

Analyzing the Northern Cities Shift

Group field reports due Wednesday, October 01, at the end of class.
Personal reflection paper due Monday, October 06, at class time.

What we are doing

The Northern Cities Shift working group assignment is an activity to elicit, record, analyze, and describe NCS features in the speech of members of your working group.

Why we are doing it

This activity will help develop your understanding of American English phonetics and phonology in general and the Northern Cities Shift in particular. By comparing the sounds of NCS features to the sounds of non-NCS articulation, you'll get practice listening for distinctions in pronunciation and transcribing what you hear. Additional benefits include experience in how to elicit linguistic features from research participants, increased understanding of the concepts of articulation frequency and type and token analysis, and of how independent variables interact with language. You'll also get to play with and get comfortable with fun recording equipment and gain experience in collecting linguistic data.

How do we do it?

1. First, your group will have to decide which NCS feature(s) to focus on and what you'd like to know about them. You may decide to test all members of your group for presence or absence of the five major features. Or you might decide to focus on a single feature, or maybe two, and compare frequencies among group members using a type and token analysis.
2. Once you decide which features you're interested in, the next step is to figure out a way to elicit the features from speakers. We've looked at reading passages as one option. Your group can develop a passage of your own, or you might decide to try creating lists of words or other ways of eliciting NCS articulations by coming up with opportunities for your speakers to produce them. This will be your data collection instrument.
3. Next, test out the data collection instrument among your group members. Modify it if necessary.
4. Then do your study and record your interviews using the microphones and the Audacity sound editing software.
5. Once you have all your data recorded and saved to the desktop, you and your group can listen to and analyze your recording, keeping track of what you find out.
6. Each group will then write up a brief report of how the group proceeded through these steps and what you found out. This report (one per group) will be due at the end of class on Wednesday, 10/01.
7. Finally, write an individual narrative of 1-2 pages (double spaced) to reflect on your experience and discuss what you learned through this assignment about your own speech, that of your fellow group members, and the Northern Cities Shift. You can discuss experimental methods that worked for your group (or methods that didn't, if any), any new skills or knowledge you acquired, things that surprised you about your findings, any other new realizations you might have had as a result of the assignment, or anything else that you'd like to comment on regarding the experiment and your experience participating in it. This paper is due at the beginning of class on Monday, 10/06.