

Week 4

Communication across  
dialects, languages,  
cultures

Accent and language change

Sue Ingels

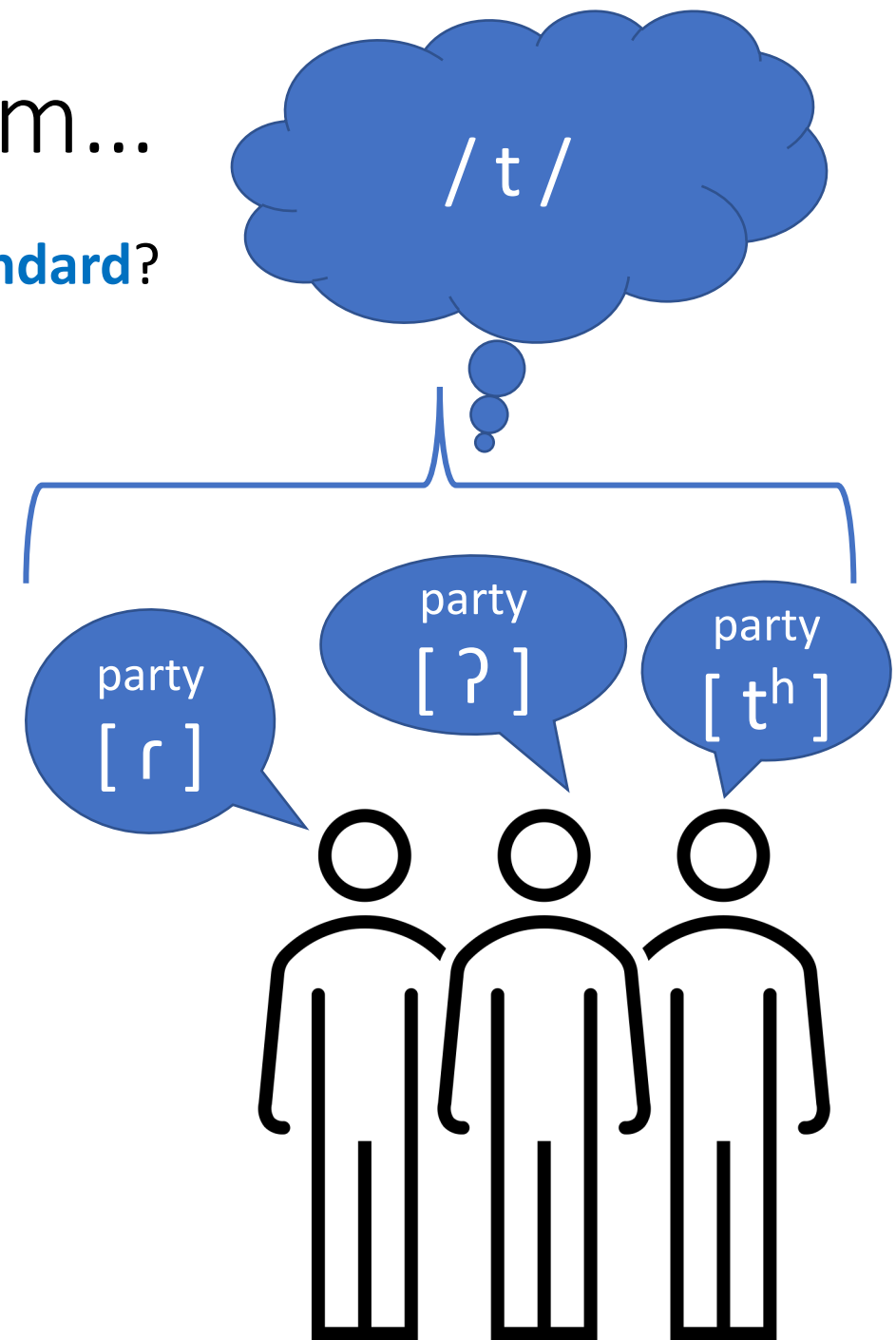
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March 20, 2023

