reveal that it is actually the retraction of /a/, and not /a~/\(\text{ɔ}\)/ (near-) merger per se, which appears to trigger the inception of the Canadian Shift in the Midland. Third, our analyses reveal that, if we redefine the Canadian Shift as involving only /a/-retraction, rather than /a~/\(\text{ɔ}\)/ (near-) merger per se, then the speakers showing the earliest evidence of the first stage of the shift are in fact members of the 1896-1913 birth cohort.

In addition, one further trend we find is some evidence suggesting /e/-retraction can occasionally precede /æ/-retraction in speaker vowel systems. We argue this additional trend provides further evidence suggesting that /e/-retraction is not linked to /æ/ and /a/-retraction (or /a~/\(\text{ɔ}\)/ (near-) merger) as the third step in a chain shift. Rather, it suggests /e/-retraction is part of a separate shift, further supporting the Canadian Shift as "parallel shift and chain shift" view argued for previously by Boberg (2005) and Durian (2009).

\(^1\)For analyses arguing that California Shift is essentially the same shift as Canadian Shift, see Boberg (2009) and Gramma & Kennedy (2009).