

# Competing norms, heritage prestige, and /aw/-monophthongization in Pittsburgh

*Scott F. Kiesling and Marc Wisnosky*

University of Pittsburgh  
Department of Linguistics

2816 CL  
Pittsburgh, PA 15260  
USA

Email: [kiesling@pitt.edu](mailto:kiesling@pitt.edu)

## **Abstract**

In this paper we argue that an understanding of the role of sociolinguistic norms in the spread of sound change needs to be able to model *competing* norms, and the indexical meanings of variants that drive them. Our argument is based on an analysis of /aw/-monophthongization in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. (aw) is above the level of awareness, to the point that it is often used to represent localness in the media in this region. Our data are based on a 50-speaker random telephone survey of the Pittsburgh metropolitan standard area. The survey indicates that monophthongization is retreating, with men lagging behind women, and city-born residents lagging behind rural and suburban-born residents. We argue that the contraction is due to a

change in norms: Those younger speakers who continue to use monophthongization are not being nonconformist, but rather are orienting to a local norm. Many other younger speakers are beginning to orient to a regional or national norm. Our findings have implications for how we understand norms in language change.

## **Introduction**

Changes from above the level of awareness have not been the subject of much sociolinguistic investigation since Labov's (1966) investigation of New York department stores. However, many dialect isolates show aspects of change from above, as in Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1995). These studies usually focus on relatively isolated speech communities which are either coming into contact with another, more robust dialect, or a speech community that is disappearing because its speakers are leaving the community.

Labov (2001:516) suggests that language change is driven in large part by an abstract social value of *nonconformity*. However, in these situations, what does nonconformity mean? In this paper that we argue that an understanding of the role of sociolinguistic norms in the spread of sound change needs to be able to model *competing* norms, and the indexical meanings of variants that drive them.

Our argument is based on an analysis of /aw/-monophthongization – the variable (aw) – in the Industrial Midland (the dialect area surrounding Pittsburgh, PA, USA). (aw) is above the level of awareness, to the point that it is often used to represent localness in the media in this region (Johnstone et al. 2002). It is commonly believed that it is 'dying out,' and that speakers who use the local variant are older steelworkers.

In order to begin to understand the patterning and possible change of this variable, we performed a random telephone survey of the Pittsburgh metropolitan standard area. We obtained responses from 50 speakers, who were asked to answer questions about local knowledge. The answers to the questions were known to have features of the local dialect; for (aw) there were six such answers.

The survey results indicate that monophthongization is clearly retreating, with men lagging behind women in this retreat. In addition, there is a significant difference between the birthplace of respondents, with those from the city significantly different from those outside the city. Surprisingly, there is only a small effect for class.

We argue that the contraction is due to a change in norms: Those younger speakers who continue to use monophthongization are not being nonconformist, but rather are orienting to a local norm, what we call *heritage prestige*. Many other younger speakers are beginning to orient to a regional or national norm (usually known simply as 'prestige'). Either of these groups can be seen as non-conformist, which suggests that we need a less abstract concept than 'conformity' for describing norms. Our data support Eckert's view of linguistic change that “the crucial dynamic is not so much the construction of prestige and stigma as the construction of identities, all of which are positive” (2000:227). Part of that identity is an orientation to community-wide norms. Pittsburgh

shows that these norms may compete, and language change is part of that competition. Studies of dialect contraction, and insular dialects, suggest a similar view of norm competition.

### ***Changes from above the level of awareness***

Changes from above the level of awareness are usually seen as a less-than-interesting, and less-than-important, object for sociolinguists. They are assumed to simply be a case of speakers avoiding a known ‘stigmatized’ form of language. For example, Labov, in his study of social factors in linguistic change (2001), focuses the entire volume on changes from below the level of awareness. In his stages of change outlined in the final pages of that volume (2001:517-518), the tenth and final stage is “The use of N1-outliers [extreme tokens of the linguistic form] rises to public awareness and irregular social correction begins.” Changes from above, despite their place in the foundation of sociolinguistic variation (Labov 1966), are thus seen as “irregular social correction.” But Labov himself showed that changes from above were regular in a social sense, although they may exhibit more features of lexical diffusion than other changes, in which specific words (*high tide* in Ocracoke, *downtown* in Pittsburgh) take on salient meanings.

Changes from above are more likely in isolated dialects in which the local form is salient, because it is one of the main displays that marks some kind of association with the community. Such variables all have in common that speakers are aware not just of how they speak, but specifically that these forms are unique (or are believed to be unique) to the area in question. In other words, the region must be recognized by locals to be a region separate from the surrounding regions or the country, in other ways besides dialect. These are most likely to be clearly bounded regions such as islands or rural areas separated by distance, or areas characterized by a certain kind of population such as Amish country or Cajun country. In such areas, there is a recurrent pattern of persistence (or resistance) of dialect forms, especially in the speech of men. This male conservativeness is often described to be motivated by ‘covert prestige’ (Trudgill 1972), which is prestige connected to masculine toughness. This term is really not an explanation, but a re-identification of the correlation: men use it because it is identified with things masculine. While the conservative forms may index masculinity, we argue that, for the users, the meanings in the old ways of speaking are more locally specific, both in social meaning and historical context. How they become attached to masculinity is the locus of explanation.

