

INTER-& POST-VOCALIC /r/ AND SOME VOWELS IN THE SOUTHERN STATES

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This paper deals with phonetic analyses of the magnetic tape recorded materials of American southern accents from the Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States (=LAGS). The method is purely by auditory impression.

Thanks to Dr. Kretzschmar at the Linguistics Program of the University of Georgia, where a large collection of Basic LAGS Materials has been preserved, the writer could listen to the speech of some informants' who joined in the LAGS Project. Seven informants in the Materials, who lived in Lower and Upper Georgia, Lower and Upper Alabama when they were interviewed, were randomly selected.

Before I begin my phonetic analyses I should first like to introduce the LAGS and how I came to deal with southern accents.

INTRODUCTION

The writer used to ask American native speakers to record the college level English textbooks for listening and speaking. They are Master or Doctorate degree holders in their specialized academic field. When recording, she usually asks them to speak in General American English. Because, it happens that

ninety /na●nt●/ → /na●nd●/

caught /k●:t/ → /k● t/(=hot)

a (indefinite article) /●/or/e●/ → /e●/(one form)

could be heard.

Wells (1982) mentions in his ACCENTS IN ENGLISH 3, "The mid-land area is supposed to owe some of its speech characteristic to the influence not only of the Germans but also of the Scotch-Irish and the Welsh. There is backing for this view in vocabulary, but it is difficult to find real support for it in the phonetics of midland speech; perhaps the absence of an/●/vs. /●/distinction (lot-Thought Merger), which is characteristic of western Pennsylvania, might be traced to the Scotch-Irish."

Sound changes associated with immigration or ethnic movement could reasonably be considered as Wells explains above. The LAGS Project on a larger scale shows more definite and precise facts of ethnic, linguistic reality.

This large-scale project naturally has preceding studies. Pederson et al (1974) edited *THE MANUAL FOR THE DIALECT RESEARCH IN THE SOUTHERN STATES*. In that book the authors outline “the aims and methods of the LAGS Projects and the relationship of that research to general linguistics, American dialectology, folklore study, and the teaching of English.” Pederson explains that “The LAGS Project is a survey of regional and social dialects in the eight Southern States. (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas).”

Regarding the methods, “These are followed by the complete text of the work sheets with the interviewing techniques used by Raven I. McDavid, Jr., in the several Atlas projects, supplemented by those used by Bernard Block, Guy S. Lowman, Jr., and Rachel S. Harris in New England and by Lee Pederson in the Gulf States.”

LAGS PROJECT

The LAGS Projects started in 1968. The total number of informants reached 1,121, fieldworkers numbered 512, interviewing hours were 5,300, and 2,700 reels of magnetic tape were used for recording as well as 128,000 pages for the protocols¹.

The tasks of fieldworkers' data gathering, which are characterized in the LAGS, are illustrated as follows; “These include (1) preliminary research to organize the work sheets and make the basic plan (1968–1970), (2) preliminary fieldwork to refine the questionnaire and to compose the grid (1971–1972), (3) the first phase of basic coverage to complete the minimum sample (1973–1975), (4) the urban investigation to improve the social and linguistic components of the sample (1976–1977), (5) the second phase of basic coverage to extend the survey in Arkansas and Texas (1977–1979), (6) terminal fieldwork to improve the evenness of regional coverage and social balance (1980), with three New Orleans records added in 1983.”

The writer's interest was how to compose the grid mentioned in (2) above. Again, this task may characterize the project, which could be called sociolinguistic dialect geography. It is described in the LAGS as follows: “The map includes 176 units with divisions based on the land regions and social history of the Gulf States. History and population statistics recommended the selection of communities within the network and identified the primary localities within the communities themselves. The grid has three parts: units, communities, and localities. The units are sets of counties and parishes, joined by geography and social history. These counties and parishes are called communities because they offer the most reliable local boundaries with the southern states. The localities identify the nativity of the informants in settlements with those communities.”

