

Submission 129 Native American participation in the Western Vowel Pattern
ABSTRACT

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In previous work (Fridland, Kendall, Evans and Wassink in press, Fridland and Kendall forthcoming), native Nevadan Anglo speakers were found to participate in a number of vocalic features reported in the larger West, such as the low back vowel merger and the front lax vowel retraction as found in the California Vowel Shift (CVS). In addition, Nevadans showed fronted /u/ and /o/ tokens, and merger in the low back vowel system. Surprisingly, a sub-set of speakers (namely older females) showed pre-velar raising in the /ɛ/ class, a feature usually associated with Washington State English. However, much of the focus on vowel patterns in US English takes Anglo speakers as the norm, and rarely investigates whether and how established ethnic groups participate in these features. As part of a larger project documenting the vowel system of Anglo and ethnic minorities in Nevada, we examine the degree to which speakers with Northern Paiute, Shoshone and Washoe heritage participate in those features known to characterize the vowel system of Anglo Nevadans. The Native American participants were recruited from the Reno Sparks Indian Colony (RISC), an established urban tribal community. While the Native American population within Nevada is small (2.1%), much of RISC community life revolves around community involvement and group activities on the reservation, suggesting the kind of cohesive social identity that often underlies the development of shared linguistic norms. However, though all of our participants are members of this community, the majority also reported involvement and peer relationships outside of the community, which suggests potential integration of broader linguistic norms. Our data comes from word list and reading passage recitation provided by 12 RISC speakers and 21 Anglo speakers from the larger Reno/Sparks

area. Our results provide strong evidence of shared vowel norms for our Native American and Anglo participants. Both groups share the vowel features found more widely in the Western states according to the Atlas of North American English (Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006), namely the low back vowel merger and fronted /u/, though our Anglo speakers appear to have more advanced back vowel fronting. We also find evidence in both groups of the front lax vowel retraction associated with the California Vowel Shift (CVS), with both retracted /æ/ and /ɛ/ classes. However, we also found some differences. Native American speakers are in advance of Anglo speakers in several features, with a more extensive pre-nasal /æ/ split and, surprisingly, much greater pre-velar raising in the /ɛ/ class. In general, the overall vowel system, regardless of ethnic identity, looks similar to, and in line with larger Western speech norms, much as Wassink (in press) found in recent work comparing Native American and Anglo speakers in Washington State. However, our work demonstrates noticeable distinctions in terms of how advanced these features are in our speaker groups.

Fridland, Valerie, Betsy Evans, Tyler Kendall, and Alicia Wassink. In press. *Speech in the Western States Vol. 1: The Coastal States*. Publication of the American Dialect Society. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

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