Three such studies of change from above – Labov’s (1963) study of Martha’s Vineyard, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes’ (1998) study of Ocracoke, and Dubois and Horvath’s (1999) study of Louisiana – show the pattern of male conservativeness, but for different reasons, as outlined in each study. There is thus no single identification of masculinity with the old way of speaking, but there is an identification of men with stereotypes of the identities indexed. In other words, the old stereotype, or cultural model, of a local person always seems to be masculine. There is no corresponding feminine cultural model, so women are less likely to use the old forms, and look to regional or national norms.

All of these cases have in common an orientation to the local area, where that local area has a specific strong cultural model that describes the ways a local resident acts, dresses, and speaks,

and sometimes, why. In Pittsburgh, the change from above is yet a different permutation of these kinds of changes. Pittsburgh does not have the size and economic vitality of New York, it is not a dialect region flooded by newcomers, nor is it a previously stigmatized identity that is culturally and commercially ascendant. There are indications, moreover, that other features of the dialect, below the level of awareness, are proceeding strongly.

Labov argues that changes are driven by the Constructive Nonconformity Principle: Linguistic Changes are generalized to the wider community by those who display the symbols of nonconformity in a larger pattern of upward social mobility. The second part is crucial: the context of upward social mobility. So in changes from above, the speakers using the incoming (usually non-local) forms, are non-conformist and upwardly mobile. That such speakers are upwardly mobile has been clearly shown. But we will need to look further to see how they are nonconformist. But what about those who hang on to the old form? Aren't they resisting conformity to the larger norm? We can suggest here that both groups are conforming to a set of norms, but that they are orienting to different norms. The change occurs because different sets of norms are available, and more importantly indexed by linguistic form.

Horvath and Dubois (1999) move forward the discussion of changes from above considerably. They analyze several changes in progress in the Cajun English speech community in Louisiana. They find that one set of features of Cajun English decreases in a linear fashion across apparent time, but another set decreases from the oldest to middle-aged generation, then increases sharply in the youngest generation. There is a gender difference in which men tend to use more Cajun forms than women, but this difference is particularly pronounced in the variables that increase in the younger generation. For these variables, men and women both decrease from old to middle-age, but the men increase their use in the youngest generation far more than the women. Horvath and Dubois show that the increase in Cajun variants is correlated with the Cajun Renaissance, in which Cajun music and cuisine have become popular and fashionable even outside of Cajun Louisiana. However, they also show that these activities are traditionally male activities in Cajun culture, and therefore hold more prestige for the men than the women.

Dubois and Horvath show further that these patterns cannot be captured under Labov's (1990) principles of language change for gender. They argue that the reason for this inability is that "the critical characteristic turns out to be not whether the change is from above or below, but where it originates:" whether the speakers in the community are adopting a norm originating outside the community (exonorm), or whether they are innovators of a new way of speaking within the community (endonorm). They further argue for a cycle of change in Cajun English as follows:

1. Origination of the Cajun forms, primarily through contact with Cajun French as language shift begins to English;
2. Adoption of exonorms that de-value the Cajun English forms during a period of industrialization;
3. Recycling by some speakers (men) for some variants during the Cajun Renaissance;
4. Persistence of most other variants for other speakers, although there is substantial divergence.

The terms *recycling* and *persistence* are important additions to the descriptive vocabulary of

changes, as they more accurately describe what is occurring in these situations than previous work has done, although they essentially elaborate patterns of change from above and below.

Our data from Pittsburgh indicate that the variable (aw) is under multiple and complex normative pressures, with endonorms competing with exonorms, as in Cajun English. However, the very definition of endonorms and exonorm is problematic for areas outside the city of Pittsburgh proper, where Pittsburgh norms are not (overtly) seen as endonorms, or are weakly so. But it is fairly clear that we are dealing with a case of persistence (and perhaps recycling in the case of young men) of the Pittsburgh variable versus adoption of an exonorm. The question in Pittsburgh is why we would find persistence, given that the Pittsburgh Renaissances (there have been more than one, by Mayoral declaration), have not had the economic impact of the Cajun Renaissance.

Eckert argues that meanings are more specific, although they become more general as they become widespread. Thus, in her work in suburban Detroit, she find that variables (in a process which would be described as innovation) spread first with varied and particular meanings, such as urbanness, or even “jockness.” Thus as the new variants age, they become less specific in their meaning, and more widely available to the speech community, as opposed to the early innovators. She thus shows that in fact variables do not have a fixed indexicality until the point at which they are fairly widespread. The importance of her work for our arguments is that she shows that variables can have divergent meanings for different people, in different places, and at different times. If this is the case, then a variable is unlikely to be unproblematically associated with (one kind of) prestige whether it is known to the analyst or covert to him or her.

There are thus important aspects to changes above the level of awareness which deserved the attention of linguists. In fact, we can see most changes as a tension between innovation and adoption (if we can sort out the thorny problem of what it means for a norm to come from outside or inside a community, where community is another problematic concept for sociolinguistics). But what is it that speakers are aware of? Experimental measures do not really tell us, because experiments are presented with choices pre-made for speakers to choose – they must choose a category that the linguist has invented, or taken from her or his intuitions or sociolinguistic tradition. So again, what are speakers aware of? We will argue that in Pittsburgh they are aware of a cultural model of a local speaker. They are not avoiding stigma, being non-conformist, or getting prestige. Rather they are claiming traits associated with this cultural model for their own. The nature of this cultural model, the Discourses and practices of gender, and the trajectory of history in Pittsburgh, come together to influence choices about whether someone says [dauntaun] or [da:nta:n].

