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Trabajo Fin de Grado

An Initial Approach to the Study of Texan English

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Abstract

In this paper the reasons for universal linguistic variability have been briefly explained, along with the historical background that has influenced the English of North America and of the state of Texas. The characteristic Southern dialect spoken in Texas has been analyzed in some depth, considering all allophonic variants, grammatical phenomena and some lexical particularities which are expected to be found in the population of the state. Apart from this, the General American accent has also been described in contrast to Received Pronunciation in order to offer a referent for comparison in terms of phonetics and prosody. Finally, to supplement the theoretical data provided, a contrastive phonetic analysis of a short speech by two famous actors born in different parts of Texas has been carried out.

Keywords: Texan English, Southern US English, General American English, Phonetics and Phonology, Linguistics.

Resumen

En este trabajo se han explicado brevemente los motivos de la variabilidad lingüística universal, junto con los antecedentes históricos que han influido el inglés de Norteamérica y el del estado de Texas. Se ha analizado en cierta profundidad el dialecto sureño característico de Texas, considerándose todas las variantes alofónicas, los fenómenos gramaticales y algunas peculiaridades léxicas que se espera encontrar en la población del estado. Aparte de esto, el acento inglés estadounidense también se ha analizado en contraste con la Pronunciación Recibida con el objeto de ofrecer un referente de comparación en términos de fonética y prosodia. Finalmente, para complementar la información teórica aportada, se ha llevado a cabo un análisis fonético contrastivo de dos actores famosos nacidos en diferentes lugares de Texas.

Palabras clave: Inglés Tejano, Inglés del Sur de EEUU, Inglés Estadounidense, Fonética y Fonología, Lingüística.

“It is no nation we inhabit, but a language. Make no mistake; our native tongue is our true fatherland.” –Emil Cioran

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1. Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze in some depth the American English variety spoken in Texas, with a special focus put on its phonetics and, additionally, the historical reasons of the development of this highly identifiable dialect.

The accent has been receiving attention as a result of being located in Texas, which is the second biggest state of the USA both in terms of area and population; besides, the petrol industry has been enriching the state for nearly a century. The accent presents a series of peculiar features, most noticeable in rural population, which contrast markedly with the so-called General American English. It is often object of satire both within and outside the country, associated with the clichéd image of the cowboy. This happened because the South lagged in industrialization and education for many years, which was later portrayed in many filming productions that have taken place there –or at least that have represented it–; these exacerbate the idea of Texas being the most rural and uneducated side of the country. The most divergent local varieties are fading away as rural population moves to bigger towns, where English is being regularized. Given that it was originally part of Mexico, and that it is now the main entry point of South-American and Central-American immigrants, the dialect has been heavily influenced by the Spanish language in certain areas.

All these facts make Texan English a very interesting dialect for research, both in terms of linguistics and of cultural aspects. On top of that, it has not received much special attention during the course of my degree, and it is for this reason that I have chosen this topic, apart from my interest in learning about American English.

The presentation of the contents will follow a general-to-specific structure, starting with the most basic aspect of all, that is, language variety. Later on, an in-depth explanation of the inception and features of General American, contrasted with Received Pronunciation found in England, will be provided in order to describe the basis of Texan English. This will be followed by an analysis of the English spoken in Texas, explaining how it varies from RP and GenAm, while also pointing out its unique intonation and differences within the state itself. Before reaching a conclusion, an analysis of the speech of two native Texan English speakers will be carried out, in which the difference between the areas they were born in will be highlighted as well.

2. Language Variability

Before carrying on with the description of the General American English and the Texan variety, it is of paramount importance to take a brief pause and reflect first on what is exactly the meaning of ‘dialect’ and its relation with language.

2.1. What is a dialect?

There are a number of definitions illustrating what ‘language’ and ‘dialect’ are, the bulk of them being chiefly philosophical or social, rather than strictly linguistic. For this reason, the most objective –and concise– elucidations will be included next.

‘Language’ is described by Crystal and Robins (2019) as “a system of conventional spoken, manual, or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves.” On the other hand, Ivić and Crystal (2014) define ‘dialect’ as “a variety of a language that signals where a person comes from,” whereas Millward and Hayes (2012: 49) consider them “mutually intelligible versions of one language.”

In the same line, Wells (1982: i) states that they are “characteristic of people belonging to a geographical region and/or social class.” Besides, he affirms that there are primary and secondary features (1982: 8). First, the dialect one, which can be controlled by the speaker, deciding whether or not to use a standard phoneme or other linguistic forms; the second one is the accent, which is carried to present in every situation unconsciously. He describes the latter –the accent, or pronunciation of a dialect– as “the use of particular vowel or consonant sounds and particular rhythmic, intonational, and other prosodic features,” which may also affect, up to some extent, the speaker’s own perception of grammar and vocabulary (1982: i).

Now, it is important to remark that the barriers between language and dialect are not always totally clear, for it is something rather subjective. On the macro level, according to Alvar (1996), as cited in Durango Santos (2014: 6), there exist *constitutive* dialects¹, like Cockney and Scouse, and *substitutive* dialects, like British and American English. The main difference is that the first two dialects appeared at the same time of the formation of British English –and contributed to the RP variant to some extent– and both could have become standardized under

¹ Those attached to nonstandard speech, i.e. deviations from the accepted norm.

the appropriate circumstances; on the contrary, American English emerged as an altered version of the already existing varieties. Regarding the micro level, we can find diatopic, diastratic, diaphasic and diachronic variations² of the dialects themselves (Durango Santos, 2014: 8-14); additionally, these variations sometimes overlap among dialects, which means that some attributes of a social class of one geographical area can be found in those of a different area, for example³.

Apart from this, dialects are also a matter of politics, which makes the distinction even blurrier. Ivić and Crystal (2014) state that they are mainly discerned from the standard language by features of morphology, syntax and vocabulary; however, this is often ignored. As Millward and Hayes (2012: 49) put it, Swedish and Danish are mutually intelligible, yet they are known as different languages due to their political condition; conversely, Mandarin and Cantonese are, apparently, varieties of Chinese, yet their respective speakers cannot understand each other, at least in their spoken form.

2.2. How do dialects appear?

As the title of section 2 indicates, what we are talking about when we refer to dialects is linguistic variability. It is argued that the ‘Proto-World’ language (Levine & Rowe, 2016: 345) emerged once in Africa and spread from there to the rest of the world along with our ancestors throughout millennia; hence, the variations of this original *Homo sapiens* language led to the macrofamilies which linguists have known up to the present.

According to Millward and Hayes (2012: 7-14), this is due to the fact that languages are in a constant and inevitable change as a result –apart from their external and internal history– of geographical isolation and the subsequent ‘shared innovations’. These emerge from sporadic linguistic errors⁴ in patterns and rules, commonly triggered by the ‘principle of least effort’ (Wells, 1982: 94), which are eventually accepted by the community. Thus, when a new element does not belong to the ‘public sense,’ it sounds incorrect due to the native speaker’s intuition, until it becomes common; afterwards, a previous similar element is the one which starts to sound incorrect on account of its increasing lack of use, and it finally disappears. Linguistic modifications are constituted by losses, gains, and substitutions of different elements, and they

² Diatopic refers to geography, diastratic to social background and occupational jargon, diaphasic to register, and diachronic to changes over the course of generations.

³ For this reason, matters of ethnicity and gender will not be dealt with in this paper.

⁴ Since languages are completely arbitrary, ‘error’ stands for deviation in respect of the accepted norm.

are mainly based on three language development principles: articulatory ease, auditory distinctiveness and gestural economy. They may be conditioned, meaning that they are predictable due to the linguistic or extralinguistic context, or they may be unconditioned, caused by unknown factors. As time goes by, the accumulation of these systematic changes leads from the creation of a nonstandard speech –or dialect– of a language to the emergence of a new one.

Dummett commented (as mentioned by Stoutland, 2000: 184-185) that a specific language is but a social construct which allows communication between humans, as, in the end, every speaker has a unique idiolect⁵. Since each person may have the knowledge of more or less words and more or less possible meanings of a single word, and may also have different views on syntax, the possible length of utterances and when to make pauses, there exist no two exact idiolects. Nevertheless, when multiple similar idiolects overlap in a community⁶, the ‘social calibration’ requirement proposed by Goldberg (2007: 68) is fulfilled and the perception of a language emerges. If all speakers of a language except for one die, that language is no longer alive, for only one idiolect persists, not comprising all possible conceptions of grammar and vocabulary which had originally formed that linguistic code.

Penny (2000), as cited by Durango Santos (2014: 8), argues that the acceptance of a particular dialect among different areas –later evolving into a language– is deeply rooted in the sense of ‘prestige’ which that specific dialect has acquired due to socio-economical and historical reasons. This is related to the social classes who speak it, its institutional use, and the literary tradition it possesses, for the more widespread it is, the more people will understand its vocabulary and distinctive grammatical characteristics. Consequently, more people are likely to identify it as ‘normal’ and slowly start using it instead of the dialect of their previous generation. Once it acquires an official status and is normativized, the rest are regarded as marginal and rather incorrect, since they are not employed in ‘important’ matters; despite this, at some point they could possibly replace the official language if they achieve being understood by most people.

