

ABSTRACT

BOWERS, JR., ANGUS WAYNE. Feature Erosion and Ethnolinguistic Alignment: The Case of Bertie County, North Carolina. (Under the direction of Walt Wolfram.)

Recent sociolinguistic investigations of African American communities in rural North Carolina have indicated that social history, regional location, community size, and relative insularity play major roles in determining the past and present state of ethnolinguistic alignment. This investigation reconsiders the relative effect of these and other variables by investigating ethnolinguistic alignment in Bertie County, North Carolina, a Coastal Plain rural context that is quite unlike the Appalachian and Outer Banks regional contexts that have served as the primary bases for recent hypotheses about trajectories of change in African American English. Bertie County, located at the junction of three distinct dialect areas: Coastal Plain dialect, Outer Banks dialect and Virginia Piedmont, exemplifies a transitional zone in terms of these adjacent dialect areas. How has this variety accommodated its regional contact varieties and negotiated its ethnolinguistic status in this unique, intermediary dialect situation, and what are its implications for sociolinguistic models of dialect contact, change, and ethnic alignment?

Originally the home of the Tuscarora Native American Indians, Bertie County was transformed by colonization in the early 1700s into a European settlement characterized by the plantation system of farming (cotton and tobacco) prototypically representative of the American South and almost identical to neighboring Virginia—through which the founders of Bertie County passed. During the colonial and antebellum periods, Bertie exhibited economic success due to its dependence on the system of slavery, but the post-Civil War period has witnessed a continued economic downturn, with two-thirds of the rural County

residents now African Americans who still do not share equitability in the County's resources and wealth. In addition, Bertie's regional affiliation—historically linked to Virginia and the coastal areas of North Carolina—has shifted toward a more broadly based North Carolina economy over the past century. How has this post-insular shift of association in a transitional dialect zone influenced the regional dialect in general and its ethnolinguistic alignment in particular?

To examine these issues, I examine a set of diagnostic regional and/or ethnic phonological and lexical variables for African American and European American speakers of different generations to show how these groups have aligned and distinguished themselves in apparent time. Data gathered through sociolinguistic interviews indicate a pattern of change in which the groups were more regionally aligned in the past, but currently are following a path of divergence. This divergence underscores variation in social alliance as well as speech in that European-American speakers exhibit closer affiliation with the Coastal Plain dialect area whereas African-American speakers are electing to follow more general, urban-based AAVE trends at the expense of local dialect features. The durability of the majority African American core population, the continuing social disparity, and the growing awareness of language as an ethnic marker are all implicated in understanding the current progression of change and variation.

**FEATURE EROSION AND ETHNOLINGUISTIC ALIGNMENT: THE CASE OF BERTIE COUNTY,
NORTH CAROLINA**

BY
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Angus W. Bowers, Sr. and Judy Bowers. Thank you for your support and love. You are truly the best.

BIOGRAPHY

Angus Wayne Bowers, Jr. was born on August 5, 1969 in Washington, North Carolina. He graduated from Earlham College with a BA in French and a minor concentration in Japanese in 1991. After teaching English to middle school students in Japan, Angus completed a Master of Science degree in Social Anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1998. In 2004, he continued his graduate education by enrolling at North Carolina State University. With the completion of this thesis, Angus fulfills the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in English with a concentration in Linguistics.

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1. Introduction

Recent investigations into small insular communities have been fruitful in describing the historical and present ethnolinguistic alignment of speakers from these locales (Wolfram & Thomas 2002; Mallinson & Wolfram 2001; Childs & Mallinson 2004; Carpenter 2004; Rowe 2004; D'Andrea 2005;). Bertie County, a relatively isolated county in eastern North Carolina, presents a similar type of situation in that it is predominantly African American in population, but has historically been characterized by control of both wealth and resources by a small European American minority. The resulting social situation and linguistic landscape represent an inter-ethnic community that is presently informed by its past. Left behind in economic development by the rest of the state, Bertie has also remained relatively unincorporated into the sociopolitical fabric of the Coastal Plain or of North Carolina.

This research introduces and establishes Bertie County as a fieldsite worthy of sociolinguistic investigation. Although research on Outer Banks English is well established (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1997, Wolfram et al. 1999, Wolfram & Thomas 2002, Carpenter 2004), and work in the inner coastal plain town of Princeville is increasingly gaining recognition (Rowe 2004, D'Andrea 2005), little exploration has been done in the outer Coastal Plain region—the area between these locales—since the LAMSAS survey of the 1930s. This research seeks to remedy this situation by presenting qualitative and quantitative data that provide insight into the linguistic qualities characterizing Bertie County English.