### ***(aw) Monophthongization in Pittsburgh***

In Pittsburgh, place and stance are tied up in the cultural model of the male working class steelworker. The rise and fall of /aw/-monophthongization can be traced to the rise and fall of the popularity of this image of Pittsburgh. Johnstone et al. (2002) show that monophthongization likely developed in the early twentieth century. According to Oestreicher (1989), this time coincides with a coalescence of the working-class as a class in Pittsburgh. It was also a time

when unions gained power and ethnic divisions between older Pittsburghers and migrant groups that had arrived during the late nineteenth century began to disappear. In other words, it was the time when a large group of people emerged who had a common (working class) experience in Pittsburgh and some economic stability. The period also marks the end of a stabilization of Pittsburgh's workforce, which previously had been fairly transient. The wave of immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were more likely to stay in Pittsburgh than earlier migrants.

It is also possible that the change began because the older residents of Pittsburgh wanted to differentiate themselves from the newer migrants. There was conflict between these groups, as evidenced by some of the rhetoric around a massive strike which took place in 1917, in which the companies attempted to divide the strikers by suggesting that the strike was a "hunky" (derogatory for Eastern European migrant) affair (Oestreicher 1989:132).

There are also internal linguistic motivations, or at least facilitations, for /aw/-monophthongization in the Industrial Midland dialect area. The most salient is the character of the low-back (*cot-caught*) merger between [ɑ] and [ɔ]. In this dialect, these phonemes have merged on [ɔ], whereas in most dialects realize this merger as [ɑ]. This leaves this low-back area open in the back for a merger. There is also a parallel monophthongization of /ay/, which may provide an analogy for the /aw/, although these then form a merger around [a]. However, the characteristics of /a/ and the monophthongized variants, while initially sounding similar, may in fact have characteristics that differentiate them, such as length or backness. In fact, although we have not yet coded (aw) for place of articulation, from the preliminary hearing during the auditor coding for monophthongization it was clear that there was a sizable minority of speakers that show a backed variant, both monophthong and diphthong. Johnston (p.c.) reports hearing such variants in her fieldwork as well. In any case, there is ample opportunity in the vowel system of the Industrial Midland for /aw/ to monophthongize.

Not surprisingly (because it is a change from above) there does not seem to be a possible motivation for a reversal of monophthongization beyond an avoidance of merger. As just noted, there are a few diphthongal tokens with backed nuclei, so that a possible future trajectory for this vowel is to re-diphthongize, but with a nucleus to the back of [a], thus filling the space left by the merged low back vowels. This is especially likely if the low-back vowel is still rising.

In casual conversations with Pittsburghers, and with local students, it is often repeated that this way of speaking is dying out, however. Johnstone et al. (2002) found a small drop in the use of monophthongal /aw/ in recent generations, but it is not dramatic. The Pittsburgh Speech Telephone Survey aimed to gather apparent time data on this question.

## ***The Pittsburgh Speech Telephone Survey***

### **Method**

A randomly-generated list of telephone numbers for the six counties in the Pittsburgh

Metropolitan area was obtained and used to make telephone calls. Calls were made at different times of the day, in the order on the list. When the phone was answered, speakers were told that we were performing a survey about what people know about the Western Pennsylvania region. We asked for the last person over 18 who had had a birthday in the household. After obtaining consent from that person to record, we asked the speaker to count to twenty, then asked a series of 41 questions about the region which elicited linguistic items of interest. Five of these elicited (aw):

**Can you name the Cleveland professional football team?**

{Browns}

**Can you tell me what part of Pittsburgh the USX Tower is located?**

{downtown}

**Can you tell me the name of the general area where Carson Street and Station Square are?** {South Side}

**Can you name the head coach of the Pittsburgh Steelers?**

{Bill Cowher}

**What is the yellow cloth thing that Steelers fans wave around called?**

{the Terrible Towel}

Next, a series of semantic differential questions were asked, one of which elicited (aw): *Can you tell me the difference between a house and a home?* Participants were then asked if they were aware of a unique way that Pittsburghers speak, their characterization of it, and if they recognize some dialect words such as *nebbby*, *hoagie*, *redd up*, and *yinz*. Finally they were asked for some general demographic information. Recording was made on digital tape through a telephone interface. Each call was transferred to computer and coded using the digital files. Each instance of (aw) was isolated so that the coder heard only the relevant part of the call (usually the question and answer). This was done to reduce the effect of a coder's preconceptions of the speaker from other variables. In addition, speakers and words were assigned randomly to each coder so that no coder coded an entire speaker or all tokens of the same word.

Authors coded answers auditorily on a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 being a monophthongal variant. Inter-rater reliability was tested and the two raters were not significantly different. In addition to the variable value, the word, coder, and speaker characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, birth city, city of residence, income, occupation, education, and parents' birth cities were coded. In addition, a combined class scale based on income, occupation, and education was created.

## **Results**

The coding resulted in 300 tokens which were subjected to Goldvarb analysis (both for Macintosh and Windows). The application value was 1 (clear monophthongization) in all cases; we also tested an application value of 3 (no monophthongization), and there was no difference in the selection of factor groups (the intermediate score was given rarely, an average of 10% of all tokens were coded as intermediate). All factors except parents' birth cities and the combined

class analysis were included in the initial analysis.<sup>ii</sup> Gender, age, occupation and birth city were selected in the initial run. Gender and age were combined in a single factor group and also selected as significant. Gender, age, and occupation was not selected as significant and therefore this combination was not kept.