# A given language's sound system...

- an **idealization** (phonological rules, phonemes) – a **standard**?
- “**orderly heterogeneity**” Weinreich, Labov and Herzog, 1968
  - **Dialect**—a variety of a language that varies from the standard language in systematic ways
  - **Accent**—phonology and pronunciation of a particular language or regional dialect; L2
  - **idiolect**—an individual's way of speaking (one's internal language structure)

(McMahon, 1994)



# American English Dialects

- See American English dialect map here:
- [https://www.ling.upenn.edu/phono\\_atlas/NationalMap/NationalMap.html#Heading2](https://www.ling.upenn.edu/phono_atlas/NationalMap/NationalMap.html#Heading2)

# Accent

Phonology and pronunciation of a particular language or regional dialect

Articulatory setting

Differences in articulation of sounds

Rhythmic features

Tone use

# What is accent?

Articulatory setting

Differences in articulation of sounds

Rhythmic features

Tone use

## General tendencies in a given language:

- rounded lips (French); spread lips (Am. English)
- dentalized or alveolarized tongue body (Chinese)
- retroflexion of the tongue (Indian Ls)
- uvularized tongue body (Hebrew)
- openness of jaw (more open—Am. English/more closed—Brit English)

# What is accent?

Articulatory setting

Differences in articulation  
of sounds

Rhythmic features

Tone use

Features may be phonemic in one language and allophonic in another

- **aspiration** of consonants: phonemic in Hindi or allophonic in English
- **nasalization** of vowels: phonemic in French, allophonic in English

# What is accent?

Articulatory setting

Differences in articulation  
of sounds

**Rhythmic features**

Tone use

- syllable duration (stressed and unstressed syllables)
- pitch accent
- presence or lack of phrase stress

# What is accent?

Articulatory setting

Differences in articulation  
of sounds

Rhythmic features

Tone use

- Tones used at **vowel** level (e.g., Cheyenne)
- Tones used at **syllable** level to distinguish meaning (e.g., Chinese “ma”)
- Differences in intonation patterns used at the **phrase** level (e.g., English)

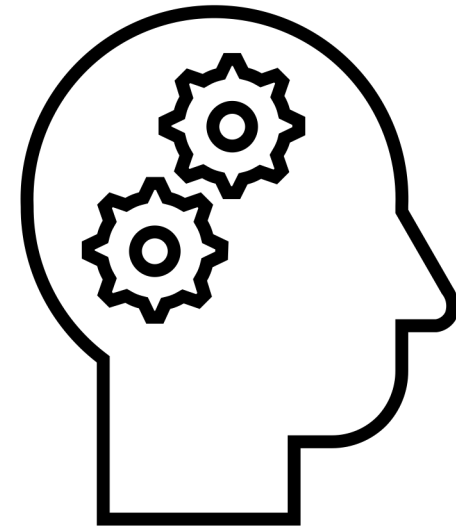


# Ideolect

- L1(s) structure(s): early childhood → school → early adulthood → speech communities
- *pasketti* → *spaghetti* → *pasta* → *bucatini*\*
- internal phonological structure unique to the individual
- generally systematic variation within one speaker

\* <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/02/952806806/where-is-all-the-bucatini-behind-the-great-2020-shortage>

Anymore, we  
/warf/  
dishes by hand



# Accent resources

## **Speech Language Archive**

Speakers of many different languages reading the same passage in English. Compare accents, pronunciations.

[https://accent.gmu.edu/browse\\_language.php](https://accent.gmu.edu/browse_language.php)

## **Atlas of North American English**

Dialect maps and descriptions.

