

North American English

Much of the dialect differentiation in the English of North America has been attributed to migration patterns, beginning with migration from England.

So what kind of English came to North America?

In the 17th Century, there was (and there still is) considerable dialect variability in the British Isles. The fate of English in North America depends to some extent on where people migrated from in the British Isles.

See the BBC recordings of different UK dialects at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/recordings/>

r-ful and r-less dialects

Rhoticity in English -

Rhotic dialects pronounce /r/ in all positions

Non-rhotic dialects pronounce /r/ only before a vowel.

Thus in New York:

father [fɑ^əðə] but father is [fɑ^əðəɪz]

guard [gɑ^{əd}]

Most of England in the 17th Century was **rhotic**
and much of it still is



As of the 1950s, the dialects in the red areas shown in this map of England were still rhotic.

Scotland and Ireland are also rhotic.

This map was taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhotic_and_non-rhotic_accents

Which was, in turn, based on Harold Orton and Eugen Dieth. 1962-71. *Survey of English dialects*. Leeds: Published for the University of Leeds by E. J. Arnold

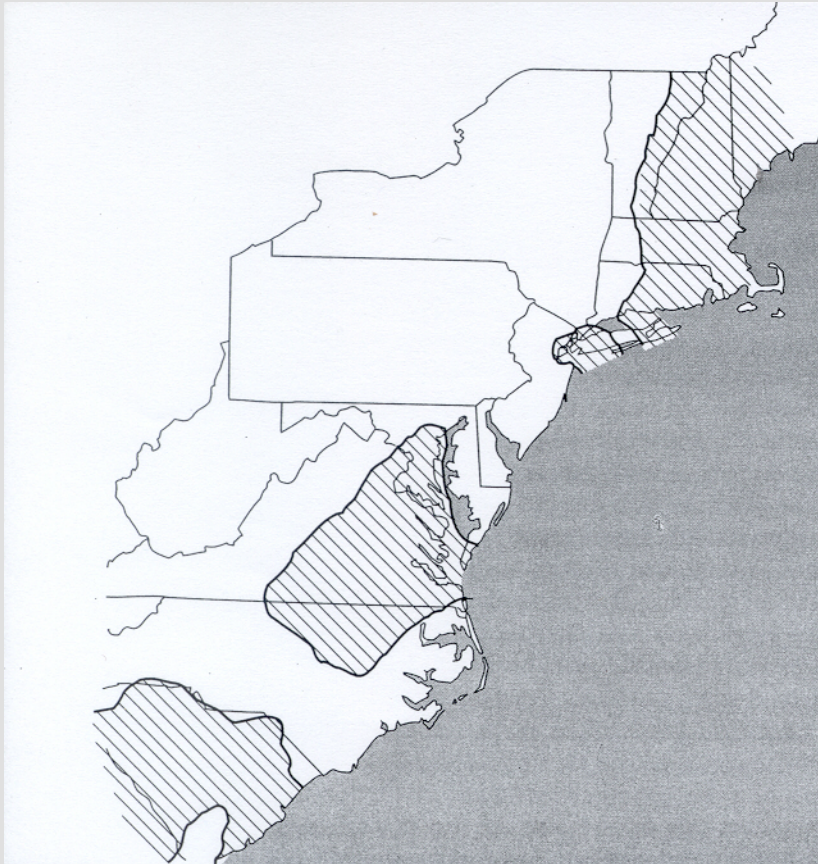
/r/ and prestige

In the 17th Century, r-lessness was a feature of the prestige dialect of south-eastern England, particularly around London. Southern rural dialects and northern and western dialects were (and many still are) r-ful.

Relatively prosperous people from southern England constituted an elite in the **Jamestown settlement** and in the **Massachusetts Bay Colony**, bringing an r-less norm to those areas.

People settling the rest of North America tended to be rural and from other regions, and brought their r-ful dialect with them.

r-less dialects on the east coast



Although New York was originally dominated by r-ful speakers, in the 1800's, New Yorkers began to emulate the prestigious r-less of the Boston dialect.

But over time, a national r-ful norm took over, and New York speech is gradually becoming r-ful again.

Most North American dialects are rhotic.



Non-rhotic dialects in the US are shown in red. While r-lessness was widespread in the south, it is rapidly disappearing, as in the north.

This map is taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhotic_and_non-rhotic_accents

Which, in turn, is based on William Labov, Sharon Ash and Charles Boberg. 2006. The atlas of North American English : phonetics, phonology, and sound change : a multimedia reference tool. Berlin ; New York : Mouton de Gruyter. Available on CD-Rom in Green Library.

Migration

Initial settlement patterns had an important effect on the establishment of dialect areas in the US.