In addition, because one of the categories in the occupation group is ‘retired,’ we suspected that this factor could be an artifact of age and not occupation. In addition, there was a category for occupation which was for speakers who refused to give their occupation; this group had a strong effect, but is uninterpretable. We thus removed the retired and unknown factors. This had the effect of making only gender significant, probably because of the number of speakers reporting being retired.

We found that the occupation factor group was uneven in its representation in terms of men and women, so that only men were in the professional factor group. Moreover, the professional factor group had the highest weighting of all. We thus chose to remove the occupation factor group altogether, but will report the raw percentages for it. We subsequently ran varbrul with the combined class score, excluding the groups that made up that score (occupation, income, education), and class was not selected as significant.

The model in Table 1 thus reflects the weightings from what we believe to be the best model, which excludes occupation. The percentages for occupation are shown in Figure 2. Because gender had the most robust effect in all varbrul runs, and cross-cuts occupation in important ways, we have shown occupation by gender as well.



<b>Gender and Age Combined Factor Group</b>		
<u>Gender and Birth Year</u>		<u>Varbrul weight</u>
Female	1968-1985	.30
	1944-1967	.36
	Before 1943	.60
Male	1968-1985	.45
	1944-1967	.55
	Before 1944	.74
<b>Birth City Factor Group</b>		
<u>Birth City Location</u>		<u>Varbrul weight</u>
Pittsburgh		.70
Western PA		.45
USA		.29
Input 0.222 Application Value is 1 (strong monophthongization)		

**Table 1: Varbrul results**

The varbrul weightings show that younger speakers are much less likely to use monophthongization, and for each age category, men monophthongize more than women. Among women, only those in the oldest age group favor monophthongization. Moreover, only the oldest female factor shows a weight that is above the two youngest male groups; even the youngest age group of men has a higher weighting than the middle age group for women. The effects for gender and age are thus consistent and independent. There is a strong effect for whether the speaker was born in Pittsburgh, with those born in the city the only category favoring monophthongization.

Cross tabulation of the percentages in Figure 1 shows that there is some interaction between gender, age, and birth city. The younger two female groups are fairly consistently low in all three regions, and the older female group shows a large shift from Pittsburgh to Western PA. The male story is more complex. The youngest men show the most monophthongization in Pittsburgh, while older men in Western PA actually monophthongize more than in the city. This pattern is due in some part to the low number of speakers for each data point with this many factors, so that some points, especially in the younger group, represent only one speaker. But there is clearly a much stronger urban effect for the men than for the women: women are in general not monophthongizing, and only in the oldest group does the urban pattern show up.

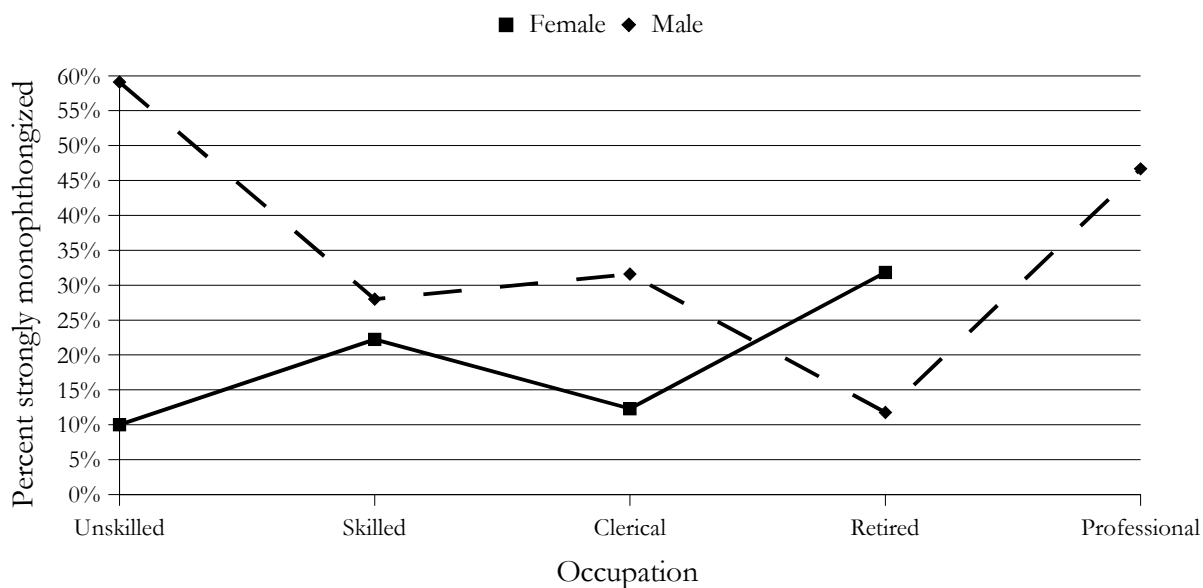
## Gender, Age, and Birth City



**Figure 1: /aw/-monophthongization percentages by gender, age, and birth city.**

In terms of occupation, there is also some interaction with gender, although again women use much less monophthongization than men (except for in the retired category, but it is not clear what the class and age backgrounds of the people in the retired category are, so that there could be more older and working class female speakers in this category). For non-retired women, the occupation effect is small, with only 10-12% separating unskilled, skilled, and clerical occupations (See Figure 2). For the men, however, there is a large difference from unskilled to skilled, with unskilled male speakers using the most monophthongization of any category. This result suggests that it is unskilled men born in Pittsburgh who are continuing to use monophthongization the most. The high use of monophthongization for male professionals is surprising, but describes tokens from only two speakers. Why these two professional men would use such a high amount of monophthongization demands explanation, however, and we will address it in the explanation.