All the aforesaid information has been added to support the fact that generalizing about Texan English would be the same as generalizing about the English language; there exist many Texan sub-varieties in the same way that there exist hundreds of world Englishes. Given that

⁵ I.e. the way of speaking of a specific person, or Chomsky’s *I-Language*.

⁶ I.e. a group of language users understands the meanings of most words in almost all the same contexts.

not all different variations in Texan English have been registered, only general data about the differences found within big areas of the territory can be provided. It must also be taken into account that languages change as their speakers do, for they are living beings. The description provided here may not actually represent the current state of the Texan English, as the consulted bibliography was written some time ago; likewise, by the time someone reads this paper, the dialect will be somewhat different from the time of its publication as well.

3. General American English

What is exactly this dialect? It is defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary* as “the standard way in which people from the US speak, that does not sound as though it comes from any particular region.” For a better understanding of the Texan English, though, it is essential to describe first the origins of this dialect, along with what is expected to be heard from most native speakers of the United States in comparison to the British Isles.

3.1. Origins

The development of the English dialects across North America can be said to be more uniform than in the case of most dialects in the world. As Wells (1982: 467) puts it, these sub-varieties can be classified in three main groups, which originated along the Atlantic coast with the arrival of different English settlers with various accents. These had sharp regional and social differences in speech that were –and are– easy to distinguish from one another in rural zones, for they evolved differently due to the reasons discussed above. This is illustrated in figure 1.

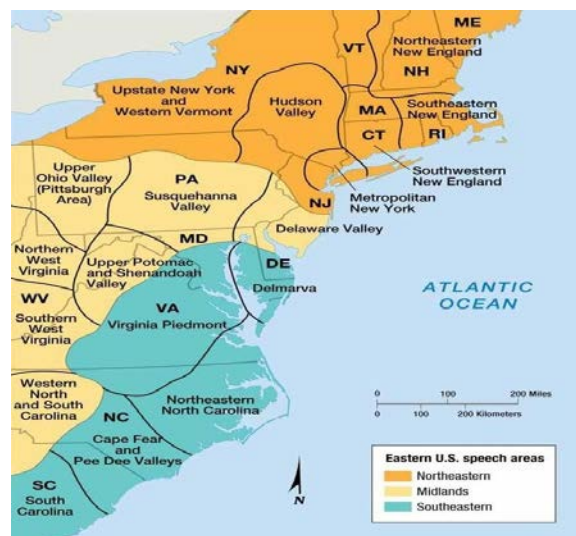


Figure 1. A map of the Atlantic Coast accents (“Mapping 19th-century American Regional English,” n.d.)

As the west was progressively settled from the east coast, the main speech areas can be seen in horizontal bands stretching across the country (Wells, 1982: 467-470). Although these bands are relatively uniform, accents are intermingled in certain territories in contact. This can be seen in figure 2, which establishes a more complete and modern classification of the North American English dialects.



Figure 2. A map of the main North American English dialects (Labov *et al.*, 2006: 148)

The three main original speech areas are the North, including such areas as New England and New York; the Midland accent, with New Jersey or Pennsylvania; and the South area, with such regions as Virginia and the Carolinas. At first glimpse, the main differences are found in vocabulary, and then in syntax and morphology. Pronunciation is different to a lesser extent between the North and Midland accents, with the exception of certain areas, whilst it is very noticeable along most of the South. This is why General American is said to be spoken by two thirds of the English-speaking population in the USA, since the South –except for big urban zones– and some other regions do not fit as much as the others within this big dialect. As can be seen, the West accent takes a big portion of the map; however, the differences with GenAm are slight, and vary depending on how close an area is to the South or North ones (Labov *et al.*, 2006: 137).

Before moving to the main differences between GenAm and RP, it is important to provide first some historical context from Wells (1982: 469-472) to see how these dialects expanded. The first English settlement was established in 1587 in Plymouth (Massachusetts). By 1700 only part of the 13 colonies had been fully settled, being Charleston one of the biggest cities. One hundred years later, the rest of Carolina was populated, while Scotch-Irish people from Ulster arrived together with Welsh and German immigrants. These three new cultures brought accent features to the Midland area, being Scottish-Irish likely responsible for the LOT-THOUGHT merger of western Pennsylvania. There are even remains of Pennsylvanian Dutch to

the present day. In the South there was still a plantation economy with landed gentry, and the indentured white labour was substituted by black slavery. There was social stratification, yet a merchant class grew up, who sent their sons to study in England.

When the expansion westward started, Midlanders arrived in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and also the inland parts of Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia. Meanwhile, New Englanders moved to the Great Lakes area. The influence of Richmond and Charleston was important in the South, but it slowly decreased with time. In the 19th century, there was a new pattern: British English innovations in pronunciation were brought to the east coast through seaports. Nevertheless, these did not spread to all North America and mostly stayed there. The R dropping phenomenon can be found in Boston, New York and the South. BATH broadening remained mostly in the Atlantic coast, and it did not affect Pennsylvania or New England. From this point onwards arose the old classification of accents: the Eastern (non-rhotic), the Southern (non-rhotic), and General American (rhotic), coming from the Hudson valley and upstate New York.

During the 20th century there was a massive migration of black people from the South to the North. They brought non-rhoticity with them, which has always been regarded as a nonstandard characteristic, and it reinforced the identity of the ‘south midland’ accent. This migration was then followed by the arrival of many Hispanics, mainly from Puerto Rico and Mexico. By the end of the century, the LOT-THOUGHT distinction was lacking in some varieties, and the TRAP-BATH splitting was also regional.

3.2. Main Differences between GenAm and RP

It is well known that the accent widely associated to British people still is Received Pronunciation (RP), although it is, in fact, sociologically defined⁷. Wells (1982: 117) renames it as Southern British Standard, for it is not to be expected in the north of the country in most cases. Meanwhile, General American (1982: 118) is applied to two thirds of the population across the United States, even though it is far from being uniform, since there are many variations, some of them being rather important. The common identifying element is the lack of features of the two other accents. Similar to its overseas counterpart, it was also called

⁷ It does not belong to a specific area and most people do not speak it. It is ‘artificial,’ in the sense that only educated people usually employ it, and often only in specific situations.

“Network English,” as it was the accepted accent on television across the country, although its nature is not as formal.

As there are fewer differences in consonants, yet these may trigger some of the changes in vowels, so the former are going to be treated first. Later on, vowels will be analyzed in some depth, paying attention to the many variations that can be found throughout the nation, but leaving for later those related to the Southern accent.

3.2.1. Consonants

The first General American phenomenon to be dealt with is **Later Yod Dropping** (Wells, 1982: 247-248). The process known as “Early Yod Dropping” affected both varieties of English, where /ju:/ was reduced to /u:/ after palatals, /r/ and clusters with /l/. The Later Yod Dropping, exclusive to the USA and some zones of Britain, extended this to the environment with /r/ after /jʊ/, and also to where it was preceded by coronal consonants⁸. While it tends to happen mostly in strong syllables, in weak syllables the effect of **Yod coalescence** can also be appreciated, where /sj/ is very likely to become /ʃ/, /dj/ can become /dʒ/, and /tj/ can turn into /tʃ/. Some words where this happens are *issue*, *education* and *situate*. Wells (1982: 489) also states that this phenomenon is really common for most speakers, although in formal contexts, such as radio broadcasts or education, yod is often used and even hypercorrected; e.g. *noon* [nʊn].

A second very noticeable feature of this accent is found in **Tapping**, usually accompanied by **T Voicing**. It is very characteristic of English people to interpret the American intervocalic /t/ as a /d/, whilst the latter think that RP’s consonant is artificial and forced (Wells, 1982: 244-251). This phenomenon is Tapping, in which Americans transform /t/ and /d/ into [ɾ] and [ɽ], respectively, as they find it easier to produce. When T Voicing occurs, the latter phoneme stands for both sounds, so the distinction between those two consonants in such intervocalic positions is neutralized for many Americans. It is, in fact, taking place both in spoken and written forms in young speakers, since they cannot distinguish them. The main conditions are that it must follow a vowel or sonorant consonant (liquid or nasal), and it must not be followed by another consonant.

⁸ These are /t/, /d/, /n/, /θ/, /s/, /z/ and /l/.

Apart from these rules, it is worth noting that T Voicing is not only applied in intervocalic position, but also in several other environments. If /t/ follows or precedes a syllabic [l], such as in *battle*, or *guilty*, it is produced as a laterally released tap. Instead of [ɾ], a retroflex flap [ɽ] takes place if there is a preceding /r/, as in *dirty* or *party*. In words such as *button* or *butter* we can find a glottal stop [ʔ], although it is more likely to appear in the South and in Britain, whereas in GenAm this is commonly realized as [tʰ].

