Internal Push, External Pull: the Reverse Vowel Shift in South African English.

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Like other Southern Hemisphere Englishes in Australia and New Zealand, South African English was well known for its short front vowel chain shift. Lass & Wright (1985) pointed decisively to raised TRAP and DRESS vowels compared to RP, and centralised KIT in mostly non-velar contexts. (In velar and glottal contexts, however, KIT remains high front, forming a KIT split in South African English.) However, recent scholarship has suggested that this raising is being reversed among young white South Africans. In particular, Bekker and Eley (2007) and Bekker (2009) report the lowering and retraction of TRAP. Mesthrie (2012) reports not only the lowering and retraction of TRAP, but also the lowering of KIT and DRESS.

This paper investigates the extent of the reversal of the older South African Chain Shift among white middle class South Africans from Cape Town via 44 sociolinguistic interviews. It uses the Forced Alignment and Vowel Extraction Toolkit (Rosenfelder, Fruehwald, Evanini & Yuan, 2011) for formant measurement and extraction of over 23,000 tokens. Statistical testing via R was performed, including linear mixed-effects modelling, random forest analyses, conditional inference trees, Euclidean Distance measures, Welch's Two Sample *t*-tests and Pillai Scores.

The analysis finds strong evidence of the reversal of the South African Chain Shift in the speech of participants, mostly led by women, under the age of 30. In particular, speakers aged between 18 and 25 participate the most in lowering KIT, DRESS and TRAP. Moreover, the short front vowels within the sample are being retracted, indicating that within the process of vowel lowering, further innovation occurs via this retraction. I argue that the Reverse Vowel Shift is a combination of push and pull chains: the fronting of FOOT causes the lowering of KIT, but it is the lowering of TRAP that induces the lowering of DRESS. The retraction of TRAP furthermore causes the backing and raising of STRUT, such that an anti-clockwise rotation of the short front vowels (barring LOT) is evidenced in South African English.

The Reverse Vowel Shift evident in Cape Town is similar to trends observed in California (Kennedy & Grama 2012), Canada (Clarke, Elms & Youssef 1995), southeast England (Torgersen & Kerswill 2004), Ireland (Hickey 2013) and Australia (Cox & Palethorpe 2008), except for one important factor. This concerns the KIT split. Both allophones are lowering in the Reverse Vowel Shift: KIT2 (the front allophone) appears to follow international trends. However, the lowering of 'other KIT' (the central allophone) may well be a further endogenous development predicted by earlier scholars like Lanham (1965). This restructuring of South African English therefore appears to reflect global trends, with a small portion of localisation.

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