## Gender and occupation



**Figure 2: /aw/-monophthongization percentages by class and gender.**

In summary, in this survey, the strongest users of /aw/-monophthongization in the metropolitan region are men with unskilled jobs who were born in the city of Pittsburgh. These men have not shifted to the same extent as any other group, and may even be exhibiting a reversal. In addition, professional men are not hesitant to use this form with an interviewer. We next turn to explanations for this pattern.

## ***Heritage Prestige and (aw) in Pittsburgh***

Why do men monophthongize more than women, and why is there some persistence in the face of change? The standard answer to this question since Trudgill's (1972) use of the term has been "covert prestige." But covert prestige does not explain why the men are using more of this variant; it only re-organizes the correlational pattern to say that men do it to be masculine, which verges on tautology. The important question is still unanswered: Why is this variant, of this variable, used by men to be tough and masculine? What does it mean to be tough and why do men do it? Are receding variants in changes from above always associated with tough masculinity, or is this association related to the particularities of the speech community? In Pittsburgh, moreover, any prestige associated with monophthongization is hardly covert (except perhaps to standard-speaking academics from elsewhere), as people in Pittsburgh will often proudly tell visitors and new arrivals to Pittsburgh about "Pittsburghese."

The explanation for the use of such variants is in the social meaning of the variants, and that social meaning is related to the complex sociohistorical specifics of the speech community. As Oestreicher (1989:142), in a review of Pittsburgh's class history, comments, "if Pittsburgh has been a symbol of an earlier industrial culture, it has also been distinctive in the endurance of cultural patterns that grew out of an earlier industrial age. ... There is more than a little nostalgia for old symbols in local popular culture . . . born out of some very contemporary fears." As shown by Johnstone et al. (2002), (aw) is one of these symbols. It is the most used dialect form to represent someone from Pittsburgh in print by linguistic form.

The rise of /aw/-monophthongization appears to have taken place in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as discussed by Johnstone et al. (2002). This rise is likely tied to particular sociohistorical events in Pittsburgh as well. Pittsburgh reached the height of its industrial output in the 1920s, followed by a slow decline until the 1980s, when the industry collapsed. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Pittsburgh also marked the end of a period of intense migration, especially from Eastern Europe, and was the source of some ethnic conflict between earlier migrating ethnic groups and newer groups. In addition, these migrants came and stayed more often than previous migrants, and also tended to stay in jobs longer (earlier labor patterns in steel mills shows a high turnover rate). Finally, this period finds the unions ascendant, and the patterns of leftist union politics forming. Many decades of turmoil, including that of migration, were thus forming the cultural patterns (referred to in the quote from Oestreicher above) in Pittsburgh around the 1920s. It is these cultural patterns – especially stable, unskilled jobs that provide enough income for an entire family – for which some Pittsburghers likely have nostalgia. The rise of /aw/-monophthongization in the 1920s, and its retreat, probably beginning in the 1960s, thus correlates with the rise of the cultural patterns that Oestreicher discusses.

We can see this nostalgia in the ways that /aw/-monophthongization is performed in Pittsburgh, and speakers' reactions to these performances. The most well-known of these is performed by a morning radio DJ, Pittsburgh native Jim Krenn. Krenn is noted for the humorous skits he performs on his show highlighting local characters who use many (exaggerated) features of the local variety of English. While the dialect features are a part of the humor, they are not the only object of the humor, and are thus different from other dialect parodies and performances. In

addition, they are performed for a wide local audience. What makes this dialect humor unique is that Krenn is a local personality, performing exaggerated local speech for a local audience. Krenn's morning show is the highest rated morning show in the Pittsburgh area, and thus must resonate locally with Pittsburghers.

The dialect Krenn uses for his characters is most appropriately called "Pittsburghese," which is the name given to representations of local Pittsburgh speech. These representations are often based on folk beliefs about language (Johnstone 2000). Johnstone (2000) explains that these representations don't "actually represent things that a linguist would identify as local, but ... they *claim* to do so. Taken together, they form a description of what it takes to sound local, a grammar for the (fictional, from a linguist's point of view) local variety known as Pittsburghese." (Johnstone 2000:12). That is, "Pittsburghese" is not a true representation of Pittsburgh speech, but a perceived one (Wisnosky 2003:4).

Based on an interview performed by Wisnosky (2003), Krenn believes his dialect humor is appealing to his audience not because it is performed in an exaggerated dialect, but because of the situations his uniquely "Pittsburgh" characters get themselves into. Krenn says of his characters: "When I'm writing those skits, I'm laughing, obviously it's my humor. And I'm laughing at the fact of the situation more than the fact that they happen to be from Pittsburgh, and that, to me, gives them the badge of being real. . . . But I think it's the situation that's funny" (Wisnosky 2003:70).