The phoneme /r/ is very complex and highly motivates changes in vowels, but on its own, it has distinct positional variants. It is important to remark first, as most people know, that General American is mostly **rhotic**, whilst RP is non-rhotic. Despite this fact, there exists **R Dissimilation**, in which speakers tend to delete a /r/ phoneme in words having two or more of them. This phenomenon affects historical (orthographical) /r/ in unstressed non-final syllables adjacent to /r/ in another syllable, such as in *caterpillar*, *governor* or *surprise*. Regarding more specific variations, when we find it in prevocalic position, /r/ tends to become an apical post-alveolar [ɹ], except in western Pennsylvania; besides, when combined with /ɑ/, the Midwest accent tends to always use this allophone.

When a weak syllable contains a vowel followed by an /r/, this usually becomes an r-coloured vowel –or vocoid– [ə̃]. This phenomenon named **colouring** also affects the allophone [ɜ], which is generally represented as [ɜ̃] when it is followed –and blended– with an /r/ (Wells, 1982: 120), as it very commonly is. Thus, in words like *further* /'fɜrðə/ it becomes /'fɜ̃ðə/. In some cases, though, it is possible to simply analyze those two variants as /əɹ/, for it can be more centralized.

Following the data provided by Wells (1982: 488-490), some other minor differences that are characteristic in this dialect can be found in their use of /l/, /r/, /w/ and /z/. For instance, the phoneme /l/ tends to be a dark or velarized [ɫ] in contexts where in RP it is not, while /lj/ combinations, such as in *William* or *failure*, tend to become /jj/. Although the distinction between the phonemes /s/ and /z/ is essentially similar to RP, the latter phoneme is mostly pronounced as /s/ in words like *grease*. Finally, the semi-consonant /w/ can have a possible [ʍ] (or /hw/) realization in the east coast, since this is a leftover of its merger with /hw/ that took place centuries ago (Labov *et al.*, 2006: 49).

3.2.2. Vowels

Here lie the biggest differences between RP and General American, which can be spotted easily even by non-native speakers. The vowel and glide systems of both are very different, with the plus of being really variable in GenAm depending on the environments where they are found and the region the speaker belongs to (Wells, 1982: 120). Additionally, vowel length in this dialect is not as important as in RP, which also involves a simpler glide system. These contrasts can be appreciated in Figures 3-6.

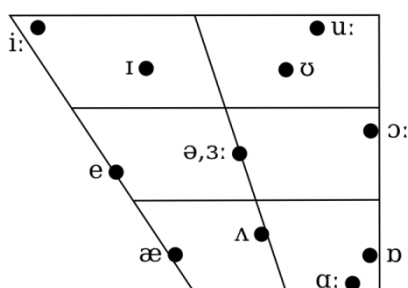


Figure 3. RP vowels (Roach, 2004: 242)

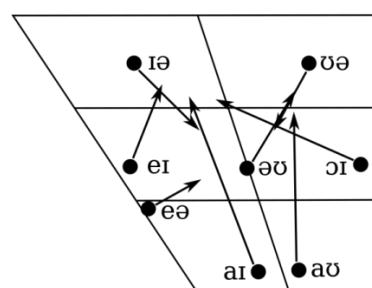


Figure 4. RP glides (Roach, 2004: 242)

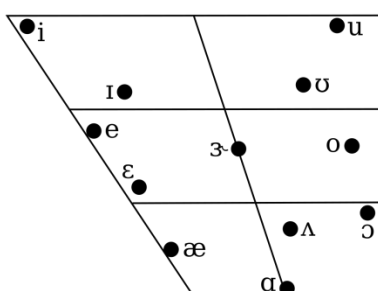


Figure 5. GenAm vowels (Wells, 1982: 486)

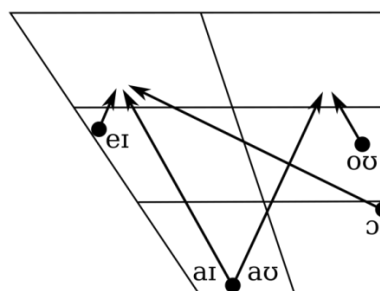


Figure 6. GenAm glides (Wells, 1982: 486)

There are several important facts regarding **pure vowels** not depending on environments (Wells, 1982: 485-488). For instance, although the vowel /e/ exists in this dialect, /ɛ/ is much more likely to occur, in opposition to RP. The same applies to /ʌ/, which is generally a centralized slightly back vowel [a]. In GenAm the starting point of /oʊ/ is fairly back (rather than schwa in situations like /əʊ/) too, in the same way that FORCE is usually the allophone [o] except for the Atlantic coast, where it remains /ɔ/⁹. In the Middle Atlantic area /oʊ/ can turn into /ɜʊ/, which is reminiscent of RP.

⁹ The number forty-four is realized as ['fɔrti'for].

A rather relevant feature that distinguishes GenAm from RP is the **LOT unrounding**, followed by the loss of its distinctive length in the PALM-START sets. The phoneme /ɑ/ was rounded in Middle English, staying as /ɒ/ in RP, but only a minority actually uses the latter in GenAm¹⁰, who instead uses its unrounded counterpart. The fact that PALM and START became short in this dialect makes them sound like LOT. For this reason, the distinction gradually became neutralized in many zones (Wells, 1982: 245-246), such as the northern speech, where we hear *on* pronounced with /ɑ/¹¹. Before an /r/, it can also be a retracted front unrounded [a]. Nevertheless, it is becoming a standardized feature.

Related to the previous feature is the so-called **LOT-THOUGHT –or low back– merger** (Wells, 1982: 479-484), which means that /ɒ/ (or its variations) and /ɔ/ become undistinguishable, although the majority of Americans only suffer it in the environment rV¹². It raises some problems regarding intelligibility, for it means that there exist minimal pairs such as *collar-caller*, *cot-caught*, *stock-stalk* or *knotty-naughty*. In pre /r/ environments, if these two are unmerged, NORTH is an allophone of /ɔ/; if they are merged, it depends on whether NORTH is merged with FORCE. This variability is due to the failure of RP innovations to unrounding the LOT words in these environments.

American accents are unique in their treatment of historically long vowels before /r/, something that will be elucidated in this paragraph and the following ones. First of all, it is important to comment on the combination /ir/, which can occur across morpheme boundaries; i.e., this makes *key#ring* rhyme with *clear#ing*. This leads to *hero* and *zero* being realized with /i/ rather than with RP's /ɪ/, as if there was a #¹³, so their distinction is neutralized. This is extended even further up to the relatively common monophthongization of NEAR, which makes *mirror* and *nearer* perfect rhymes, just like *spear it* and *spirit* (Wells, 1982: 481). North America is the only place where this happens, where /iə/ becomes [i] to later become KIT. Hence, *near*, *beer* and *deer* include the same vowel /ɪ/. In Early Modern English, NEAR, SQUARE, FORCE and NORTH did not have the exact same vowels as they do now in RP, and the first two did not have schwa either; that is where the difference comes from. This process is called **Laxing**, where a normally long vowel preceding /r/ lowers and centralizes, and then it is

¹⁰ In fact, in those areas where it is used, young speakers exclusively use it before /r/ (Wells, 1982: 475).

¹¹ While it is realized with the short THOUGHT vowel /ɔ/ in great part of the country.

¹² /r/ plus a vowel.

¹³ I.e. an inflectional morpheme.

followed by **Pre-R schwa deletion**. However, the environments $_r||$ and $_rC$, such as in *beer* and *beard*, are diphthongal like in RP, but a bit closer.

Taking into account the previous effect, if an area has NEAR pronounced as $/ɪr/$, it will mean that SQUARE is also realized as $/ɛr/$, with schwa deletion and the typical mid open ‘e’ from America. Hence, *sharing* and *herring* are rhymes. It takes place in the environment $/_r\#/$, like *care* and *fair*, and derivatives such as *caring* or *faring*. In addition to this, if we take into account that $/ɛr/$ is commoner than $/e/$ and that it also may replace the TRAP set, we get to the conclusion that the distinction between SQUARE, DRESS and TRAP is neutralized, which makes *Mary*, *merry*, *marry* homophones in several places. Meanwhile, New York maintains $/eə/$, as it is close to RP; this glide does not exist in GenAm.

In regards to START words, in General American they are realized as $/ɑr/$, ranging qualitatively from fronted central $[a]$ to $[ɒ]$. In rural areas, however, the distinction between START and NORTH is neutralized, both usually having $[ɒ]$ in all of Mississippi, Iowa and Utah (Wells, 1982: 482). If START, THOUGHT and LOT are realized as $/ɑ/$, and there is an $/o/$ in FORCE, then GOAT and NORTH are pronounced $/ɔ/$ in $/_r/$. So we get *fork* $[fɔrk]$, *park* $[pɔrk]$ and *pork* $[pɔrk]$.

Finishing with pure vowels, respecting the NURSE set, it is often pronounced with the STRUT phoneme, but in General American it may be interpreted as a schwa when transcribing phonetically (*hurry* → $ˈhəri$), as it is more central than in RP and it is rather uncommon.