Western migration from those initial settlements had an important effect on the linguistic geography of the midwest and the west, as suggested by the shapes of the major dialect areas in the US.

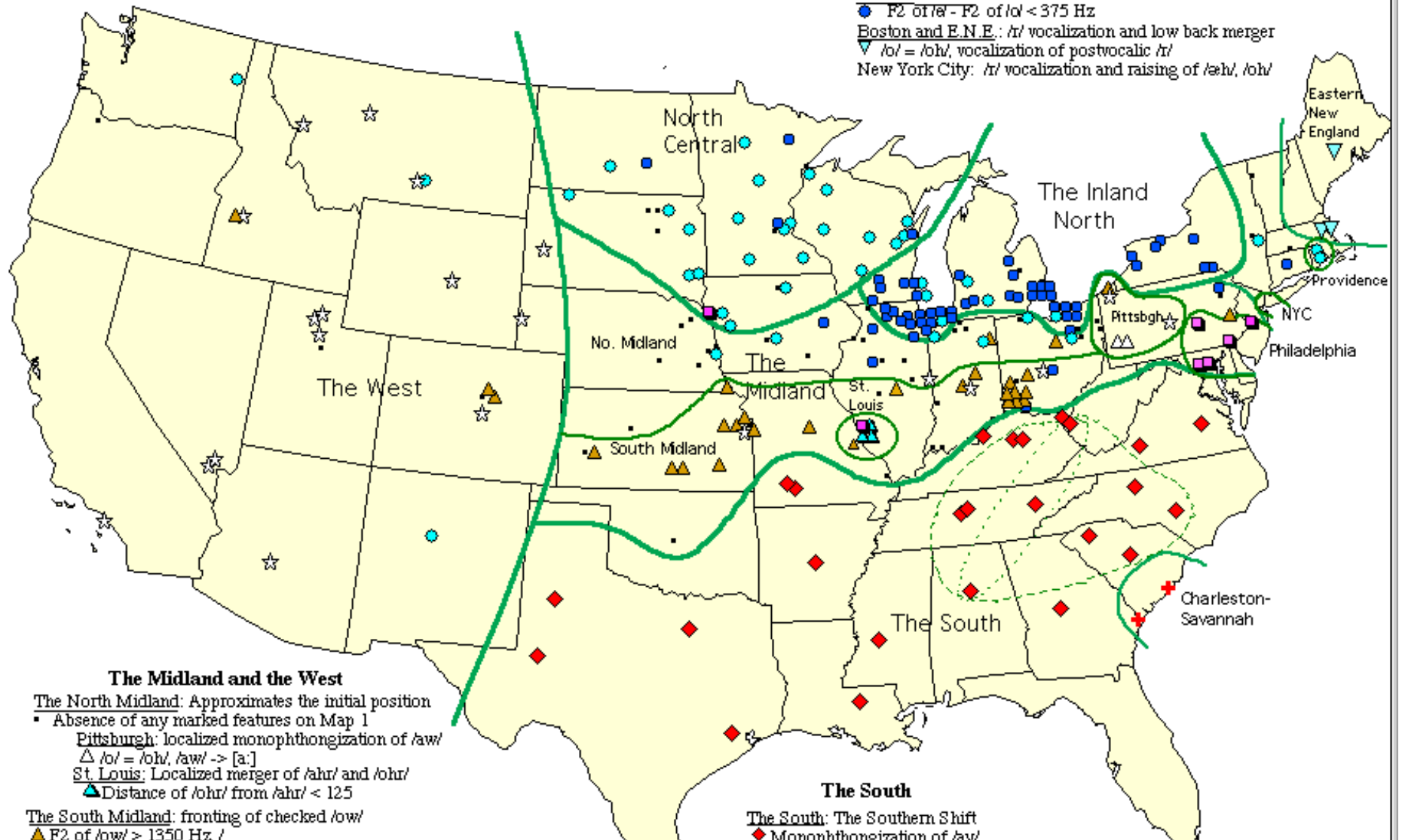
The Inland North: The Northern Cities Shift

● F2 of /r/ - F2 of /l/ < 375 Hz

Boston and E.N.E.: /r/ vocalization and low back merger

▽ /o/ = /oh/, vocalization of postvocalic /r/

New York City: /r/ vocalization and raising of /eh/, /oh/



The Midland and the West

The North Midland: Approximates the initial position

▪ Absence of any marked features on Map 1

Pittsburgh: localized monophthongization of /aw/

△ /o/ = /oh/, /aw/ -> [a:]