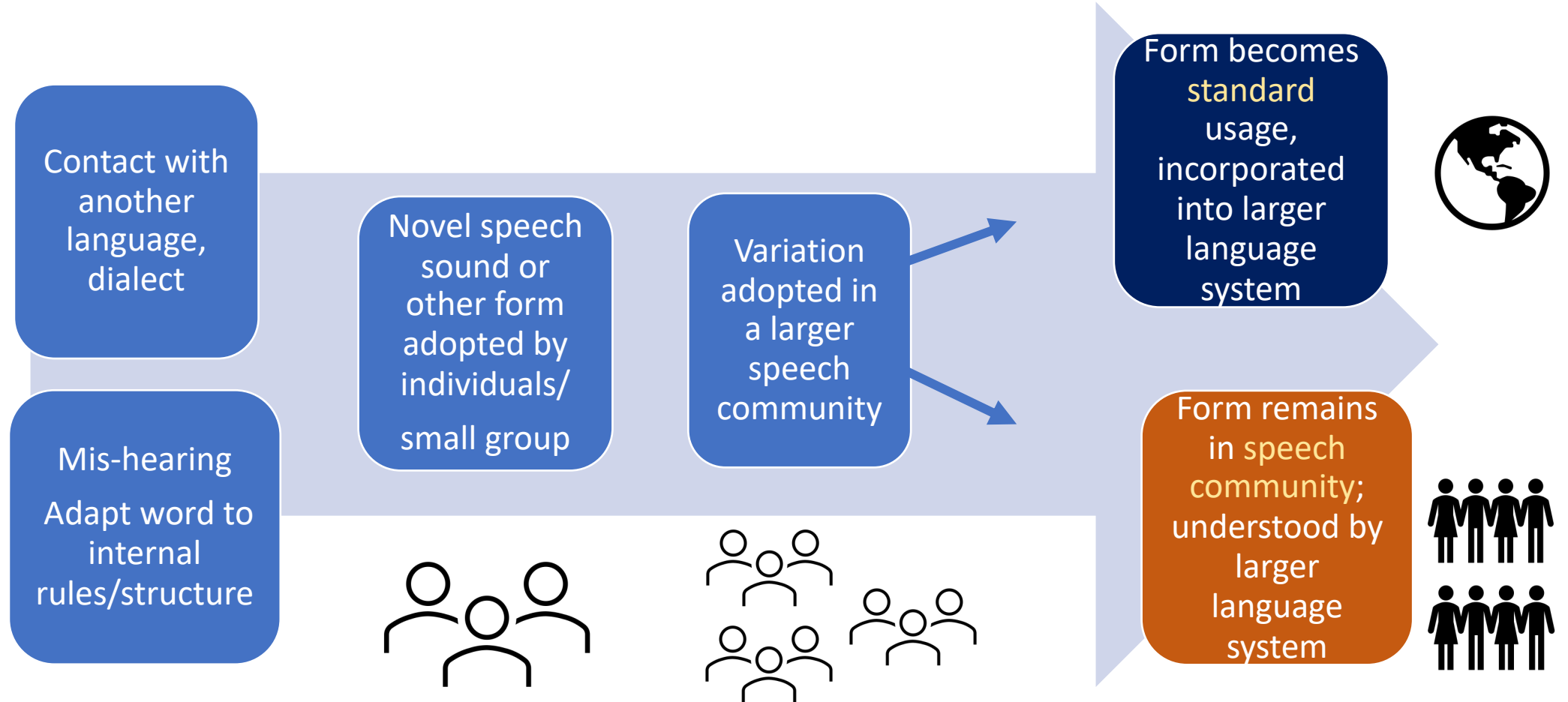
[https://www.ling.upenn.edu/phono\\_atlas/home.html](https://www.ling.upenn.edu/phono_atlas/home.html)

# Language change

- Language **contact**
  - **borrowings**—processes such as metathesis
  - Multi-dialect or multi-lingual contexts (**code switching**)
  - Cultural/social/political **impacts**
- **Analogy** (*brought* → *brang*, a la *sing/sang*)
- **Spelling** (*soldier*; [l] not pronounced before spelling stabilized)

Metathesis	
Old English	Modern English
bridd	bird
wæps	wasp
beorht	bryht → bright