Now, turning to **diphthongal changes** that may occur with different environments, there are multiple phenomena to be discussed. For instance, before the consonants $/ʃ/$ and $/ʒ/$, the vowels $/ɛ/$, $/ʊ/$, $/ɔ/$ and $/æ/$ usually get an $/ɪ/$ offglide, such as in *measure* $/mɛɪʒə/$ or *push* $/pʊɪʃ/$. In some parts of the country where this happens¹⁴, the vowel $/ɔ/$ followed by a $/ʃ/$ can turn into $/ɔrʃ/$, as in *wash* $/wɔrʃ/$. In the context of velars ($/g/$ and $/k/$) these four previous vowels either get an $/ɪ/$ offglide or the consonant transforms into a palatal; this can be seen in the word *egg*, with $/eɪg/$ and $/ej/$ as possible productions (Wells, 1982: 485-486).

¹⁴ Especially the west accent, with the state of Washington deserving a highlight.

Before a final [ɫ], the phonemes /i/, /u/, /eɪ/ and /o/ may develop a centring offglide; for instance, *feel* can be [fiəɫ] or [fiɹəɫ], and *rule* can be pronounced either as [ruəɫ] or [ruwəɫ]. additionally, /eɪ/ and /o/ may develop the semi consonants /j/ and /w/. Hence, *fail* can be heard as [fe(j)əɫ], and *coal* as [ko(w)əɫ] (Wells, 1982: 487).

The final major feature of North American English yet to be described is called **BATH raising**. It is characterized by the fact that TRAP and BATH words in GenAm are undergoing a change of the quality of the vowel, which is turning into an unlauted [æ] (Wells, 1982: 477). Some other changes are, for instance, that /æ/ can commonly have an additional /ə/, which modifies the vowel; this can be seen in *half* (with /æ/ in GenAm), which is now realized in some places as [eə], [éə] and [ɛə], or even [ɪə] in Buffalo. It takes place word-finally before voiced plosives, fricatives and nasals, along with final clusters including one of those consonants first. In contrast, the verb *have* and its conjugations *has* and *had* use /æ/ instead of [æə]¹⁵. Among the offglides mentioned a few lines back, some may have mid qualities as well; that is, [ɛ·ə] and [e·ə]. Hence, *gram* becomes homophonous with *Graham* (1982: 478). Although the /eə/ of *Mary* sounds like in *half*, as can be seen above, some monosyllabic words with this diphthong tend to develop such mid quality. This is very striking to RP hearers and has become a stereotype of the American accent. For this very reason, it is held in low reputation, and it is pronounced /æ/ in a careful and monitored speech. It was not registered in most books until the middle of the 20th century, as it is relatively recent.

Some other diphthongal features are the following. The MOUTH vowel remains the same, although in more specific areas such as Pennsylvania and New England, both /aɪ/ and /aʊ/ use a backer first component [ɑ]; meanwhile, in New Jersey and South Midland it is likely to be /æʊ/ or even /æəʊ/ (Wells, 1982: 485-488). *Fire* and *tired* /aɪə/ have the PRICE set in most of the country, followed by an /r/; in the Midland accent, though, the /ɪ/ disappears and *fire* is homophone with *far*, and *tired* with *tarred*.

¹⁵ There does not seem to exist an ASCII symbol for unlauted /æ/.

4. English Accents Spoken in Texas

4.1. Historical Background

Following to the data from Atwood (2010: 4-23), a brief summary of the history of Texas and its inhabitants will be provided in this section. The main objective is to elucidate why there are so many linguistic and cultural differences within the state, in addition to the differences between rural and urban areas.

What is known today as Texas was originally part of the Viceroyalty of New Spain from the early explorations of the continent in the 16th century. The European country tried to establish numerous settlements during the course of three centuries, yet most of them failed¹⁶. By 1809 there were barely 4000 non-native inhabitants, one fourth being soldiers; these hardly meant a resistance force for the Anglo-Americans. Texas obtained its independence from Mexico in 1821, when a group of these settlers bought a permission¹⁷ from the government of Mexico to live in the Gulf Coast Plain. Black slaves began to arrive by 1825, despite the first objections of their leaders. The territory later expanded to the north and west with migrants mostly belonging to the Inland South and its neighbouring states.

Years after the independence, most migrants inhabiting the southeast came from the Gulf Coast states, being Louisiana the most influential, whose people carried with them their French heritage. In contrast, the north was mostly populated by people from Tennessee and the plantation states (Arkansas, Missouri, etc). The black slaves were also an important part of Texas, as they were nearly 60 percent of the total population. Before and after the Civil War, certain German settlements were established as well, mostly in Central Texas. It is around the beginning of the 20th century when Latin-Americans started to migrate to the state, most of them coming from Mexico.

Compared to the era of the Civil War, the economy of the state was completely different in the 20th century, and so has remained. Cattle raising and corn production are mostly located in the east and southeast areas, while cotton production and other agriculture activities are found in the west, especially in the High Plains. The oil industry is scattered throughout the region,

¹⁶ Not because of native population, as it was scarce.

¹⁷ A way of settling under contract known as the *empresario* system.

but the important economic changes were triggered in areas towards the northwest, such as Odessa, leading to the creation of more great urban areas.

4.2. Current Accents and their Perception

The English spoken in the state of Texas comprises several sub-varieties within the Southern dialect¹⁸, yet also shares some features with the West accent; besides, it is worth noting that it has traces of Spanish and French. According to Wells (1982: 527-528), it is hard to distinguish white Southern speakers from Black English¹⁹ speakers of the same social conditions, and therefore, accent barriers are very blurred.

The north and northeast of Texas are in contact with the South Midland variety²⁰ and, in fact, they belong to the so-called **Texas South** sub-variety (Labov *et al.*, 2006: 129); although it is usually associated to the state, this is clearly not the dominant variant. The east part of the state is in contact with the Gulf Southern accent (Louisiana), while in West Texas we find the Plains Southern accent. In the Mountain and Basin Region, together with the South Texas Plain (border with Mexico), no identifiable accent is found, although those are relatively small portions of territory.

To explain these differences in Texan accents, not only geography is important, but also its cultures and their origins. Atwood (2010: 11-15) took data from the population living in the state in 1950, who are the ancestors of the current population living there. It is clear that the areas with no clear accent are likely deriving from the fact that Latin culture is huge there, with population nuclei of over 50 percent of Spanish in South Texas Plain and around 40 percent in the West. The east has areas with between 30 and over 50 percent of black population, which are rates similar to many areas with the Gulf Southern accent (as they were originally slave states). Meanwhile, in the eastern border there were around 30 percent of people who were descendants from the Louisiana settlements. Between Central Texas and the northeast, around 30 percent of the population had origins either from Arkansas or Oklahoma settlements, whose accent is close to South Midland. To support this data even further, these were stated to be the four main cultural patterns in Texas:

¹⁸ According to Kirkpatrick (2007: 65), there are eighteen sub-varieties.

¹⁹ This variety will not be discussed, as it is spread throughout all North America.

²⁰ In Oklahoma and Arkansas.

The Anglos of Southern tradition in West Texas, the Catholics of strong European heritage in Hill Country²¹, the Hispanics in South Texas, and the Blacks in East Texas. All four are important in Central Texas. (Frow, 1989: 14)

The flow of people from the north, which started by the end of the 20th century²², is changing the Southern accent into a more standard one in urban areas, and hence, it is becoming more and more badly regarded. Lippi-Green (2012: 217-220) discusses the idea of ‘maps in the mind’ to refer to the preconceptions that the population have towards national accents. For instance, she states that there exists a north-south mental divide, with people from the north thinking that people with southern drawl (discussed in §4.5) are “ungrammatical and ignorant,” and find it the less desirable place to live. That feeling is so strong that even the author affirms to often react negatively to Southern accents. Likewise, many rural Texans are proud of their speech and have become wary of outsiders, thinking their own way of talking is sincere, unlike artificial accents²³. While some southerners will simply share the latter point of view, many have the perception of not having any particular accent. On the contrary, those southerners who identify their culture with the stereotypes will try to avoid criticisms and will adopt a General American accent, as is happening in big cities (Wells, 1982: 529).

4.3. Consonants

Before going into detail with the consonantal particularities of the Southern variant, it is important to remark some differences in respect to some General American rules that apply to great part of the country (Wells, 1982: 488-490). For instance, the phenomenon of Later Yod Dropping is mostly ignored, since it either remains as /ju/ or changes to /ɪu/²⁴. According to Bailey (as cited in Ngefac, 2008: 67), yod dropping does occur when it is preceded by a /t/, such as in *Tuesday*. Strikingly enough, in South Midland²⁵ /ju/ can turn into /o/ or /o·ə/, since CURE and FORCE are merged there (Wells, 1982: 549); as a result, *poor* and *door* are rhymes, together with the stigmatized possibility of [oo]. Regarding the Tapping and T Voicing effects, they occur in Texas as well, even with the consequent orthographic errors in the case of some speakers. Nonetheless, as it is regarded as substandard, hypercorrections can be found, with the /d/ of *ready* being directly pronounced as a /t/. Another difference with General American is the fact that the phoneme /l/ has different qualities, only being dark in the same environments

²¹ Geographical area between Central Texas and the South.