To put it simply, this research presents Bertie as a somewhat isolated locale that finds itself at the crossroads of three distinct dialect areas. In an effort to explain the isolated nature of Bertie, the work not only points out the physical boundaries that define the county, but also describes the settlement and transportation patterns that have resulted in its current

socio-cultural circumstances and the development of Bertie English. Due to its proximity to three different dialect areas, Bertie County represents an intersection of these areas and exhibits an overlapping of their features from all three areas. This is demonstrated by providing examples of the sociophonetic and lexical features that characterize Bertie County English and how these features compare to other dialects. Just as Wolfram, Hazen and Schilling-Estes (1999) indicate in their research on Outer Banks English, what is distinctive about the dialect of Bertie County is not the language features found in the area, but the way they are combined to form Bertie County English. That is, Bertie County English does not exhibit any heretofore unidentified features, but nonetheless warrants investigation because of the unique juxtaposition it exhibits of features shared with other dialects.

The ethnographic data collected for this study have provided ample material for both qualitative and quantitative analysis. This research is based on two differing approaches to the data. The first approach is an impressionistic and acoustic analysis of the vowels produced by speakers in Bertie County. The second approach is a presentation and documentation of lexical items that Bertie speakers exhibit in their speech. Although not immediately apparent, the two approaches bolster each other since they present similar patterns in their findings. Through both a quantitative acoustic analysis and a qualitative approach to lexical items, Bertie English shows two distinct tendencies which will be further revealed in the chapters to follow. These include a trajectory of change over apparent time in the speech of Bertie speakers and an alignment in terms of ethnolinguistic configuration.

Although this work does follow in the footsteps of other works which focus on African American English, as we will see, it represents a comparison of variables of both African American and European American speakers. The data used for analysis in this study

were gathered by the researcher during 2005 and was collected using a sociolinguistic interview script that was adapted to suit the purposes of this study. Study participants were first identified initially through kinship networks of the researcher, but were increasingly nominated through introduction of participants and by chance encounters while at the fieldsite.

Although the focus of this study is the analysis of linguistic features of Bertie English, this research also focuses on the social and historical context of Bertie County as an introduction to the processes that have created Bertie social relations as they currently exist. In what follows, Section 2 is a brief history and discussion of the socioeconomic factors that influence the way of life of Bertie citizens. Section 3 presents and discusses the phonetic values of Bertie speech, and finally, Section 4 is an exploration of Bertie County English lexical items.

2. Historical and Socioeconomic Overview of Bertie County

The linguistic variables that compose the dialect of Bertie County, North Carolina do not exist in a vacuum and cannot be fully appreciated without proper consideration of the historical and the current socioeconomic circumstances of the county. Linguistic features, such lexical items in particular, take on a greater importance in view of the social context of the region. Moreover, an exercise of this type is useful as well in identifying the patterns of movement and settlement within the county that have led to the establishment of communities that stand out as especially suitable areas for linguistic study. For these reasons, this section not only covers the geographic location of the county, but also presents a brief survey of its history, and the contemporary economic and social factors which bear most impact on the county.

Bertie County is located in the inner coastal plain in the northeastern section of North Carolina. It is separated from Chowan County on the east by the Chowan River and the Albemarle Sound. The Roanoke River forms its western boundary with Halifax County and also forms its southern boundary with Martin and Washington Counties. The northwest and the northern boundaries are the only ones created through survey. They separate Bertie from Northampton and Hertford Counties, respectively.

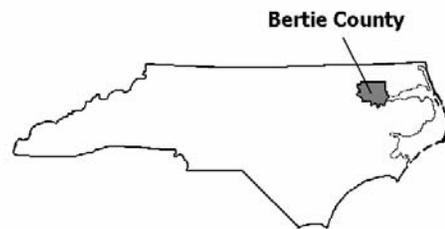


Figure 2.1 Map of Bertie County

As the fifteenth largest county in land area in North Carolina, Bertie County encompasses 699 square miles according to the US Census Bureau. The average elevation is only 10 feet. As such, the Bertie County Economic Development and Planning Commission (1999) states that much of the land that comprises

Bertie County is wetlands—two of the larger wetland areas in the county are the Roanoke River Valley, consisting of the Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge, and the Roquist Pocosin (38).