Concerning the pattern of the grid the final form was “(1) the inclusion of the entire state of Georgia, (2) the expansion of the Western Zone to include the entire state of Arkansas and to enlarge the area of coverage in East Texas, and (3) the identification of urban units for special study.” This is not simply a matter of expansion of the research areas, but reveals the nature of those districts, resulting in setting up the sectors (see Fig. 1) that reflect traditional, natural and historical boundaries.

“All LAGS evidence is organized according to the divisions of the grid, the zones, the sectors, and the unit². The four zones preserve the state boundaries for east to west, except where geography or social history seems more important than political demarcation. These exceptions are the three ‘Grand Divisions’ of Tennessee, the combination of Gulf Alabama, and the combination of West Florida and Gulf Alabama, and the combination of Gulf Mississippi and East Louisiana as the western set of the old ‘Florida Parishes.’ Each zone divides north to south in four sectors that reflect land regions and social history. The units within each sector identify the target communities of the survey.”

“Within the sectors, the grid units frame the target communities. These groupings identify the sites of the interviews, the older settlements and newer urban places that are distinguished by social history and geographical factors.”

“Economics and urbanization are the primary criteria for this classification, with further consideration given to population stability in the source essay ‘The LAGS Grid’. The basic organization includes three kinds of industrial centers and three kinds of agricultural centers.”

For example, here are descriptions of how fieldworkers made the division of Six Alabama counties.

“Within the communities, fieldworkers selected interview sites on the basis of social history. The LAGS Grid describes the 699 places, according to population, growth rates and local culture. The localities are also classified with reference to Alabama cities, towns, and villages. These include six principal types with the smallest divided into three further subtypes.”

I heard of one of episodes in which some earnest fieldworker took twelve hours to finish his interview, resulting in the interviewee’s anger. Even after fieldworkers had had special training for maneuvering recording machines; recording conditions were not always good enough for comprehending interviewees’ speech. One of the tapes I listened to had quite a lot of background noise.

Statistical figures and diagrams based upon the Basic Material of the LAGS are done in conventional, academic, innovative means, and could satisfy the academic desire and

interest. At the same time after listening to seven informants' speech on the tapes, the writer felt human warmth and essence, and recalled Pederson's comments on language that were made in his previous work, *A MANUAL FOR DIALECT RESEARCH IN THE SOUTHERN STATES*. He says that ". . . And even the least imaginative investigator will come to realize from his work that language is more than a series of abstract formulas. . . . it is the interaction of all kinds of human beings in all kinds of situations." (p.50)

"In LAGS, phonetic notations include only *sounds* as heard, and that observation by Kurath largely determined the decision to rely exclusively on the tape-recorded text in the atlas," using the phonetic alphabet of the IPA as revised by Kurath and Pederson, and "LAGS sustains the Inland Northern dialect as the standard of Linguistic Atlas of New England and Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South States. Inland Northern form is the speech of metropolitan Chicago, the largest and most influential focal area in the region" (p. 27)

In the LAGS Project Pederson directed to all fieldworkers to use 153 symbols of consonants on the Table 6.

The next illustration could be one of the focal points in the project; "When linguistic information enters the description of a cultural design, social features are inseparable from any interpretation. Characteristics of individual speakers, such as race, age, and education, combine with his historical processes, such as urbanization and linguistic change, to complicate the pattern. *Those social factors* condition the regional distribution of every phonological form recorded in the synopses, as well as the incidence of many lexical features."

And then, as one of the examples, "historical reflexes of postvocalic /r/", which the writer also examines in this paper, is referred to as one of the "traditional markers of Southern speech."