²² Which is the opposite type of migration which took place decades before.

²³ We could say that Texans think of Americans just like these think of RP speakers.

²⁴ As in New England.

²⁵ Which may very well affect Texas South.

as in RP²⁶, whilst GenAm uses [ɫ] more commonly (1982: 550). In the South, the phonemes /ʌ/ and /w/ may be merged for new generations in Texas South (Labov *et al.*, 2006: 50), but they can also be differentiated by older speakers, such as in *whale* and *wail* (Collins and Mees, 2013: 187). A final difference with the General American tendencies above is that, while the /z/ in *grease* is pronounced /s/, the former is kept in the South.

Southern accents are understood as non-rhotic in a variable way²⁷, which is a reminiscence of the influence of British English. The most classical distinction is that, while lower-class people do not have the tendency of R Dropping, upper-class and black population do; this goes back in time to the old plantation economy (Wells, 1982: 542). Nevertheless, as Labov *et al.* state (2006: 47), in the present day that distinction is disappearing and /r/ usage is expanding in the South at a rate of 14 percent each generation; this is at least among white people of all social conditions, and curiously enough, those rates are higher among women. Wells noted back in 1982 (544) that, in fact, it was partially proven that most speakers had a rhotic mentality, which means that they had been exposed to rhotic accent through television, and such was their perception of the language. However, they recur to R Dropping as a custom, until that tendency finally disappears. Melchers and Shaw (2011: 87) detail that some present-day Southern speakers, except for those of the east, may not have ‘r-liaison,’ meaning that it is not used for linking or intrusively, as in RP, to the extent that it may not even be pronounced by lower-class speakers in intervocalic position.

A very well known southernism, which is associated with the western stereotype of the cowboy, is that of the occasional occurrence of the implosive /b/ in initial position (Wells, 1982: 489), transcribed as [ɓ] in words such as *boi* [ɓoi]. Moreover, Texans tend to use nearly retroflex allophones of /s/ and /z/, that is, [ʂ] and [ʐ]. This, together with the fact that /s/ is preferred over /ʃ/²⁸ when preceding /r/, means that *shrink* can be produced as [ʂrɪŋk]. Oddly enough for strangers, verbs conjugations such as *isn’t* or *wasn’t* are pronounced with /d/ instead of /z/; thus, [ˈɪdnt] and [ˈwədnt] can be heard more commonly than expected (Collins and Mees 2013: 187).

²⁶ In final position or preceding a consonant.

²⁷ Except for Appalachian Southern, which is fully rhotic, now becoming the reference for Southern English (Labov *et al.*, 2006: 48)

²⁸ Even if it is written as <sh>.

Regarding the consonant /l/, there are some features yet to be mentioned, which are related to contexts in which lax vowels may experiment Breaking and/or Shading²⁹. When a dark quality occurs, if it is followed by a velar or a labial consonant, it is due to suffer a stigmatized L Dropping (Wells, 1982: 550-551); e.g. making *help* sound as [hɛəp]. In other contexts where it occurs, it is likely to be lateralized as well, becoming [ɫ]. Further, in words such as *battle* or *bottle* this velar lateral is expected to blend with the schwa and turn into a syllabic consonant [ɫ̩]. This process is called L Vocalization and may also occur in Britain (1982: 258), although it acquires the quality [ɣ] there.

In respect to nasals, there are two phenomena worth mentioning. The first is that some speakers may often simplify the combination /nt/ to /n/ when it is preceded and followed by a vowel at once. Some examples are *hunter*, *winter* or *Atlanta*, produced as ['hʌnə], ['wɪnə] and [ət'läenə], respectively (Wells, 1982: 552). Nevertheless, when the combination /nt/ is followed by the syllabic consonant [ŋ], it is not simplified, although the previous vowel is likely to be nasalized; e.g. *sentence* ['sɛ̃tɪns]. The second detail that can be found in the Southern speech is that, in final position, as in *-ing*, the apical nasal [ɲ] is more common than the velar [ŋ].

Although seen as substandard, the cluster reduction of final /st, ld, nd/ can occur always that this combination is not triggered by an inflectional suffix, such as the past tense (Wells, 1982: 553). The fronting of /θ/ and /ð/ to /f/ and /v/, as in *both* [boʊf] or *breathe* [briv], is also regarded as lower-class.

4.4. Vowels

The main differences with the General American rules above is that NEAR does not become a monophthong (Wells, 1982: 481), and the Low Back merger is not as well established as in other parts of the country, except for the western area of the Texas South accent (Labov *et al.*, 2006: 63). For the rest of the features below, these are mostly effects exclusive to this accent, and some are specific to certain areas. First, the main Southern Shift features will be dealt with, then followed by the explanation of weak and pure vowels, and finally there will be some comments on the Southern glides.

²⁹ This will be explained in detail in §4.4.

It is difficult to establish a specific set of vowels, since they are very sensitive to contextual changes with /r/ and /l/ and there are many possible allophones. Some of its deviations from RP and GenAm would be interpreted by RP speakers as ‘traditional-dialect,’ due to realizations such as *deaf* [dif] or *wounded* ['waʊndɪd]. Wells proposes the vowel system below. The weak vowel schwa, along with its alternative and stigmatized r-coloured vocoid /ə̃/, must also be taken into account.

ɪ	ʊ	i			ɪu	u
ɛ	ʌ	eɪ				oʊ
æ	ɑ	(æɪ)	aɪ	ɔɪ	æʊ	ɔ
<i>Checked</i>		<i>Free</i>				

Figure 7. Southern Vowel System (Wells, 1982: 530)

The difference between **checked and free vowels** is only applied to stressed syllables (Wells, 1982: 119). The checked ones occur when followed by a consonant that restricts their pronunciation; hence, they cannot occur in a stressed monosyllable with no final consonant. Meanwhile, the free vowels are not usually followed by any checking consonant, though they can be sometimes.

Although the vowel system proposed by Wells is appropriate, his table of lexical incidence does not reflect some of the most common qualities; for this reason, I shall use his table but updating it with data taken from Boberg:

KIT	ɪ, ɪə	FACE	eɪ, ɛɪ
DRESS	ɛ, eə	PALM	ɑ
TRAP	æ, æɪ	THOUGHT	ɔ, ʊ
LOT	ɑ, ɒ:	GOAT	oʊ
STRUT	ʌ, ɜ	GOOSE	uʊ, ɪu
FOOT	ʊ	PRICE	aɪ, a:
BATH	æ, æɪ	VOICE	ɔɪ, ɔə
CLOTH	ɔ	MOUTH	æʊ
FLEECE	iy, əi	happy	ɪ

Figure 8. Table of lexical incidence from Wells (1982: 531) and Boberg (2019: 245)

The monophthongization of the /aɪ/ of PRICE into a wide range of possibilities is the main feature of what is known as the **Southern Shift** (Lippi-Green, 2012: 214), which comprises several other vowels changes. The fact of avoiding it when it is preceded by a voiceless consonant, such as /t/ or /s/, was regarded as prestigious speech at one point in time, yet that tendency has almost disappeared (Wells, 1982: 537-538). The most common quality of PRICE is a long [a:], but a short –and stigmatized– version may be found as well in great part of the population. Although more unlikely, /æ/ is another possibility. It is most noticeable within the range of the Texas South accent, but also in the east of the state (Labov *et al.*, 2006: 129). There are some marginal pronunciations specific to some areas, with either /a/ or /ɪ/ weakened.

According to Melchers and Shaw (2011: 87) and Boberg (2019: 244-245), other features triggered by the Southern Shift are the following. The FACE vowel was lowered to a mid starting point, which leads to the allophone [ɛɪ], with the marginal realization [ëɪ] as well. The FLEECE vowel is usually monophthongal in GenAm /i/, but it is common to find it as [iy] in the South, with a possible weakening of the first component. In a similar manner to FLEECE, the GOOSE vowel, normally short in the rest of the country, is generally the glide [uw], while it can also be fronted as [ɪu].

Also due to the Southern Shift, it was described by Cearley (as cited in Wells, 1982: 536) that in Texas speech the vowels /ɪ/ and /æ/ are likely to receive offglides. The environment where they develop a centring offglide is in final position and followed by an anterior consonant³⁰, whilst it is a palatal offglide otherwise in the case of /æ/. Examples are *kit*, *add*, *lack*, being respectively realized as [kɪət], [æəd] and [læɪk]. Surprisingly, the combination [æɪ] can, in fact, develop an extra schwa, with short words such as *half* or *glass* being produced with [æɪə]; this mostly happens in Texas Southern (Labov *et al.*, 2006: 122). Boberg (2019: 244) also mentions that DRESS /ɛ/ may turn into [eə] in most contexts.

The ‘checked’ sounds above are classified as lax vowels³¹. However, contrary to expectations, they are not shorter than the free ones or the diphthongs. This is due to the Southern Breaking, which will be discussed below. In addition to this phenomenon, **Umlaut** and **Shading** also affect these vowels. Originally, Umlaut refers to the phenomenon that historically led to distinctions such as *blood-bleed*, *foot-feet*, *mouse-mice*, etc. Sledd (as cited

³⁰ Labials, dentals or alveolars.