Thus, Krenn uses an exaggerated form of the local dialect to give validity and reality to his characters. He believes that by using "Pittsburghese," his characters will better connect to his audience because he thinks "Pittsburghese" is emotion. He says, "I think that what happens [is "Pittsburghese"] hits our emotions... it's just raw... There's no pretentiousness, there's no worrying about how we look, how we feel or whatever, it's from our hearts, you know. ["Pittsburghese" is] that slang of language that is that emotional, raw, verbiage that we can express and it seems to communicate to all age groups, all demographics, all income levels, and it bonds all those income levels, and bonds all those demographics." Krenn believes his characters' use of "Pittsburghese" not only makes them more real, but connects them to the community. Krenn is here describing not a type of person, but a stance. This stance is associated with things that people also value in the cultural model of the working-class Pittsburgh steelworker: non-pretentious, honest, even naive. This stance is one that clearly has prestige for Krenn, and he believes that it is this stance that his characters are taking and that his audience is responding to. In a sense, his characters become 'authentic.'

In a survey conducted by Wisnosky (2003), it was found that Pittsburghers think the dialect humor performed by Krenn is humorous and not pejorative to speakers of the dialect. These findings are contrary to other literature on the use of dialect for purposes of humor, which suggest that those who produce dialect humor often do so for derogatory and even racist reasons (cf. Ronkin & Karn 1999, Davies 1987, and Hill 1993). This dialect humor can be seen as negative because it subordinates speakers of the mocked dialect. However, in Pittsburgh, this type of dialect humor is being written and performed by members of the in-group, and is targeted at the entire in-group (although in general the characters are working-class). Wisnosky (2003)

suggests that when the in-group uses its own dialect for humor, it is not seen as pejorative by the majority of the humor's intended audience. Owing to the popularity of Jim Krenn and the *WDVE Morning Show*, it is possible to speculate that Pittsburghers in general do not find "Pittsburghese" dialect humor to be pejorative. We do see other manifestations of such in-group humor in other groups such as ethnic group, and in fact Krenn's skits could easily be taken as making fun of working-class men in particular. But in fact the responses in the survey show that respondents do not think of the skits pejorative to any group in Pittsburgh – there is no difference in interpretation whether a speaker believes she or he speaks "Pittsburghese" or not. All speakers articulate an awareness of the positive identity uses of Pittsburgh dialect forms, and (aw) in particular.

While only half of the 57 people that Wisnosky surveyed were native to the Pittsburgh Metropolitan area, all but one were living in the Pittsburgh region at the time of the survey. All were highly educated but most earned salaries below the local average. He played two audio skits from the *WDVE Morning Show*, which highlight Krenn's exaggerated "Pittsburghese," then presented the listeners with a survey. The survey asked various questions about how the participant felt regarding the skits (*Do you think the use of "Pittsburghese" in these skits is a put-down? How did these skits make you feel?*) and what social class and ethnicity the characters reflected. It then asked about local identity (*Do you consider yourself a Pittsburgher? Do you think you speak in "Pittsburghese?"*) as well as the local dialect (*Do you consider "Pittsburghese" to be educated or uneducated speech/regional speech?*) (Wisnosky 2003:59-60).

The survey results showed that overall, most Pittsburghers did not consider humor performed in the local "Pittsburghese" dialect to be pejorative. In addition, all but one participant replied that the skits were humorous. Some participants included notes on their surveys to further explain their choices. The one participant who responded that the skits were not humorous wrote that she was "not really mad, kind of offended though." Those who found the skits humorous had more informative reasons for their opinions. One participant wrote: "Knowing there was no ill will in the use of "Pittsburghese," the over-the-top stereotyped voices and phrases were funny." While another wrote it was funny "because it pokes fun of the Pittsburgh accent in a light-hearted manner and it is only an exaggerated example." (Wisnosky 2003:48)

It was also speculated that this "Pittsburghese" dialect humor is humorous to locals because it is performed by a local and targeted at locals on a characteristically local radio station. To address this, participants were asked if they thought the skits would be more or less funny if they were produced by a Cleveland radio station (Cleveland is Pittsburgh's rival in many areas, mainly professional football). Almost all (96%) responded that "Pittsburghese" humor performed outside of Pittsburgh would not be as funny. One participant elaborated: "If a group pokes fun at themselves, it is usually acceptable to that group, but if others poke fun at a group then it is usually taken in an offensive way (prejudice) by said group." (Wisnosky 2003:50) From these responses, it can be seen that the main social semantic that the respondents connect to "Pittsburghese" in general is localness, but that the traits identified as local are potentially pejorative if used by an outsider. While this survey did not focus on (aw) in particular, Johnstone, Bhasin, and Wittkofski (2002) show that (aw) is one of the most known aspects of

“Pittsburghese,” and is definitely the most widely known pronunciation (some lexical items, especially *yinz*, are likely more widely known).