St. Louis: Localized merger of /ahr/ and /ohr/

▲ Distance of /ohr/ from /ahr/ < 125

The South Midland: fronting of checked /ow/

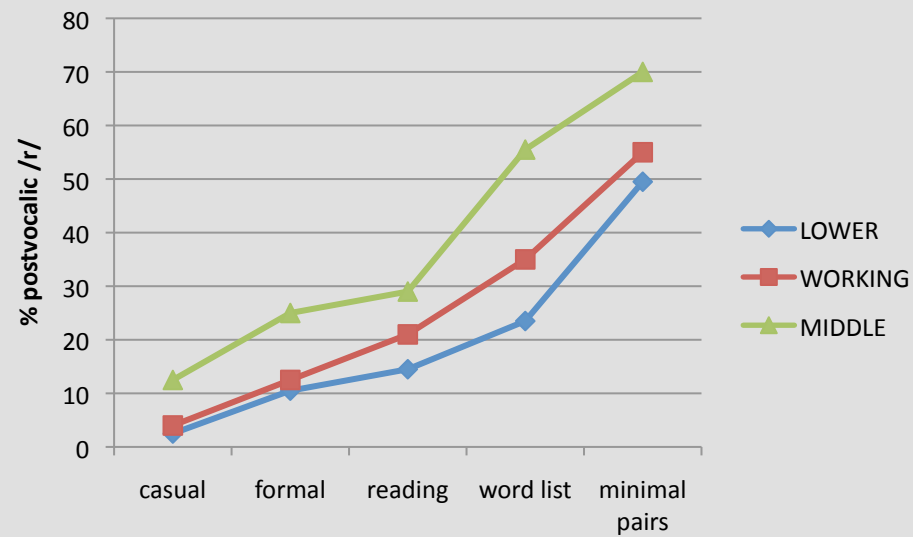
▲ F2 of /ow/ > 1350 Hz /

The South

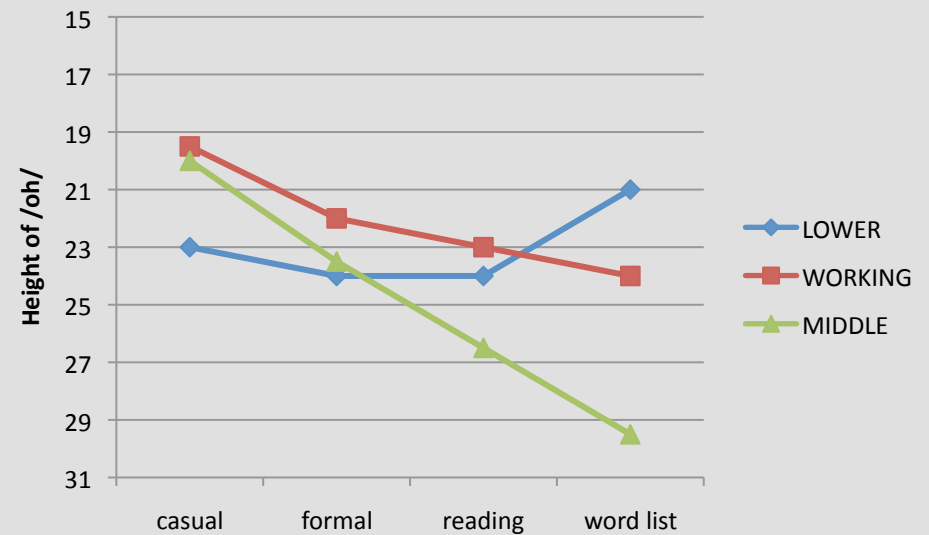
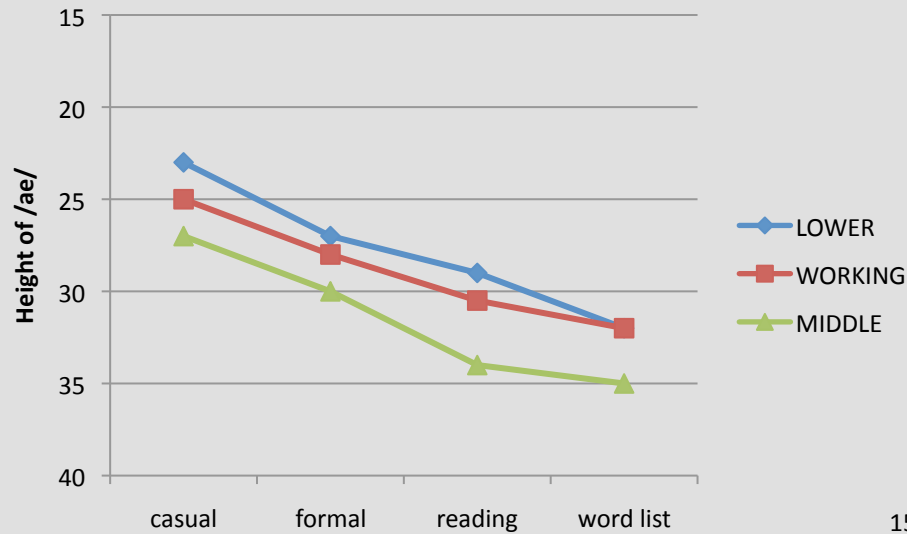
The South: The Southern Shift

