Northern Cities in the Country: TRAP, LOT, and Country Identity in Northwestern Ohio

Background
The North-Midland dialect boundary has been studied in Northeastern Ohio (Thomas 2010), but northwest Ohio is understudied, particularly in the rural areas.

Research Site: Defiance County, Ohio
• between hypothesized Inland North (north of dark blue line) and Midland (south of light blue line) dialect regions (Labov et al. 2006)
• close contact with Fort Wayne (limited Northern features) and, more recently, with Toledo (Inland North)

Variable: TRAP raising, LOT fronting
• initial changes of the Northern Cities Vowel Shift (NCVS)
• historically linked to urban areas & identities (Eckert 2000), but urban associations may have weakened (Ito & Preston 1998; Gordon 2001)

Social constraint: Country identity
• regional vowel variation may be a crucial resource for building “country” vs. “town” identities (Hall-Lew & Stephens 2012; Podesva et al. 2015)
• urban/rural divide key dimension in imagined linguistic landscape of Ohio (Benson 2003; Campbell-Kibler 2012; Campbell-Kibler & Bauer 2015)

Questions
• How do male speakers in non-urban Defiance County produce TRAP and LOT vowels?
• How are TRAP and LOT production mediated by:
  o country orientation (hobbies, music preferences, livestock ownership, pick-up truck ownership, self-reported high school social group)
  o age
  o social class (education, job, land ownership)
  o regional contact (self-reported travel patterns: Fort Wayne, Inland North, or local)

Methods
• Sociolinguistic interviews with 21 men from non-urban Defiance County, ages 20-74
• Transcribed in ELAN and aligned with with Penn Forced Aligner
• Vowels measured at 35%, 50%, 65% points using automatic script; speaker-based outliers excluded (hand-correction in progress)
• TRAP raising/fronting: F2-F1 at 35% (due to potential diphthongization), LOT fronting: F2 at midpoint

Results
• Most participants show some TRAP raising.
• All have a LOT vowel F2 close to or fronter than their STRUT vowel.
• All maintain distinct LOT and THOUGHT vowels.

TRAP
Regional contact: Speakers with Inland North contact have bigger difference between prenasal and non-prenasal environments

Age: Younger speakers have bigger difference between prenasal and non-prenasal environments

Social class: Higher class speakers have have bigger difference between prenasal and non-prenasal environments

LOT
Regional contact: Speakers with Inland North contact show fronter LOT

Discussion
• Rural Defiance County speakers pattern more closely with Northern dialect region speakers, despite more regional contact with Fort Wayne.
• Social class, age, and travel patterns show an effect of degree of nasal split, without correlating with either prenasal or non-prenasal tokens individually.
• TRAP and LOT vowel realizations do not seem to be correlated with urban/country identity in this community.

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