H. Kurath (1964) in his 'British Sources of Selected Features of American Pronunciation' explains British /r/ as follows :

"The consonant /r/ survives in SBE (= Standard British English) only in prevocalic position. After the high vowel of *here* and the mid-vowels of *care* and *door*, /r/ has become the semivowel /ɹ/; after the low vowel of *car*, *Martha*, and the mid-central vowel of *fun*, *Thursday*, this derivative /ɹ/ is merged with the vowel to produce new vowel phonemes, /ɑ/ and /ɜ/, respectively." (p.148) "The folk dialects of the south and the west of England, on the other hand, preserve the postvocalic /r/, later generally as a constricted [ɹ̥]." "It is well known that the loss of postvocalic /r/ in SBE, and the consequent emergence of the phoneme /ɑ/ of *car*, *garden*....." Further, "today all the Inland and the United States, settled by westward expansion between 1800 and 1850, preserve the /r/ after vowels.

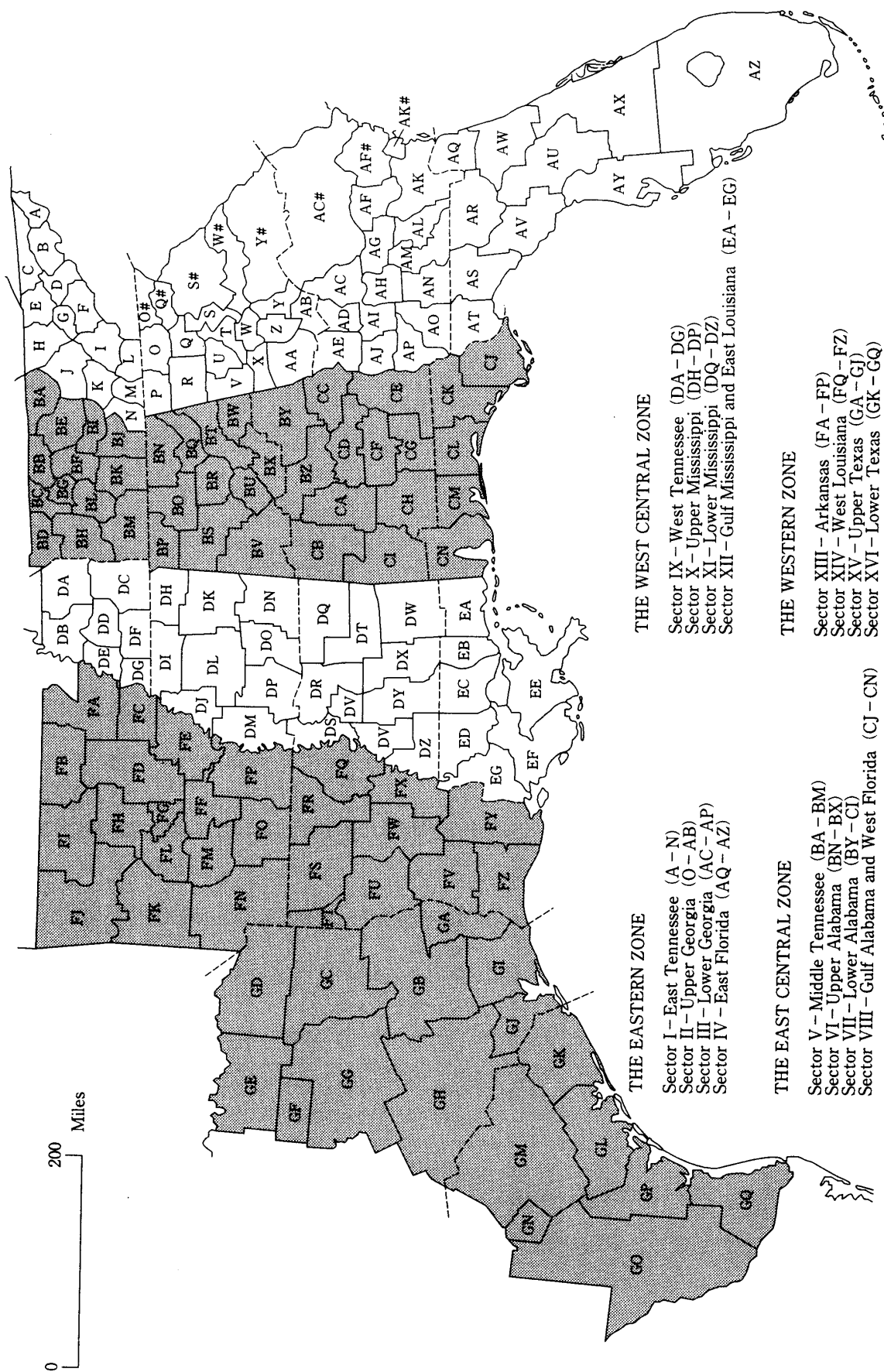


Figure 1 Grid Units of the LAGS Territory

Approximately three-fourth of American people use /r/ in all positions, but about 40 million living in the areas mentioned above do not."

On the other hand, Gimson (1989 4th ed.) writes that "Its loss in postvocalic positions in educated speech of the eighteenth century—considerably earlier in unaccented syllables and generally in popular speech."

