

Sound change reversal in context: Insights from production and perception

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Sound changes in progress are often hallmark features of regional dialects, becoming linked with local speakers and local social meanings. Linguistic theories have pointed to numerous drivers of sound change, including social, cognitive and structural factors. However, recent work on United States regional dialects is finding that a number of localized sound changes are reversing their course over time. Why would socially meaningful, well-entrenched regional sound changes halt and begin to reverse, and how does such a reversal unfold in social context? In this talk, I explore the ways in which a set vocalic changes are reversing in Chicago English. First, I demonstrate how both broader sociohistorical dynamics of migration and racialization, as well as localized oppositions and ideologies inform patterns of sound change advancement and reversal in production. Then, I examine how lower-level perceptual processes are related to the sound change reversals observed in production. This multi-faceted study suggests that the processes by which regionalized sound changes slow, halt and ultimately reverse requires an understanding of sociohistorical changes, local ideologies, and individual-level patterns of speech production and perception.