# The process of language sound change: “predominantly gradual, and very frequently regular” (McMahon, 1994)



# English language timeline

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- 450-1100 AD: Old English (Germanic; little impact from Celtic)
  - Angles, Saxons, Jutes arrive after Roman withdrawal
  - Celtic speakers pushed west and north to present-day Wales, Scotland, Ireland
  - ~1/2 of most common words in Modern English → Old English roots
  - ~800-1000: Old Norse used in Danelaw area; influence on English grammar
- 1100-1500: Middle English (French influence)
  - Old Norman spoken by upper classes; lower classes spoke English
  - 1300s: English regains dominance (replaces Latin in most schools and in government; French vocabulary remains)
  - Migrations from East Midlands and other areas to London (plague, famine, political changes)
  - Prestige London dialect develops based largely on Midland dialect
- 1500-1800: Early Modern English
  - Standardization of English based on London dialect (most publishing houses

# Pronunciation and spelling in English

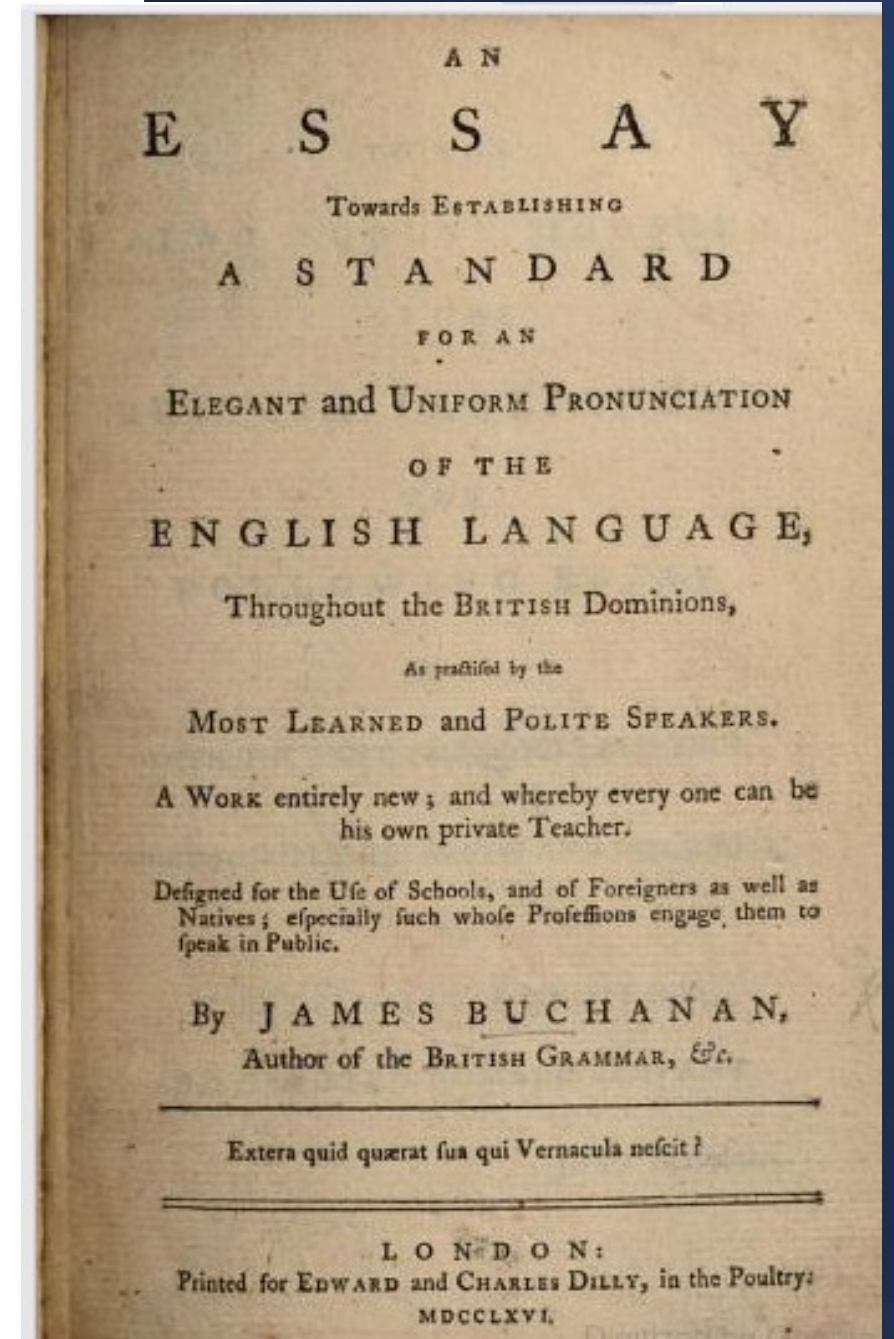
(Smith, 2015)