According to the US Census Bureau, the 2003 estimate of population for the county was 19,544. There are no major urban centers within the county. Windsor, the largest of the eight towns in the county, has a population of only roughly 2,200 persons. Over the past forty years, the county has been persistently plagued with the problem of poverty (ERS-USDA 2002) and the bulk of the adult inhabitants are employed in manufacturing, services, government or agricultural jobs with a per capita income level of \$14,096 in 1999 (Bertie County Economic Development and Planning Commission: 19). The population, in contrast to the general patterns of North Carolina, is nearly 63% African American and 36% European American in makeup (US Census Bureau 2003). In addition, relations among ethnicities have been strained at times over the past two centuries. Of course, these social facts are interrelated and are due to the historical processes that shaped the county.

Before European colonization, according to Watson (1982), Bertie County was originally inhabited by several Native American groups represented in large part by the Meherrins and the Tuscarorans, both Iroquoian. European settlers moved into the area in search of unclaimed land and, in some cases, to escape religious persecution in Virginia. The Tuscarorans' opposition to the European settlement culminated in the Tuscarora War from 1712 to 1714. They were defeated in this conflict by the colonists and were in large part removed from the entire territory to join Iroquoian relatives, the Five Nations, in a reservation in New York. A small group of Tuscarorans in Bertie County was given a reservation of 58,000 acres along the north side of the Roanoke River as a reward for their

agreement not to engage in battle against the settlers during the Tuscaroran War. Through the rest of the century, more and more Tuscarorans decided to join the Five Nations in New York due to the encroachment on their reservation lands by European American settlers in their desire for more cultivatable land. By 1803, most of the Tuscarorans had left and those who stayed behind blended into the local community; in 1831 all claims to land in Bertie County were legally abandoned by the Tuscarorans who had fled to New York (1-2; 6-9).

With the end of the Tuscaroran War, European Americans had cleared the way for settlement of the area that would become Bertie County. As Watson shows, they immediately began to expand into the region and established farms and plantations throughout the region with corn, wheat and some tobacco as the principal crops during the colonial period (52). With this settlement, the conditions that would inform today's social fabric were forged. Watson states that in the early days of colonialization, the social makeup of Bertie was represented by Europeans in four classes: the gentry, middle class, lower class, and indentured servants (15). "Freed Negroes," although representing an extremely small portion of the population, made up the fifth class of people. Slaves were considered property and were not included as social actors. Just before the Revolutionary War, the gentry, although representing only 10% of the population, controlled nearly 59% of the wealth of the county (*Ibid.*). They resided on large plantations mostly located near the Salmon Creek area (at the mouth of the Albemarle Sound) and were to be influential politically during the organization of the State of North Carolina and the University of North Carolina after independence was gained.

During the mid-eighteenth century, Bertie boasted one of the largest populations of the counties in the colony despite having some of its territory chiseled off into what would

become Edgecombe and Northampton Counties. This was due in large part to the advent of African American slaves into the county to work the plantations. Indeed, Watson contends that wealth and opportunity were controlled by the gentry to such a degree that just after independence, there was the “outmigration of large numbers of enterprising whites who sought more promising futures in the Old Northwest or along the Gulf Coast” (9). In 1740, African Americans made up only 25% of Bertie’s population (5). However, in 1790, “[a]lthough whites slightly outnumbered blacks according to the first federal census, by 1800 the black inhabitants of the county comprised the majority of the population, and for the next 170 years accounted for 55.3 to 59.9 percent of the county’s residents.” (10). As Watson states, this is contrary to the general trends that went on in North Carolina’s designation as “a land of small farmers” (15). In fact, as we would see in early years of statehood, these trends would continue in large part due to the fact that cotton, a labor intensive crop that requires large numbers of workers in its production, had become a cash crop in Bertie county as it had elsewhere across the South. With this development, Watson shows that the economy of Bertie County would become heavily invested in the institution of slavery:

In the antebellum era wealth continued to concentrate in the hands of the few. According to the 1860 census there were twenty-five plantations in Bertie containing a thousand or more acres, a figured unsurpassed by any other county. Actually only four other counties boasted as many as ten plantations of that acreage. Slave ownership was likewise skewed. Only Edgecombe and Warren counties had more than the thirty-five slaveholders in Bertie who claimed at least fifty bondsmen (16).