³¹ They are normally short vowels, produced with little constriction of the vocal tract.

in Wells, 1982: 533) found that there was a similar process in the Southern accent, which mainly affects two-syllable words. In this case, stressed front vowels become retracted in the context of a weak syllable following them. *Cellar* is likely to have /ɛ̠/ instead of the typical American /ɛ/ if it is followed by a schwa; meanwhile, as in *jelly* it is followed by /ɪ/, it retains the standard phoneme. *Horror*, ending in schwa, has /ɑ/ as the first vowel, but it is more advanced in the case of *horrid* /'hɑ+rɪd/. Apart from those factors, it is seemingly a tendency that it does not apply to inflected words (1982: 534); for instance, *dinner* suffers umlauting, while *thinner* does not.

On the other hand, Shading is a change that applies in accordance with the previous one, and it involves the change of vowel timbre, which becomes backer depending on the following consonant (Wells, 1982: 535). In this Southern accent, it is especially noticeable in the phoneme /ɪ/, which is only clearly front when followed by a velar consonant (*stick*, *big*). The most common allophone is [ɪ̠], which is commonly found with the liquids (/r, l/) and labials; however, it may or may not happen with the rest of consonants.

When Umlaut and Shading take place at the same time, there are many possibilities for the 'i' phonemes. Among the ones discussed above, we can also find a slightly retracted variant of /ɪ/ in words such as *ripping* or *ticker*, or a central [ɪ̠] in words such as *dipper* and *ribbon*. The phoneme /ʊ/ is often unrounded, which can make it overlap with the phoneme [ɪ̠] resulting from these processes (Wells, 1982: 536).

It is because of the **Southern Breaking** that there exists the tendency of pronouncing lax vowels with centring offglides; e.g. *good* [gʊəd]. This process likely occurs in a stressed monosyllable and the same environment as vowels with Shading. As these vowels do not usually have double length in the rest of dialects, the extra length finally developed into /ə/ or /ɪ/ offglides (1982: 535). For instance, the three lax front vowels have the tendency of developing a schwa when they end in labial, which, combined with the previous processes, can cause *lip* to be pronounced [lɪəp], *web* as [wɛəb], and *rap* as [ræəp]. They may also be found, if very stressed, with dental or alveolar consonants; in other monosyllabic environments, they are produced as long versions instead. As an alternative, these lax vowels may also develop the /ɪ/ offglide that occurs in some zones of GenAm, with *egg* being pronounced as /ɛɪg/, except for the fact that the offglide is usually the palatal [ɪ̠]. It occurs when the following consonant is one of the following /ʃ, ʒ, ŋ, g/, as in *measure* ['meɪʒə]. However, when the phoneme /ɪ/ is the

one developing the offglide, it turns into a [i], as it is typical to be found in contexts such as *thing* [θiŋ]. Out of these cases, the [ɪ] can take place preceding palato-alveolars. For instance, the words *push*, *much* and *dodge* can be heard as [pʊɪʃ], [mʌɪtʃ] and [dʌɪdʒ]. This inevitably sounds very striking to people not belonging to this region, and it is for this reason that these realizations are regarded as substandard.

Weak vowels have a particular feature in the South that has not remained in General American; that is, the differentiation between /ə/ and /ɪ/ as weak vowels (Wells, 1982: 551-552). With this distinction, any orthographic <i> in weak position, or an inflectional *-ed* following a <t> or <d>, are likely to be pronounced with the front vowel instead of /ə/, similarly to the RP accent. But unlike in the overseas variant, the vowel /ɪ/ is also extended to word endings *-ad* and *-as*, which leads to *Texas* being often pronounced as [ˈtɛksɪz]. Besides, in HAPPY words [ɪ] is mostly preferred over [i], just like in RP (Collins and Mees, 2013: 156), while /u/ in final position³² is likely to be found either as /ə/ or its rounded counterpart [ə].

The vowel /ʌ/ is barely present in North America except for some parts of the Atlantic coast. Nevertheless, the allophone [ɜ] is the quality most likely to be found in the South, except in an environment before a labial consonant; e.g. we can find *cup* and *cut* as [kʌp] and [kɜt]. For this reason, given that the phoneme is usually associated with an orthographic /r/ as in RP, a way of mocking the Southern accent is by writing ‘lervin’ for *loving*. There also exists the possibility of NURSE merging with CURE into /ɜ/, since in General American it is merged with STRUT. In that case, *surely* would be homophonous with *Shirley*, and *Europe* would be pronounced [ˈjɜrɒp].

The vowel /ɔ/ is discussed as being possibly realized as /ɔʊ/, as there is a tendency towards diphthongizing the ‘o’ vowels. A variant of the /ɔɪ/ of CHOICE could be [oɪ], although it can also become [ɔə] if it is located word-finally. Turning to the LOT set, it can vary from the central [ɑ+] to the back [ɑ] in the eastern areas of the South (Wells, 1982: 536-537). However, at the west of the Mississippi, like Texas, LOT may use instead a lengthened version of the rounded RP counterpart [ɒ:] (Boberg, 2019: 244). Additionally, the THOUGHT set is fronted and merged with the latter phoneme, possibly becoming [ɒʊ] due to the tendency discussed above.

³² Rarely unstressed, actually.

Wells (1982: 540-541) affirms that there exist two phenomena in the Southern speech in the sequence **vowel plus nasal**. The first is the neutralization of the distinction between /ɪ/ and /ɛ/, being the former the standard pronunciation. The second is their coalescence with the nasal sound in certain environments, except with the *-ing* suffix; this coalescence can also affect preceding vowels, such as in *glance* [glæ̃ns].

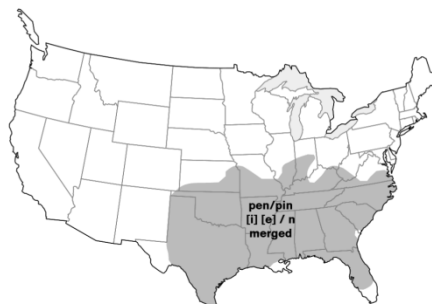


Figure 9. A map of the /ɪ/-/ɛ/ merger (Lippi-Green, 2012: 214)

For instance, *hymn* and *hem*, *mint* and *meant*, or *pin* and *pen* become homophonous. Other specific examples are *gonna* [gõ], *don't* [dõʔ], or the typical combination *I'm going to* [amgõ]. As this is not well regarded by some speakers, there exist hypercorrections of this phenomenon, with people pronouncing *since* as [sɛ̃ns].

The PALM set is usually /ɑ/, yet it is also common to find a long version of the vowel, whilst [æ] is typical of some rural areas. Other vowels preceding /l/ may also suffer some mergers due to Breaking (Labov *et al.*, 2006: 241). These are /uw/ and /u/, /iy/ and /ɪ/, and /ey/ and /e/, with the second of each pair being the usual pronunciation. Therefore, homophonous words resulting from this can be *pool* and *pull*, *feel* and *fill*, or *fail* and *fell*. In the state of Texas the most common merger is that of /ey/ and /e/, while the /iy/ and /ɪ/ merger can be located in the Texas South variant (1982: 71, 128).

Now we shall move to environments with **vowel plus /r/**, which will comprise several paragraphs below. Historical /r/ remains as such in accents that are rhotic up to some extent. Although the NURSE set is /ʌ/ in General American, in the South it is usually merged with CURE into [ɜ]; this phoneme is very likely to become an r-coloured vowel [ɜ̃] if the accent is rhotic. In Alabama, which is relatively close to the Texas South area, NURSE may turn into [ɜ:] if it is in final position, but into [ɜɪ]³³ if it is followed by another consonant; e.g. *bird* [bɜɪd] and *bur*

³³ Regarded as 'elegant,' while it is stigmatized in other parts of the country.

[bɜː]. One problem that arises from rhoticity is the distinction between monosyllabic diphthongs and disyllabic ones (Wells, 1982: 545-546), as the length of the main constituent of the diphthong can be increased, such as from /ɪə/ to [ɪːə]; additionally, if this is combined with the Breaking of lax vowels, *beard* can be [bɪːəˈd].

Where /r/ is prevocalic and there are no intervening inflectional morphemes, it is common in the South to have long vowels or diphthongs, even in some cases where they sound odd³⁴. For instance, while *Mary* is homophonous with *marry* and *merry* in General American, in the South *Mary* is pronounced with /eɪ/, while *Harry* is kept as /æ/. Aside from that feature, FORCE-CURE are not merged in this context (┘rV), so the first vowel of *curious* is diphthongal³⁵. On the other hand, when there are intervening morphemes, there is a very interesting distinction between verbs and other word classes (Wells, 1982: 547). The former are likely to suffer Breaking and develop centring offglides, whilst in nouns or adjectives the vowels tend to remain short; this can be seen in *steering* [i] vs. *steering* [ɪə], the first being an adjective –as in ‘steering wheel’– and the second a verb.