- Middle English—spelling variations; closer alignment of spelling and pronunciation, **by region**; used for basic literacy; spelling reflected local pronunciation to aid in teaching
- Latin was language of record across time—unchanging
- 15<sup>th</sup> century: English became language of record—need for spelling consistency
- Standardization of spelling: formal response to change in linguistic function
- Prestige dialect in London/surrounding areas; other dialects remain elsewhere

# Developing a “standard” English

- By 1766, James Buchanan’s *An Essay towards Establishing a Standard for an Elegant and Uniform Pronunciation of the English Language ... as practiced by the Most Elegant and Polite speakers*.
- “commodification of accent was also enhanced by the rise of elocution as an industry in a period of marked social change”

Mugglestone, 2015, p. 23



# English borrowings from Latin

McMahon, 1994, p. 201

- Germanic trade with Romans

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**Language contact**

- Spread of Christianity

(2)

**Basic: continental Germanic**

*wine, street, mile, butter, cheese ...*

**Religious: sixth to seventh century**

*mass, monk, bishop, abbot, altar, angel ...*

**Literary: Renaissance**

*democratic, enthusiasm, pernicious, dexterity, imaginary, allusion ...*

**Scientific: seventeenth to eighteenth century**

*nucleus, formula, atomic, molecule, carnivorous ...*

(after Hughes 1988: 4)

- Rise of literary language

- Scientific revolution



# More examples of borrowings

(McMahon, 1994, 201)

- Motivations for borrowing
  - Necessity (no word in one L)
  - Cross-linguistic communication
  - Social (prestige): German < French < Latin or Greek



- Provides synonyms:
  - ask – question – interrogate

(1) Cultural borrowing into English:

<i>apartheid</i>	(Afrikaans)
<i>perestroika</i>	(Russian)
<i>pyjamas</i>	(Hindi)
<i>quay</i>	(Gaulish via French)
<i>gala</i>	(Arabic via French or Italian)
<i>garnet</i>	(Middle Dutch)
<i>flannel</i>	(Welsh)
<i>hammock</i>	(Taino via Spanish)
<i>lama</i>	(Tibetan)
<i>potato</i>	(Taino via Spanish)
<i>aardvark</i>	(Afrikaans)
<i>arrowroot</i>	(Arawak)
<i>artichoke</i>	(Arabic via Spanish or Italian)
<i>banana</i>	(Wolof via Spanish)

# Great vowel shift

(plausible argumentation)

Smith, 2015

- 1200 - 1700 (greatest changes 1400-1500)
- Southern England
- Influenced all dialects of English
- All Middle English long vowels changed / i: e: u: o: /

Causes:

- Dialect clash: migration from Midlands to southern England, during plague years
- Rise of the middle class: Londoners wanting to distinguish their speech from other English cities; or to align with London middle/upper classes
- English gaining prestige in comparison to Latin and French
- anti-French sentiment: hypercorrection among upper classes

# Vowel shift phases

(go to site to listen)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Vowel\\_Shift#First\\_phase](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Vowel_Shift#First_phase)

