Country Identity and the North-Midland Divide

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“Sounding country”


“I think a lot of people of any city, of Columbus, uh, they speak the same as people from Toledo. But then, if you get into rural areas in both towns, then they speak the same.” (22yo white female from Toledo OH and Columbus OH quoted in Campbell-Kibler 2012)
“Country” = Southern?

Linguistic and cultural rural practices are repeatedly, but not monolithically, linked to the South (Allbritten 2011, Campbell-Kibler 2012, Campbell-Kibler & Bauer 2015, Podesva et al 2015)

I have my husband’s friends in Marietta which is somewhere down in this area, I believe. They have more of the southern accent, um more country southern accent. (24 year-old white female from Sebring OH quoted in Campbell-Kibler & Bauer 2015)
“Country” = Southern?

This is true even for northern rural within Ohio areas:

   And then Lima’s like slang, they talk like <laughs> they’re non-talkers. Like, got the hillbilly accent and stuff. (28yo white female, Columbus OH quoted in Campbell-Kibler 2012)
“Country” = Southern?

Which leads to complex negotiations between the two constructs for rural northern speakers:
"Country" = Southern?

Which leads to complex negotiations between the two constructs for rural northern speakers:

Country is from anywhere doesn't matter where your from

Lanesboro Minnesota❤️Who says ya gotta be from the south to be country?

I live in a farming town in Minnesota and just as we are just as redneck as you guys
KEEP IT FRICKIN HILLBILLY

Arizona, some of the most country people I know live here! Country must be country wide!

The Heartland of Cascadia, Eastern Washington state where we know how to get our country on.
“The ones that are [...] self-proclaimed rednecks, and they think they need to talk like a total Southern jerk, basically [...] like a country slang, almost to the point where they’re uneducated, and you know they’re not [...] because if you talk to them one on one they will be less of that” (Speaker 4)

“You hear some kids have more of a Southern type drawl [...] if you wanna stereotype you could say the farming kids listen to a lot of country music and they kind of pick up on that drawl of country music” (Speaker 12)
Broad Questions

- What linguistic features do speakers outside of the South use to index country identity?

- How do local regional variables combine or interact with the Southern-linked variables *pin/pen* merger, /ay/-monophthongization and /u/ fronting and monophthongization?
Research Site: Rural Defiance County, OH

Transition area between the (Inland) North and Midland (Davis & McDavid 1950, Labov et al 2006)
Variables for today

/u/ fronting

/o/ fronting

/ai/-monophthongization

/u/ and /o/ fronting and monophthongization
Tokens of the word /u/, produced by male Midland and Northern speakers (\(s\) not shown in spectrograms).
/o/

diphthongal

monophthongal

front

back

Midland

Northern

Southern
Tokens of the word *boots*, produced by male Midland and Northern speakers (\textipa{/s/} not shown in spectrograms).
Predictions

Hypothesis A: More country-oriented speakers will orient towards **Midland** (but not Southern) vowels.

- Fronter /u/ and /o/; no difference in diphthongization (or more diphthongal)
- Less raised /æɪ/; no difference in diphthongization
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OR

Hypothesis B: More country-oriented speakers will orient towards **Southern** vowels (despite living far outside of the South).

- Fronter, less diphthongal /u/ and /o/
- Less raised, less diphthongal /aɪ/
Data Collection

- Sociolinguistic interviews
- 21 men from non-urban Defiance County, ages 20-74

Acoustic Analysis

- Force aligned using Penn Forced Aligner
- Vowel formants extracted using Praat script at 35%, 50%, and 65% of vowel (hand correction in progress)
- Fronting: F2 at midpoint
- Monophthongization: Euclidean Distance between 35% and 65%
- Raising: F1 at 35%
Quantifying Country Identity

- Hobbies
- Pick-up truck ownership
- Country music
- Farm animals
- Self-identified high school social group
Other Social Variables

Age

Social class (job, education, & land ownership)

Regional contact
Results: /u/

- Prediction: Country people will be more fronted

**fronter**

![Graph showing F2 (Hz) at midpoint against Country Practices Score with more country indicated.](image-url)
Results: /u/

- Prediction: Country people will be more fronted

![Graph showing the relationship between F2 (Hz) at midpoint and Country Practices Score.]
Results: /u/

- Prediction: Country people will be more fronted
/u/ fronting: A change in progress here, too!

fronter

F2 (Hz) at midpoint

Year of Birth


1000 1200 1400 1600 1800

younger
Results: /u/

Is there an effect of country identity on /u/ monophthongization (→ Southern-marked /u/ fronting)? → maybe!

more monophthongal

Country Practices Score

more country
Results: /o/

- Prediction: country people = more fronted
Results: /o/

- However, fronting associated with higher social class.
Results: /aɪ/ raising

Prediction: More country people are less raised (i.e., less Northern).
Results: /aɪ/ monophthongization

Prediction: more country people are more monophthongal
If country-oriented participants are targeting Southern /aɪ/, which Southern pattern do they use?

- **Deep South** - monophthongal EXCEPT before voiceless consonants (*tide, tie* vs. *tight*)
- **Appalachiia** - monophthongal in all environments (*tide, tie, & tight*)
Results: /aɪ/ monophthongization

- Effect of country identity same in both environments:

  Pre-voiced

  Pre-voiceless

- Suggests that country-oriented speakers are (a) targeting Appalachian-style monophthongization OR (b) not good at learning the Deep Southern environment ("hypercorrection")
Country-oriented speakers use fronter (and perhaps less diphthongal) /u/ and less diphthongal /əɪ/.

- They may be targeting Southern, rather than Midland, vowels.
- Contrary to our title, the North-Midland divide doesn’t seem to matter very much for country identity.

/o/ fronting is associated with social class and NOT country orientation, and doesn’t appear to be a change in progress.
Thank you!