Another symbol of the vitality of the region’s identity is football, and especially the professional team. In fact, the recent history of Pittsburgh can be appropriately bracketed by two events surrounding Three Rivers Stadium, where Pittsburgh’s professional football team, the Steelers, and their baseball team, the Pirates, played for 30 years. The first event took place at the end of a playoff game between the Steelers and the Oakland Raiders on December 23, 1972, and is known as the “Immaculate Reception.” Before this play, the Steelers looked certain to lose, but made a last-minute play that seemed to rely on a supreme being, and not the Steelers’ talent, to produce a game-winning score.<sup>iii</sup> This play resulted in the Steelers going to the NFL playoffs for the first time in franchise history, and is still often talked about among Steelers fans. From this season forward, the Steelers continued to win until reaching their peak in 1979 when they won their fourth superbowl, the most ever at the time. During this time, the University of Pittsburgh was also a football powerhouse, winning two NCAA Football national championships and fielding a Heisman Trophy winner. Through the 1980s and 1990s, employment in Pittsburgh shifted from the dying steel mills to the University of Pittsburgh (which became the largest employer in the city by 1990), the steel industry replaced by the medical, educational, and technical fields. It seemed that symbols of Pittsburgh’s sports power increased as industrial power decreased. The end bracketing event – on February 11, 2001 – is the implosion (and subsequent demolition) of the stadium in which the Immaculate Reception took place, followed by the rise of two new modern, gleaming stadiums. These sports symbols of local identity and pride rose in importance as the economy slowed and the population shrank.

Pittsburgh’s love of football, particularly the Steelers, the reactions to Krenn’s skits, and Krenn’s motivations for doing them, thus show us that there is a pride associated with a certain cultural model of a Pittsburgher, and with “Pittsburghese.” It is a pride of heritage, much the way Cajun forms are a kind of pride in Cajun heritage, and “high tide on the sound side” shows a pride in Okracoke Island heritage. The difference in Pittsburgh is that this pride is restricted locally. Pittsburgh is not the vacation destination that Okracoke is, and it doesn’t have an exportable and commodified music and cuisine the way Cajun culture does. These facts mean that the Pittsburgh’s local pride remains restricted, because there is no economic motivation to amplify the pride in Pittsburgh heritage. As has been demonstrated repeatedly (e.g., Gal 1978), while pride in heritage is necessary for language maintenance, it is rarely sufficient without economic incentives to go with it.

This pride is mostly a pride in Pittsburgh’s past, but it is important in Pittsburgh, as are those features (such as “Pittsburghese”) associated with that past. It can be argued that some of the reason for the local dialect’s survival at all is this *heritage prestige*. This prestige can be seen in Jim Krenn claims that even his highly educated friends, doctors and lawyers, connect to his characters: “I got buddies of mine who . . . are professors and doctors and, lawyers or whatever, and all just high, well educated, and come from unbelievable income levels or whatever and they talk about . . . [my “Pittsburghese” character] Stanley ‘hey, I heard Stanley today,’ you know . . . They think it’s fun to do [the character] Stanley [P. Kachowski], and you’ll hear them doing

Stanley, they'll do Stanley back to me at parties, or we're hanging out and stuff" (Wisnosky 2003: 65).

Krenn explains how he thinks "Pittsburghese" is an important part of the Pittsburgh community, part of the region's heritage: "Pittsburghese" is "that part of us that connects to the community, it's connected to the community and I think that's the emotional button that it hit whenever I was on DVE and started, and did Stanley for the first time. It hit an emotional button that connected me to the community and it connected everybody to remember maybe where they came from, you know, at some time in their lives, even if they didn't come from a good place, it's the times that it was good, or whatever, it's where they came from, their essence, who they are, where they're from, some pride there" (Wisnosky 2003: 66). This is the pride Pittsburghers have in "Pittsburghese" rooted in their heritage.

So again we meet the fact that prestige, stigma, and nonconformity are relative. /aw/-monophthongization has prestige, but *heritage prestige*, not covert prestige. It does not have *economic prestige* (except perhaps for politicians and contractors, two categories which seem to describe a good portion of Pittsburgh's male population). Young white men in Pittsburgh do not have the economic opportunities they once had, but likely long for those days. Women likely have more economic opportunities than in the past, and the traditional cultural model of the Pittsburgher is masculine, and brings to mind the steelworker who provides for his family while the woman stays obediently at home. Other young men may see that cultural model as 'quaint,' and important for their heritage, but it won't get them a job. There is less recycling going on in Pittsburgh than in Cajun English for the very reason that this heritage prestige is restricted in Pittsburgh, but widespread (and in fact shared by the rest of the country) in the case of Cajun English.

What of the professional men who use a high rate of monophthongization? While the unskilled men are connecting to a previous Pittsburgh way of life for the Pittsburgh working class, we suspect that the professional men used /aw/-monophthongization in a way to perform their Pittsburgh identities for the survey. The survey was about knowledge of Pittsburgh, and what better way to display this than through a known shibboleth? There are other possibilities as well, such as the fact that this may show a kind of masculine solidarity with the male interviewer.

Why is monophthongization so focused on the city of Pittsburgh? Here again we need to understand local sociohistorical patterns. Western Pennsylvania is an area marked by very local identification. Evidence of this fact can be derived from changes made during the implementation of the telephone survey. Early in the survey period, we received responses that indicated speakers didn't think the survey applied to them because they weren't from Pittsburgh (even though they may be from a town only a few miles outside of the city). We reworded the introduction to tell people that we were interested in what people know about Western Pennsylvania, and achieved much more success. More evidence comes from the municipal geography of Allegheny County (the center of the metropolitan area and the county in which Pittsburgh stands). This county holds no less than 130 incorporated municipalities, to which people hold close allegiance. Even within the city of Pittsburgh there are sharp divisions and loyalties between neighborhoods and other divisions, such as the North Side (north of the



Allegheny river), and the South Side (south of the Monongehela River). Zelinsky (1980) performed a survey of business names across the United States to find the vernacular regions of the US. He found a very weak regional association in Western Pennsylvania, to the point that he claims that Western Pennsylvania was a “place lacking any regional identity” (1980:13). This finding supports the view that the urban-focused pattern of /aw/-monophthongization in the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Area is related to this lack of a regional affiliation, which is replaced by a more local orientation in which people are not from Western Pennsylvania, but from the Sharpsburg, Lawrenceville, Johnstown, Carnegie, etc.