◆ Monophthongization of /aw/

LABOV, W. 1966. The social stratification of English in New York City.
Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

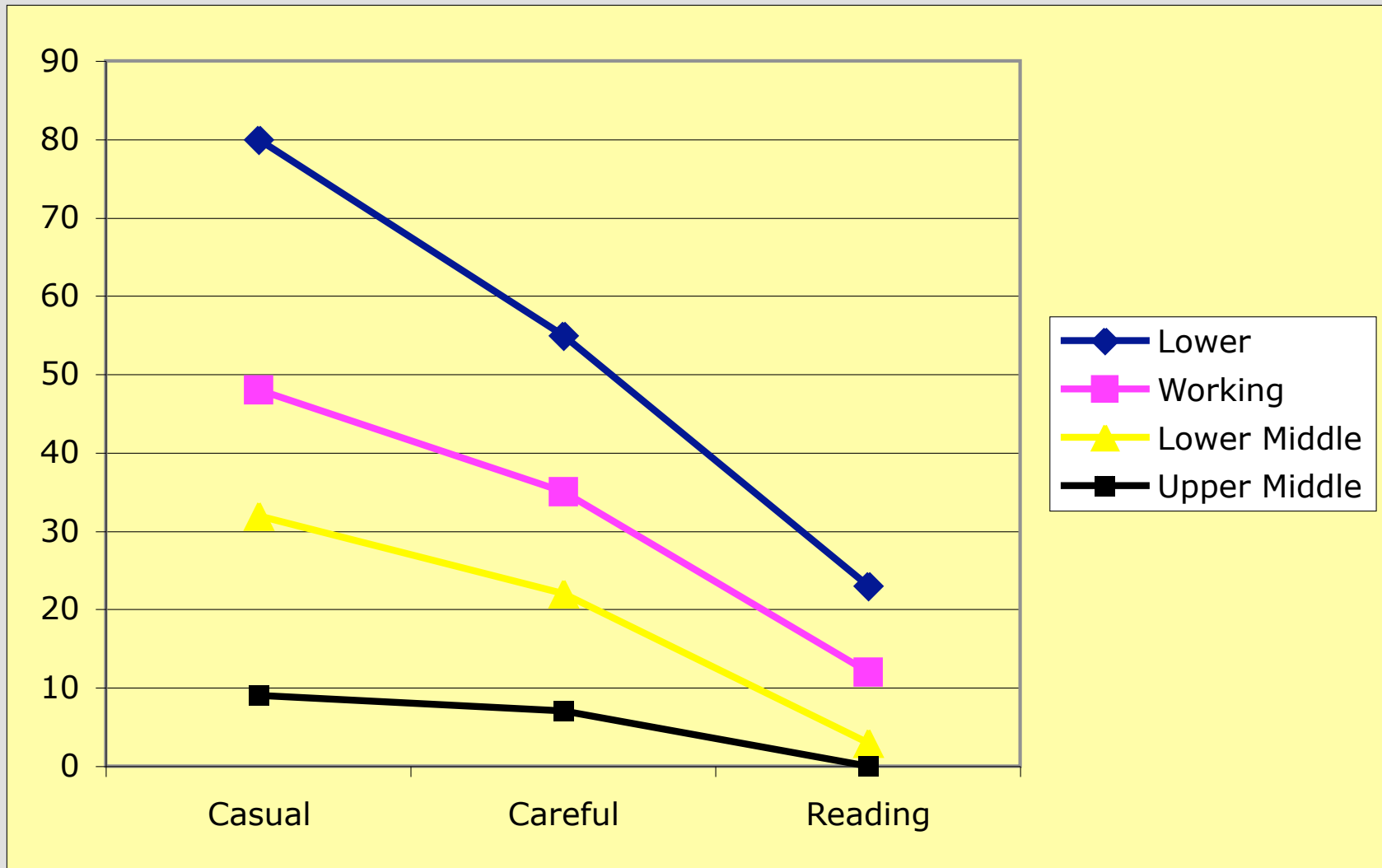


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Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.



% reduction of -ing in NYC

LABOV, W. 1966. The social stratification of English in New York City. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.



% reduction of -ing in Norwich

TRUDGILL, Peter. 1974. The social differentiation of English in Norwich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