Word	Vowel pronunciation			
	late ME	EModE		ModE
	1400	1500	1600	by 1900
bite	ⓘ /i:/	/ei/	/ɛi/	ⓘ /aɪ/
out	ⓘ /u:/	/ou/	/ɔu/	ⓘ /aʊ/
meet	ⓘ /e:/	ⓘ /i:/		
boot	ⓘ /o:/	ⓘ /u:/		
meat	ⓘ /ɛ:/		ⓘ /e/	ⓘ /i:/
boat	ⓘ /ɔ:/		ⓘ /o/	ⓘ /oʊ/
mate	ⓘ /a:/	/æ/	ⓘ /ɛ:/	ⓘ /e/

# How much shifting actually occurred in the historical English vowel shift? (Stockwell, 2008)

Jespersen, 1909

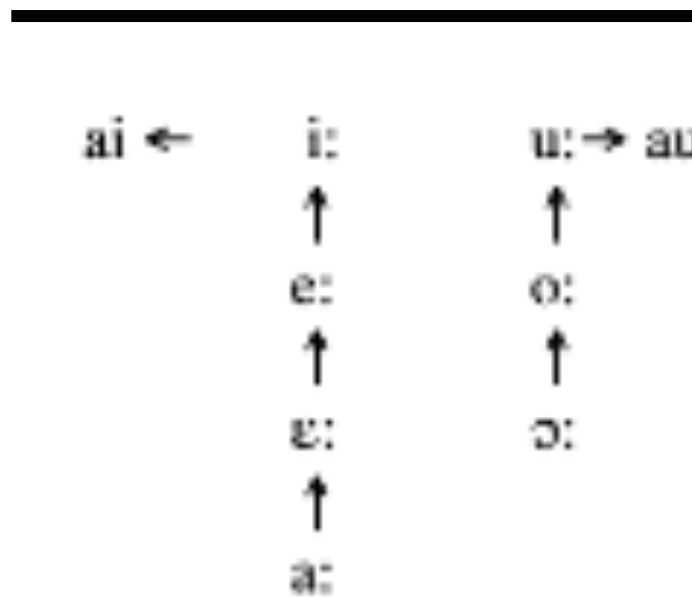


Figure 1

Stockwell & Minkova, 1988;  
Stockwell, 2008

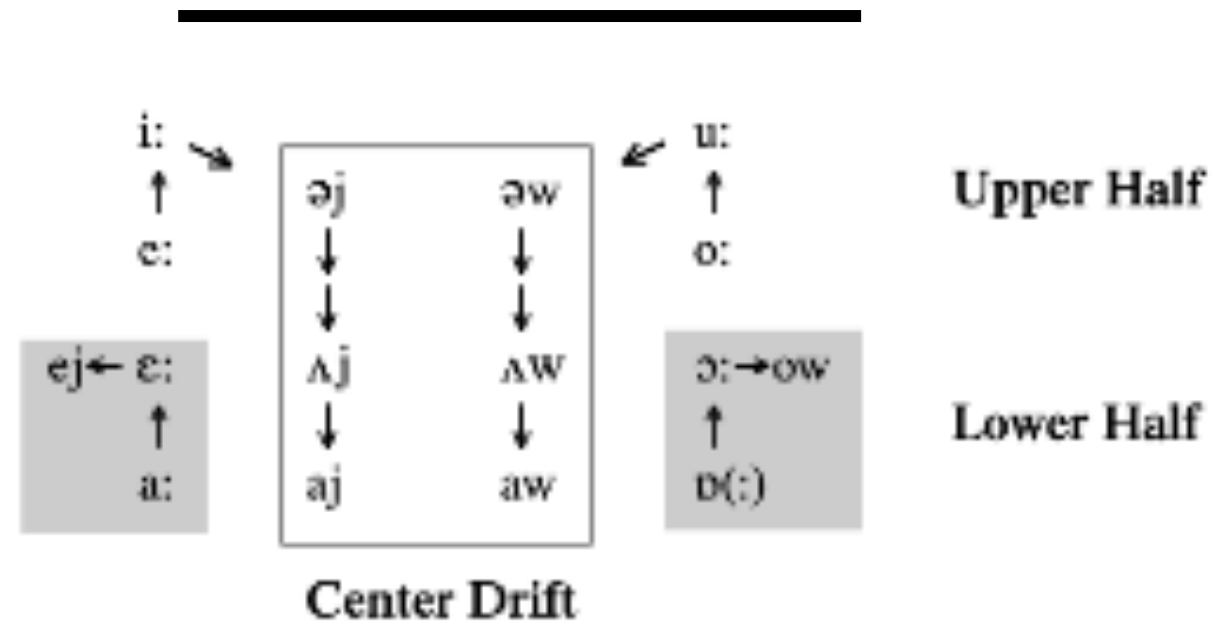


Figure 2

The vowel shift may be complete in standard version(s) of English...

Allophones of /aj/ and /aw/  
remain in various English  
dialects

- [ɹj], Virginia and [ɹw],  
Canada

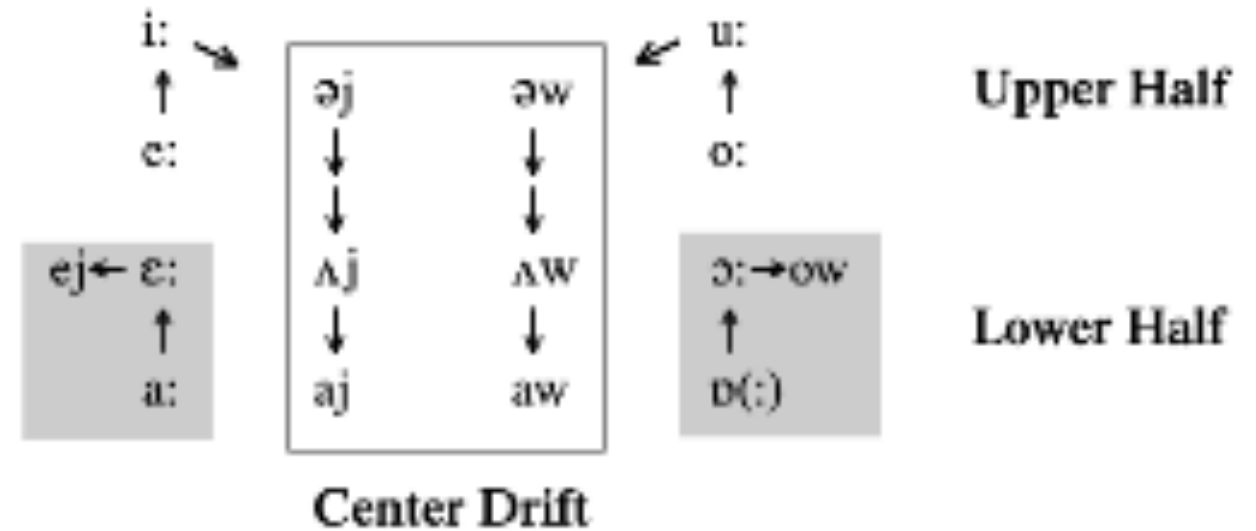


Figure 2

# “Linking” or “intrusive” [r]

- /r/ in cuba(r); vanilla(r)ice cream

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linking\\_and\\_intrusive\\_R#Linking\\_R](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linking_and_intrusive_R#Linking_R)

# Voiceless vowels example

- Cheyenne language: /e a o/
- vowel tone is phonemic: high, mid, low, rising
- voiceless vowels are allophones of voiced vowels (occur in specific phonetic contexts)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaWvsONEEno>

vohpoma'óhtse  
"salt"

# Wrapping up

- Week 1: What is language?
- Week 2: Principles of language learning
- Week 3: Language sound systems
- Week 4: Communication across dialects, languages, cultures



Comments, thoughts, questions?

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