This shows that plantation lifestyle was very central in the social organization of Bertie County in a way that is more in line with the Deep South than with the rest of North Carolina. George H. Throop (1851) who served as a tutor for the Capehart Family of Scotch Hall (a plantation on Salmon Creek), describes plantation life in Bertie County in his novel,

Bertie: Or, Life in the Old Field. A Humorous Novel. According to his depiction in the novel, life was very festive for the gentry as they sat on piazzas, received visitors and celebrated Christmas in a very civilized manner. Nor was life that bad for the slaves who celebrated Christmas in the “John Kooner” tradition. In fact, the institution of slavery as a peculiarity of the South as opposed to the practices of the North is explained in the line “[W]e are raised differently, and therefore must make allowance for each other’s prejudice” (105).

Of course, the Civil War brought swift change to Bertie County as well as to the rest of the South. Arwin Smallwood (2002), supporting Watson’s description of Bertie’s population before the Civil War, states that at the start of the Civil War, 59.4% of Bertie County’s population was black. Blacks, free and slaves alike, supported the Union, which made the white supporters of the war “fearful throughout the conflict” (97). Smallwood argues that the population distribution of the county was altered as a result of this fear once the Civil War ended because white landowners moved to the towns, leaving African Americans to build their own communities: “As quickly as these former slaves returned to their rural communities and built homes and churches, white plantation owners fled and relocated to the nearby towns between 1870 and 1890, leaving these former slaves to develop their own communities and churches without any direct interference from whites” (107). African Americans had been forbidden to build their own churches during slavery, but these churches, mostly Baptist, became centers of the community which eventually opened and ran schools, provided assistance for residents who were in dire straits and eventually “would be deeply involved in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s” (*Ibid.*).

African Americans were building their own communities in the rural areas right after the Civil War due in large part to Reconstruction and the protection offered by federal forces

who were in occupation of the South. However, as soon as Reconstruction ended in 1877, these troops left the area and African Americans found themselves at a disadvantage. Although Republicans had gained political power in Bertie County right after the Civil War, once the federal troops left, terror tactics by white groups (including the Ku Klux Klan) intimidated African Americans and political control in Bertie County (just as in the rest of the South) was wrested from the Republicans and the era of Jim Crow laws began. This resulted in the outmigration of African Americans from Bertie County in 1879 as part of the Black Exodus which as Smallwood contends caused alarm among the white landowners because it meant a shortage of labor (116). To a large extent, the model of life in Bertie County remained the same as during slavery except for absence of the use of force in the application of labor. Another distinct difference was that former slaveowners who had mistreated slaves during slavery could not get anyone to work for them during reconstruction. However, other plantation farmers who had exercised fair treatment of slaves had huge numbers of ex-slaves “asking to work and live on their farms following emancipation” (110).

Just as the demographics of the county had changed with the advent of freedom for the blacks who comprised the majority in the rural areas, life in town (to which the affluent whites had fled) had become characterized by the practice of segregation during the Jim Crow era. Smallwood argues that rural blacks felt fewer effects of Jim Crow segregation in Bertie County than most urban blacks felt. Rural life held advantages for blacks. Because there was little need for education beyond the basics in the rural, agrarian lifestyle, residents were not overly concerned with their inadequate schooling facilities. Although these were arguably much better than what was to be had under slavery, good schools would not become available for African Americans in Bertie County until the advent of the Rosenwald schools

that were established through the philanthropy of the president of the Sears, Roebuck and Company (119). Also, the rural areas saw a greater degree of integration, although it was still limited: “[I]n areas of the county where numbers of poor whites and blacks lived closely together, such as in Beaching Light, children did play together and families treated each other as good Christians would. They did not, however, attend church together, nor encourage dating or marriage. They were respectful of one another without violating the Jim Crow laws of the state” (119). In spite of this limited integration, there was very little unity between poor whites and blacks. “As late as 1935, poor whites still saw blacks as competitors for jobs and as a threat to their families, rather than as allies against the wealthy landowners and merchants who kept them in an economic form of slavery” (120).