Where a historical /r/ is followed by a palato-alveolar consonant, the vowels /ɑ, ɔ, o/ substitute the /r/ by a lengthening of the vowel, then followed by the development of a palatal offglide. Thus, *large* can have the striking pronunciation [laːɪdʒ].

In the Texas area, it is likely that the START and NORTH sets are merged in popular speech, both using [ɒ] and varying from [ɒː] to [ɒr]; hence, this makes words such as *card* and *cord* homophonous (Wells, 1982: 548). The option of inverting both lexical sets instead of merging them is also possible, but highly rejected, and this causes a confusion between words like *barn* and *born*. Alternatively, the NORTH-FORCE sets, which are sometimes merged in the rest of the country, have a clear distinction in Texas, maintaining *horse* and *hoarse* with a different pronunciation, with the exception of the eastern part of the state (Labov *et al.*, 2006: 52).

Also in Texas and the surrounding states, the PRICE vowel plus /r/, as in *fire*, suffers the typical monophthongization from the Southern Shift; meanwhile, the schwa is kept or turns into

³⁴ *Store* realized as [stou].

³⁵ At least for cultured speakers (Wells, 1982: 549)

its r-coloured counterpart. Thus, the pronunciation of *wire* would be [waə]. In central Texas³⁶, there exists the stigmatized possibility of PRICE becoming [a], followed by the loss of the weak vowel but keeping the consonant, so *fire* is homophonous with *far* (Wells, 1982: 549). Even more rare³⁷ is the monophthongization of MOUTH words, which may cause *flower* to be pronounced [fla:].

Respecting glides other than PRICE, there are several possibilities worth mentioning. The MOUTH glide usually has the quality /æʊ/ in most of the South, but in rural areas of Texas it is rather subject to Breaking, thus having the possibility [æo] or even with an extra offglide (/ɪ/ or /ə/) between the two phonemes (Wells, 1982: 538). While the /iu/ diphthong is mostly unknown to Americans except in New England, in the South exist allophonic variants used by some speakers; that is, [yu] and [iy]. The former is rather uncommon and can appear in words such as *abuse*, *feud* and *view*; on the other hand, the latter may be used after palato-alveolars, having as a result *shoot* and *choose* being pronounced as [ʃiʏt] and [tʃiʏz] (1982: 539). This component of the allophonic variant of /u/ may also be present in /eɪ/, resulting in [ey] in words like *fail*. The glide /æɪ/³⁸ has evolved from the historical /æ/ in certain words, splitting the TRAP-BATH sets of words. Macmillan states (as cited by Wells, 1982: 532) that it usually happens after /g, f, θ, ʃ, s, v, n/, whilst Wells also notes, as seen previously, that it can occur with the velar nasal /ŋ/. Curiously enough, this diphthong seems to be well distinguished from the PRICE one, and from the phoneme /æ/ itself. One final minor diphthongal variant discussed by Wells (1982: 540) is that of GOAT. Most parts of the South have /ou/, but the Deep South³⁹ can even have /ɒʊ/⁴⁰.

4.5. Prosody

Although this area of General American has not been treated previously in this paper, a brief commentary will be added before addressing the Texan speech. As Gramley and Pätzold (2004: 278) put it, stress and intonation in General American are similar to those of RP.

Regarding stress, they share most of the patterns except for the endings *–ary*, *–ery* or *–ory*, in which GenAm tends to split these endings in two syllables by adding a secondary stress,

³⁶ Nearly half of which corresponds to the Texas South accent.

³⁷ Except for the typical *our* [ɑ:].

³⁸ Which can also be found as [æə].

³⁹ South Texas Plain in Texas.

⁴⁰ Just like it is common in the THOUGHT vowel in the east of the Mississippi.

whereas RP tends to realize them in a monosyllabic way. Thus, the word *library* is /'laɪbri/ in RP but /'laɪbrəri/ in GenAm, and similar results are obtained with *discovery* or *territory*. Apart from this, the primary stress may vary on specific words (i.e. not following any rules); for instance, RP puts stress in the first syllables of *ballet*, *detail* or *frontier*, whilst GenAm puts it in the second ones; conversely, only GenAm puts stress at the beginning of *artisan*, *doctrinal* or *reveille* (Gramley & Pätzold, 2004: 278).

Turning to intonation, General American is considered much flatter and sharper, meaning that it misses some of the gradual points characteristic of RP. While the latter tends to divide long sentences into various segments with their own rises and falls⁴¹, GenAm maintains, from the very beginning of the sentence, either the fall or the rise up to the end. Something similar applies to interrogatives in GenAm, having *wh*-questions with only falling intonation (instead of rising) and *yes-no* questions with rapid rises plus a final smaller rise (Gramley & Pätzold, 2004: 279).

Now that these differences have been established, it is time to talk about Texan suprasegmentals, which essentially derive from the GenAm accent. As Wells (1982: 529) states, the particularity of this accent is the so-called **southern drawl**, which is easy to recognize. The main features, in fact, have been already explained in §4.4, except for the tendency of putting most stresses in the first syllable of words; e.g. *Detroit* ['dɪtrɔət]. There is greater length in these stressed, accented syllables as compared to the unstressed ones, which has led to the Southern Shift, along with the breaking and shading effects discussed above.

This extended length, together with the possible diphthongizations and triphthongizations, do not necessarily mean that the rate of speech is lower than in other accents⁴², yet such is the perception of other speakers. And with this perception comes the subsequent stigmatization. As was stated by Kirkpatrick (2007: 65) when commenting on some quotes, “the first demonstrates the speaker’s surprise that someone who spoke with a southern drawl might be intelligent.” Additionally, Schneider (2008: 93) points out that it is most noticeable in white speakers born before 1960, although it is a recessive phenomenon. The reason for the loss of the southern drawl is, as has been commented several times, that Texan

⁴¹ I.e. tone units.

⁴² In a study by Frow (1989: 32-36), Central Texas speakers, who are more likely to have southern drawl, were only considerably slower than those of Houston in two sentences out of 16. It seems it is most noticeable in short sentences, while barely perceptible in long ones.

English is being standardized progressively as population moves to urban areas. Schneider also notes that intonation has not been studied enough, but it is similar to General American.

4.6. Grammatical and Lexical Particularities

4.6.1. Grammar

Melchers and Shaw (2011: 88) detail some grammatical features. The most frequent of them is probably **unmarked plurality** (*two mile, five year*), along with **multiple negation** (*I couldn't find none nowhere*). Matyiku (2011) also describes negative inversion as a phenomenon that tends to occur in rural parts of Texas, with a fronting of the auxiliary verb and the negative; e.g. “can't all of you go at once,” “don't many people like you.” In regards to other effects related to modals in Texas, there exists the use of multiple modals too; for example, ‘may’ and ‘might’ can be combined with ‘can’ and ‘could’ in the same sentence, and also with ‘should’ and ‘would’. Some examples taken from Huang (2011) are “Heather, could you might find you a seat somewhere?,” “I may could at Finger's” and “This thing here I might should turn over to Ann.”

Besides, in informal speech, there exists ‘copula deletion’ where the dropping of ‘to be’ is allowed (*they going*) and a tendency to use the ‘**invariant be**.’ The latter essentially means that the second person inflection of ‘to be’ is used universally. Additionally, the uninflected verb can even be found inserted in some sentences. This is exemplified by Zanuttini and Martin (2017) in expressions such as “she don't do that,” “Do Stefen be coming home late?” or “I don't be home on most occasion.”

The expression *fixin' to* is commonly found in Texas as well, although it is less frequent in the northwestern part of the state (Staub & Zentz, 2017). It is normally used in the present tense with a reference to intentions or future actions, for it substitutes ‘going to,’ ‘about to,’ and ‘planning to.’ Two illustrative examples are “There's fixin' to shine a full moon” and “Daisy's fixin' to tell the story.”

In the South, especially in Texas, there is an extended use of the second person plural form *you all* or, more frequently, the contracted version *y'all* (Melchers & Shaw, 2011: 88). Another instance of *all* can be found together with *wh*-question words, in emphatic expressions such as “Where all did he go?” or “What all did you get for Christmas?” (Lindemann, 2018).

Also related to pronouns is the feature of the overuse of split subjects, which is rather regarded as substandard. In West Texas we can find expressions such as “They didn’t nobody like him” or “There wouldn’t nobody interfere with me” (Zanuttini, 2013).

4.6.2. *Lexicon*

According to Melchers and Shaw (2011: 88), the *Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE)* is the most well documented source where to find Southern vocabulary. Great part of the words there, though, may be found in other dialects as well. For this reason, I shall instead use examples taken from Atwood (2010: 42-65), a dictionary specialized in Texas English. The words that will be shown are limited to showing important differences with GenAm as well as the influence of Spanish and French.

Some common English words that have a particular variant in Texas are the following. *Quarter till* instead of ‘quarter to’; *spell* for ‘while’ in the sense of time, with expressions such as “quite a spell” or “a long spell”; *piece* to refer to ‘distance,’ e.g. “a long piece;” and *folks* instead of ‘parents’ or ‘relatives,’ with a relatively medium to low incidence.

