

## **The Coloured GOOSE: a study of /u/ fronting amongst young Coloured people in Cape Town, South Africa**

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This paper examines the degree of fronting of the GOOSE vowel (known also as long /u/) in Coloured South African English (SAE). Fronting of goose is well documented worldwide (e.g. Labov et al 2006), including in White SAE (Lass 1995), which is one of four distinct varieties of English observable in South Africa, each one belonging to one of the four primary racial groups which make up the country's population, namely White, Coloured, Black and Indian. The Coloured group is comprised of people of mixed heritage which includes coloniser, native, and slave ancestry. South Africa's apartheid policies enforced segregated development amongst the different racial groups, thereby limiting the social interaction between members of different races to the extreme. Legislation expressly prohibited Coloured and White South Africans from mixing freely, which resulted in the social networks of each group being comprised almost exclusively of people from the same race group prior to the early 1990s when apartheid was formally abolished.

The dramatic change in the political landscape of the country led to significant social change which affected all aspects of South African life, including language use. Various aspects of the effect of this change on the Coloured community of Cape Town have been studied by social scientists, but there is a dearth of linguistic, and particularly phonetic, research which has been conducted on the variety of English spoken in this community. All previous phonetic research was conducted in the auditory phonetic tradition by Wood (1987) and Finn (2004). The current study employs methods of acoustic analysis to investigate the changes in the phonetic system of Coloured SAE since the transition from apartheid to democracy began in the early 1990s.

One of the first sites in which post-apartheid interracial interaction was prevalent was in schools. In 1991, legislation was passed which disallowed the racial exclusivity previously enforced at all South African schools. This resulted in an unprecedented social situation in which children of all races were able to be educated as peers in the same classroom. During apartheid, economic resources were distributed in such a way the White population was favoured to the detriment of the other racial groups, so schools which were formerly reserved for White children were significantly better resourced and thus the most desirable choice for parents choosing an educational institution for their children. Economic factors dictated that only middle-class families were able to send their children to the formerly Whites-only schools, as the fees charged at such schools were significantly higher than at

the 'Coloured schools'. The study is thus limited to middle-class young adults (18 – 25 years) for whom attendance at 'White schools' was financially viable.

This paper presents an empirical sociophonetic investigation into the GOOSE lexical set in English spoken by 20 young adults from the Coloured community of Cape Town. The sample was made up of 10 males and 10 females. 1730 tokens of GOOSE were logged using PRAAT (Boersma & Weenink 2008) and grouped into one of three phonetic environments: after coronal consonants; after non-coronal consonants; and after /j/. The data were normalised using the S-procedure method (Watt & Fabricius 2003). Analysis shows that amongst middle-class Coloured young adults the GOOSE vowel has fronted slightly in relation to the typically back value recorded for Coloured speakers (Wood 1987; Finn 2004), but that relative to similarly aged White speakers (who were used as a reference group), the value remains quite back. The continued use of back GOOSE correlates with the strong sense of Coloured identity and community belonging expressed by the participants in the study.

## References

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