In LAGS "The ranges of South Midland and Southern dialects are often delimited by the occurrence of its retroflex and vocalized developments, as, for example, in the environments of such words as *third*, *can*, *ears*, under primary stress, *father*, under weak stress." And on the consonant table, Table 6 (in LAGS), /r/ is categorized as Oral-Rhotacised Continuants / Medial Alveolar.

Table 6 The LAGS Table of Consonants

		LABIAL/DENTAL · ALVEOLAR/RETROFLEX · PREPALATAL/PALATAL · VELAR/POSTVELAR · GLOTTAL														
		BILABIAL	LABIO-DENTAL	DENTAL	ADVANCED ALVEOLAR	MEDIAL ALVEOLAR	RETRACTED ALVEOLAR	RETROFLEX ALVEOLAR	PREPALATAL	MEDIAL PALATAL	POSTPALATAL	PREVELAR	MEDIAL VELAR	POSTVELAR	SUPRAGLOTTAL	GLOTTAL
OBSTRUENTS	FULL ORAL STOPS	p b	p̣ ḅ	ṭ ḍ	ṭ̟ ḍ̟	t d	ṭ̟ ḍ̟	ṭ̟ ḍ̟	ṭ̟ ḍ̟	ṭ̟ ḍ̟	ṭ̟ ḍ̟	ḳ ɡ̣	k ɡ	ḳ̟ ɡ̣̟		ʔ
	SUPRAGLOTTAL SUCTION STOPS	ɸ				ɹ							ḳ̟	(ʔḳ̟)	ʔ	
	INTERMITTENT ORAL STOPS	PB	P̣Ḅ	ṭ	ṭ̟	t d	ṭ̟	c						R		
	ORAL FRICATIVE CONTINUANTS	ΦβH	f v	θ ð ṣ ẓ	ṣ ẓ	ɹ s z	ʃʒ ṣ ẓ	ɹ̣ ḥ ṣ ẓ	ʃʒ ṣ ẓ	ç y	ç̣ ỵ	x̣ ỵ	x y	x̣̟ ỵ̟	hɦh	
RESONANTS	NASAL CONTINUANTS	m	ṃ	ṇ	ṇ̟	n	ṇ̟	ṃ̟ ṇ̟	nṇ̟	ṇ̟	ṇ̟	ŋ̣	ŋ	ŋ̣̟		
	ORAL-CENTRAL CONTINUANTS	J W	F V						ɥ̣ j̣	ɥ j	ɥ̣̟ j̣̟	ṃ ẉ	m w	ṃ̟ ẉ̟		
	ORAL-LATERAL CONTINUANTS	L	Ḷ	ḷ	ḷ̟	ḷ̟	ḷ̟	ḷ̟	ɻ̣							
	ORAL-RHOTACIZED CONTINUANTS	R		ṛ	ṛ̟	ṛ̟	ṛ̟	ṛ̟								

The distribution of the Reflexes of /r/ in *Ears* and *Years* in LAGS is seen in Figure 24 (p. 71) and the writer examines the /r/ and the variations here. She practiced seven informants; Lower Alabama 1,2,3, Lower Georgia 1,2, Upper Georgia 3,4. On the Table I post-vocalic /r/ and medial position /r/ variations are examined.