Some domestic vocabulary especially characteristic of this state, ranging from Central Texas to the Texas South accent area, is the following. *Plunder room* for ‘store room’; *safe* for ‘cabinet,’ a place to keep perishable food fresh; *shades* for window blinds; *pail* for containers of several types (buckets, etc.); *worm fence* refers to a fence of wooden rails; *coverhalls* or *levis* for working clothes; *cowhand* or *cowpoke* for ranch employee (cowboy); and *privy* for outdoor toilet.

As mentioned above, the Spanish influence is undeniably important, and this can be clearly seen in vocabulary related to food, not to mention the high rates of Spanish bilingual population with Chicano English. Some other words related to domestic aspects are, for example, *hacienda*, for the headquarters of a ranch; *reata*, *lasso* or *lariat*, for a rope for animals; or *corral*, for places to enclose farm animals.

There are also several words from the early French influence, mostly taken from the contact with Louisiana. *Bureau*, *chifforobe* or even *armoire* refer to furniture with drawers, mainly a dresser. The word *parlor* refers to ‘living room,’ but it is heading for obsolescence.

Pallet refers to a bed on the floor. And *banquette* is often the word for ‘sidewalk’ in the Texan county of Jefferson.

4.7. Phonetic Analysis of Two Texan Speakers

In this final section I shall carry out a brief contrastive phonetic analysis of two Texan speakers from different accent areas. The aim of this task is to investigate how frequent and accurate all the phenomena discussed above are. Hence, I have chosen sentences which are more likely to be different from GenAm in one way or another. Nevertheless, it is my own perception as a non-native speaker of English with limited expertise in phonetics that I am offering next.

These speakers are the actors Woody Harrelson, who was born in Midland (near Odessa), and Matthew David McConaughey, who was born in Uvalde, west of San Antonio. They are middle-age male white speakers with rather lower-class backgrounds in their childhood, although they both went to university. Harrelson is an example of Texas South accent (rhotic), while McConaughey of the Plains Southern accent (slightly non-rhotic). For this analysis, I will use some lines from a dialogue between the two actors taken from a scene of the TV series *True Detective* (Pizzolatto & Fukunaga, 2014), which corresponds to minutes 14:00-18:00. It is noticeable from the very first moment that their way of talking is really different; Harrelson clearly has a less standard speech, and McConaughey seems to use a more General American accent, although he is the one with some traces of non-rhoticity.

Lines from Woody Harrelson:

“Today, that scene... That is the most fucked up thing I ever caught.”

/tə'deɪ, ðæt siyŋ... ðæt ɪz ðeɪ moʊs flʌkt ʌp θɪŋ aɪ 'evər kɔ:t/

“Well, then what do you got the cross for in your apartment?”

/wɛl, ðe(n) wʌt də ju gət ðə krɔ:s fɔ:r ɪn jər ə'pɑ:tmənt/

“Hold on, hold on. Three months we been together, I get nothing from you.”

/hoʊld ɒn, hoʊld ɒn/. /θri mʌnθs wi biŋ tə'geðər, aɪ get 'nʌθɪŋ frəm ju:/

“Let me tell you, you ain't great outside of parties either.”

/lɛt mi tɛl jə, ju eɪnt greɪt ,aʊt'saɪd ə 'pɑ:tɪz 'iðər/

“Okay. What’s that mean?”

/okɛɪ/. /wʌts ðæt min/

“Bottle of wine, be nice.”

/'bɒtl̩ ə waɪn, bi naɪs/

First, it is worth noting that, despite belonging to an area with high incidence of PRICE monophthongization, he does not reduce /aɪ/ in any moment, although he seems about to do it in some instances. Aside, he clearly has the rhotic accent which is to be expected in South Texas. He produces once the determinant *the* with the diphthong [eɪ], which may be attributed to the Southern Shift. Besides, it can be noticed that FACE in *okay* and *today* has a more open position [eɪ], which is a feature typical of Texas. The same applies to the word *scene* with the FLEECE vowel as [iy], although *mean* is produced with a short vowel. He seems to have preference for the apical nasal allophone [ɲ], and we can notice a cluster reduction of /st/ in *most*, both of them Texan features. The word *on* being realized with /ɔ/, together with *for* pronounced as /fɔ:r/, indicate that he probably is affected by the *cot-caught* merger, matching with the data from Odessa in Labov *et al.*, (2006: 66). Conversely, the area that he belongs to is supposed to have the [ɮ] phoneme instead of /w/, yet Harrelson does not seem to experiment that merger. The STRUT vowel can be found untouched, although [ɜ] is another possibility. The two consonant phenomena in *bottle*, i.e. the implosive [ɓ] and the syllabic dark [ɫ], are also very typical of Texas. As a final note, he clearly uses a continuous falling pattern in questions, maybe even flatter than that of GenAm.

Lines from Matthew McConaughey:

“That’s a form of meditation.”

/ðæts ə fɔ:m əv ,medə'teɪʃən/

“I contemplate the moment in the garden.”

/aɪ 'kɑ:ntəm,pleɪt ðə 'moumənt ɪn ðə 'gɑ:rdn/

“The idea of allowing your own crucifixion.”

/ðə aɪ'diə əv ə'laʊɪŋ jɔr əʊn ,krʊsɪ'fɪkʃən/

“Means I’m bad at parties.”

/minz aɪm bæəd ət 'pɑ:ɹɪz/

“Get a bad taste in my mouth out here.”

/get ə bæd teɪst ɪn ma: ma:ʊθ aʊt hɪə(r)/

“Aluminum, ash... like you can... smell the psychosphere”

/ə'luːmɪnəm, æʃ... laɪk ju kən... smel ðə ,saɪkə'sfɪər/

Just like Harrelson, he seems not to monophthongize PRICE except for one case, and the FLEECE vowel seems to be short as well, with the uncommon exception [iyə]. Contrary to expectations, his accent is actually mostly rhotic, although some /r/ productions may be due to the context they are in. He produces *ash* and *bad* once with the Southern Shift [æə] typical of Texas. Furthermore, he produces the GOAT vowel in *moment* with the corresponding Southern allophone, yet he pronounces *own* with [aʊ]. An uncommon realization is that of [ɑ:] in the first syllable of *contemplate*, which is the GenAm vowel but maybe suffering southern drawl lengthening. The same applies to *parties*, in which, unlike Harrelson, he uses the long vowel, something uncommon in GenAm. Another indicator of the Southern accent is that *here* and *(psycho)sphere*, which have the NEAR vowel, are pronounced with the RP glide /ɪə/ instead of the typical General American [ɪ]; this can also be noticed in Harrelson later in the episode.

After these two analyses, it is clear that both actors present several features that are characteristic of the Southern accent of Texas, even if those features are produced only once. It is worth noting that the monophthongisation of PRICE, which is one of the most important aspects of the Southern Shift, has been barely found in these speech extracts, just like the lack of rhoticity and rounded [ɒ]. This could mean either that these tendencies are disappearing in the present due to the standardization of the language, together with the fact that both attended university, or that they are consciously avoiding such features, as they are rather viewed as substandard. Although McConaughey seems to have a more standard speech, it is in fact him who produces more uncommon vowel allophones, along with some examples of Breaking and non-rhoticity. On the other hand, Harrelson produces more consonants associated with Texas.

5. Conclusion

After dealing with the North American speech, the main conclusion that can be drawn is that the differences, although easily recognizable, are not as extreme as some people may point out. Indeed, some rural zones either from Texas or the rest of the South may present radical changes in respect to the standard accents, which may be striking to people from any other variety of English, and even more so to non-native speakers. For instance, Wells (1982: 529) remarked an example in which a speaker said “I apologize. I’m getting pissed off” which was technically homophonous with “Ah, Apollo jars. Armageddon pier stuff.” Yet those nuclei of population are relatively small compared to those of big cities, whose accent is very similar to General American (except for certain productions in specific contexts). This could be clearly seen in the cases of Harrelson and McConaughey, who, despite apparently having substandard speech, actually speak in a “normative” way for the most part. It is all a matter of the ‘maps in the mind’ concept discussed by Lippi-Green (2012), along with the negative “old south” stereotypes that Americans still have in the north. That is, of course, referring to most white population.

Non-white population cannot be left apart, but their analysis was not feasible due to geographical complexities and space constraints. In East Texas, for instance, there are high rates of Black English speakers, a variety that has not been treated in this paper yet clearly shares some similarities with Southern English (throughout the nation, in fact). In the meantime, there are certain areas in contact with Mexico with high rates of Spanish inhabitants who are non-English speakers, or who are bilingual, with Chicano English; this has inevitably influenced the vocabulary of Texan English speakers as well.

In the end, it seems likely that, sooner or later, the English generally spoken in Texas will lose its identity and will become another General American variety with certain phonetic, grammatical and lexical particularities. Meanwhile, Spanish will probably have a more important role than it has now, as those nuclei of population near the borders keep moving inland.

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