What this conclusion leaves open, however, is the interaction between the type of non-Pittsburgh area a person is born and raised in. Most small towns and cities surrounding Pittsburgh were based on heavy industry, and we would hypothesize that people working in such towns might share the Pittsburgher cultural model of working-class masculinity. Unfortunately, our data are not fine-grained enough at this point to make conclusions on this point.

## **Conclusion**

/aw/-monophthongization has not so much lost prestige in Western Pennsylvania as the cultural model it indexes has become an elaborate and rich one. It is this working-class male industrial cultural model that has lost prestige among most speakers, not the form of speech. Indeed, we would expect politicians, perhaps, to display prestige as it is normally framed in sociolinguistic studies – in other words, they would use more ‘standard’ language. But most politicians in Pittsburgh, when heard in the media, almost invariably use an extreme monophthongal variant. In fact, one of the most well-loved ex-mayors, Sophie Masloff, is often taken to be a linguistic icon, in Eckert’s (2000) sense, of the Pittsburgh dialect (even though she is a woman), and is in fact one of the few women to appear in Krenn’s skits, and the only woman to appear speaking “Pittsburghese.” In the skits, she usually uses her most famous line, which not only exhibits a combativeness and raw emotion, but also two tokens of (aw): [gɛrɑ:rɔtɑ:n] *get outta town*. As Pittsburgh goes through the agony (literally) of a new economy and social structure, many Pittsburghers hang on to the old economy, either through an interest in heritage, or because of vested interests.

We find that men resist the adoption of new forms in changes from above for many studies, or they lead in a recycling in Dubois and Horvath’s 1999 terms) of linguistic forms associated with a region or ethnic group’s heritage, both of which we can call heritage variants. Why are men the ones more likely to use these heritage variants? It is history – particularly economic labor history, but also cultural history – and the social organization of gender interact to produce these patterns. There is nothing inherent in gender, or rather, there is nothing inherent in masculinity or femininity, that produces these patterns. Thus, in the case of Okracoke (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998), Cajun English (Dubois and Horvath 1999), Martha’s Vineyard (Labov 1963), and to some extent New York City (Labov 1966), men and masculinity are bound up in the traditional identities indexed by the receding features. All of these changes from above take place in the United States at the end of the twentieth century, and are affected by similar forces and situations. In such situations, an old socio-cultural order is giving way to a new one. For some people in

these communities, the new situation is either less advantageous than the older (as in Pittsburgh and perhaps New York City) or is in fact an advantage, as in the case of Okracoke and Cajun, where tourism and/or ethnic identity becomes a lucrative business. It just so happens that in these situations one of two things is true: either the new economic reality is disadvantageous to men, especially working-class men, or the old stereotypes (which in all cases is identified with a male stereotype) present new economic opportunity. The one thing that binds all of these together is a pride (or prestige, but prestige implies external evaluation while pride is something that more likely originates in the individual no matter -- and even in spite of -- the evaluation of others) in an old local or in-group identity which is by default male. We suggest that this commonality arises from common changes in the economies of the places affected by these studies. In all cases, the men were associated with a single kind of work or art -- steel, fishing, music -- that either lost favor or gained popularity.

By focusing on meaning and specifics, therefore, we do not have to abandon generalization. Rather, we can arrive at deeper and more predictive explanations that take into account the patterned meaningfulness and complexity of human social life, just as we take into account the patterned complexity of language.

In a change from above, then, we can't say that the leaders of sound change are the only ones not conforming. They are, in a sense, not conforming to the old norm. But the young men in the city of Pittsburgh are also not conforming to a powerful, national incoming norm. It is important to note here that Labov does not make this claim for changes from above, but we are, after all, interested in language change, so we might entertain the possibility for changes from above (our most powerful examples).

Our argument here is based on simple survey data, with little explanation coming from the speakers themselves (except for Krenn). However, the argument relies on more than decontextualized notions of prestige; it relies on research about the sociohistorical trajectory of life in Pittsburgh, and corroborating surveys from community members. When all of these data are taken into account, the role of a specific manifestation of heritage prestige becomes obvious. Nevertheless, in the future we plan more ethnographic data methods in order to enrich both the linguistic data and the sociohistorical data.

There are of course some further questions, the most pressing of which is what is happening with the other dialect forms in the Industrial Midland. What kinds of patterns arise for the /ay/-monophthongization, the fronting of /ow/, the vocalization of /l/, and the raising of the merged low-back /oh/? What kinds of cultural models are being created by these newer dialect forms, which are for the most part below the level of awareness? More importantly, how do they differ from (aw) not just in their trajectories, but in their indexical meanings?

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- i Although this principle was not formulated for changes from above, the notion of nonconformity should nevertheless be generalizable to any social practice in order to have the explanatory validity that Labov claims for it.
- ii Because class is derived from other factors, it is not independent and therefore violates the independence assumptions of varbrul.
- iii See [www.steelref.com/fuqua/immac.html](http://www.steelref.com/fuqua/immac.html) or [www.nfl.com/insider/story/5701008](http://www.nfl.com/insider/story/5701008) for a full description.