ANALYSES: Explanations on the Table I

Informant No. 1 (LG) shows an extremely small number of items because of the infor-

mant's weak voice quality and poor recording, which caused the author to listen to only 15 minutes of magnetic tape.

Informant No. 1. (LA) consistently has/●/in its post-vocalic and medial position, and only once the vocalized allophone of /●/ occurred after lengthened, higher pitched, stressed vowel /i:/ in *here*. The informant, 47 years old, 2 MAs carrier was interviewed by an experienced, veteran fieldworker, who spoke in General American English. Both are cultivated speakers.

To the contrary Informant No. 2 (LG), over 60 years old, black, lively, fluent speaker does not have consistency in using any of /●/, /●/, /r/, and in the end when he became enthusiastic for speaking about his family, he was likely to use /●/. Item *store* has no liquid r at all. It disappeared.

Informant No. 4 (UG) consistently uses historic /r/, but *third* /●/, which is a cultural division marker according to the LAGS.

Other characteristics among seven informants are of prosodic features and quality of vowels. Upper Georgia Informants No. 3, 4 have a musical contour, such as

— — —
 Today is Monday. ↘

The sentence has three levels of tune. Fieldworkers were purposely chosen from the same districts as the informants' so that fieldworkers' accents seemingly echoed informants' speech.

Monophthongized, diphthongized, and triphthongized phenomena have been observed in accord with the musical contour as follows.

some of them are fifth/fi: fθ/	(lengthened)
shade/∫ e ɪ dʰ/	(triphthongized)
mill /mi: ɪ ^u /	(lengthened)
tie /ta: /	(monophthongized)
boy /b ɔ ^u ɪ /	(triphthongized)
forty /f ɔ: ^u ɪ /	(diphthongized)

Concerning idiolect or personal manner of speech Informant No. 2 (LG): expletives “je:, jei, je●”, and “Oh boy” are inserted after a certain period of time and phrases.

Further observation is to be continued.

Notes:

1. Sets of working notes; narrow phonetic notation records, conventional orthographic writing records, the observations of the scribes
2. Figure I: Grid Units of the LAGS Territory, page 2 in LAGS

Table 1 INTER- & POST-VOCALIC /r/ By Seven Informants

informants No	1	2	3	1	2	3	4
areas	Lower Alabama (educated)	L.Alabama	L.Alabama	Lower Georgia	L.Georgia	Upper Georgia	U.Georgia
here	ə						
ladder		ə	ə				
this year	ə	(thirty) r	ə		(years) r	r	r
last year	ə				ə	(years) r	r
water	ə		ə				
come over		ə					
left over	ə		r				
chairs			r				r
shower	r					r	
father					ə		
(picture's) there	ə		r (ə)	ϕ			
supper			ə				
rubber			ə				
alligator					r		
anger					ə		
cucumber					ə		
sour					ə		
store					ϕ		
furniture			r				
neighbor				ə			
butter			ə				
baster child					ə		
teacher						r	
together			r			r	
dresser							r
first		r					
retired		ə					
returned					ə		
heard	ə						
church	ə						
torn down							
thirty	ə	r				ə	(third) ə
early		ə					
turn		ə					
grave yard			r				
storm	r					r	
term	ə						
jey bird					r		
harm						r	
farm							r
fourth						ϕ	
fortnight						ə	
yesterday							
store					ϕ		
turn			ə		r (ə)		
corn	ə	ϕ	r			r	

* /ə/ = [ə]

* [] indicates the second occurrence

* ə = retroflex ə

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