F2 Variation in GOOSE and GOAT in East Austin
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This paper will discuss variation in the F2 measurements of the GOOSE and GOAT vowels among Hispanic and African American speakers in East Austin, Texas. These vowels have been described as fronted for Southern Anglo speakers, but backed for Hispanic and African American speakers (Labov 2001, 2010; Thomas 2001). The fronting and overall F2 variation observed in this data is therefore unexpected. I argue that the variation in F2 of GOOSE and GOAT is specifically related to the speaker’s stance towards the topic of conversation.

East Austin was segregated from the city of Austin in the early 20th century and is currently experiencing gentrification. The issue of gentrification provides an interesting nexus where social variables such as race/ethnicity, socio-economic class and geographical place are inextricably tied together. The six speakers examined here are life-long residents of East Austin; all were 50-60 years old at the time of recording. A total of 737 tokens of GOOSE and 1402 tokens of GOAT were extracted from sociolinguistic interviews and measured at nine temporal points along the vowels’ duration. The GOOSE vowel exhibits fronting for all speakers, and in fact the midpoint F2 values display variation that spans the entire vowel space. Visual inspection of the vowel trajectory for GOOSE suggests monophthongal variants, unlike the trajectories described elsewhere (cf. Koops 2010; Bohmann 2012). The implication of different types of trajectories will be discussed. The GOAT vowel is similarly fronted for all speakers. Though it does not show the extensive variation present in GOOSE, F2 measurements range from the back of the vowel space past the center of the vowel space. This extensive variation is not random: the variation present in both GOOSE and GOAT is related to the speakers’ stance towards the topic of conversation. When speakers take an antigentrification stance tokens are produced at the back of the vowel space. This is the expected realization for Hispanic and African American speakers. However when speakers take a traditional stance, such as discussing childhood memories, tokens are produced towards the front of the vowel space. These realizations are unexpected, given the ethnicity of the speakers.

Kiesling (2009) argues that negotiation of meaning takes place through stances. This is the case in East Austin. As backed variants occur in speaker stances opposing gentrification, these variants index an identity that is unlike the new Anglo gentrifiers and serve to highlight the speaker as a long-time East Austin resident. The fronted GOOSE and GOAT variants observed here are similar to the typical Anglo Texan variant and unlike the typical Hispanic or African American variant. Because these variants are the Anglo supra-regional variant, their realization with a traditional stance serves to index the speaker’s identity as a Texan. If speakers continue to realize GOOSE and GOAT in these different ways and in these stances, awareness of the variants will grow. As this happens, the indexical link between the variant and the related stance will be strengthened and the variants might begin to acquire greater social meaning.