The conditions of segregation created more situations of outmigration for African Americans from Bertie County throughout the Twentieth century, but in spite of this, Smallwood maintains that blacks made up 59.8 percent of the county’s population of 26,439 by 1950 (120). Although the Civil Rights Movement finally brought about social equality for African Americans, and, as Watson states, progress has been made with the advent of better housing and modern medical services in the 1970s (26), the situation in Bertie at present is not one of economic abundance. In fact, the population has fallen since its peak in 1950. The 2003 estimate of population for the county was 19,544 with –1.1% population change from 2000 to 2003 and a –3.0% change from 1990 to 2000. Even in the present, the county is still losing population. One of the reasons for this is brain drain. As the Bertie County Economic and Planning Commission (1999) have noted, “the opportunities for suitable employment in Bertie County are very limited [forcing] [e]ducated citizens...to search outside the area for employment, which results in high out-migration and a low growth rate”

(14). In other words, the situation in Bertie is such that anyone afforded an opportunity to leave Bertie for studies ends up leaving for good. It is no wonder, then, that according to the Economic Research Service of the USDA, Bertie County has the second highest poverty rate among North Carolina counties as of 1999, with a rate of 23.5%, just under its neighbor, Halifax County, which had a rate of 23.9%. The same service has also categorized Bertie County as a “persistent poverty county.” This means that along with nine other counties, Bertie County has had a poverty rate of 20% or more consistently from 1960 to 2000. Clearly, the economic situation for Bertie has not progressed much in spite of social advancements.

Nearly 70% of the land of Bertie County is forested, with 22% of land area utilized as cropland, according to the Bertie County Land Use Plan Update (23). However, as of 1995, only 10% of the employed population were employed in agriculture (19). This small percentage is due in part to the increased mechanization of agriculture, according to Watson. However, it is also due in part to the fact that farm sizes have been increasing for the latter portion of the twentieth century (55). Increasingly, jobs within the agricultural sector have been becoming fewer and have displaced workers mostly to the manufacturing sector. The findings of the Bertie County Economic Development and Planning Commission (1999) show that currently the bulk of employment lies in the manufacturing sector (41%), with government (15%), and services—including medicine and education (13%)—maintaining percentages that are higher than agriculture. Retail trade (9%) is the last significant sector in Bertie County. The remaining 22% of jobs were distributed among forestry/fishing, construction, transportation/utilities, wholesale trade and finance/insurance/real estate with none of them over 3.3% (19). More government jobs will follow as a new prison for the State of North Carolina is to be constructed and maintained in Bertie County.

On top of Bertie County's long-standing economic woes, it was devastated during the flood that followed Hurricane Floyd in September of 1999. Completely isolated from the outside world, the town of Windsor depended on the National Guard for food supplies for nearly one week. To an already economically depressed area, the flood could have been detrimental, but instead, Bertie County has rebounded and is seeking to develop its resources in non-traditional areas through promoting the wetlands within its confines as a type of eco-tourism. Canoe rides and the establishment of the Roanoke-Cashie River Center and, as MacEwan points out, the Cashie Wetlands walk along the Cashie River in Windsor all serve as examples of attractions that are designed to foster non-industrial sources of revenue for the county.

Recently, too, there has been greater interest within Bertie County in history and archeology with the discovery of 17th century artifacts during the construction of a four-lane highway in eastern Bertie County, according to the North Carolina Department of Transportation. Equal attention is being paid to Native American history and culture which as the North Carolina Coastal Folklife Survey (1997) indicates is still evident in areas of Bertie County such as Pollocksville where "Lavita Garris, a Tuscarora woman...treat[s] illnesses with herbal remedies and other traditional practices..." she learned from her grandmother. (43). Smallwood (1998) also stresses Native American heritage in the area by postulating that the community of Indian Woods, just north of the Roanoke River (and the subject of a community study by Robinson, Johnson and Withers in 1955 as one of the African American communities in Bertie County that developed around its churches once the whites fled the area for town areas after the Civil War) is today considered an African American community, but is actually the end result of centuries of mixing between African American, Native

American and European American cultures and peoples. He suggests that most of the residents consider themselves African American, but that many of the customs and the beliefs that have been passed down in the community are more Native American in origin than African American, but this claim has not been substantiated.

What is clear is that as Smallwood (2002) claims, community is very important to the residents of Bertie County (140), no matter what their background is. The historical events that have shaped the development of the county have not endowed it with an economic bounty, but the community has rallied through social injustice, out-migration and flood to persevere in spite of its persistent problems. The historical and socioeconomic setting described here helps to provide a background against which to illustrate a sociolinguistic study of the community.

3. Field Methods

The data used in this study were collected through fieldwork research conducted from January to August 2005. Speakers were initially identified through the author's kinship network, but were increasingly located through referrals from previous participants. Since the community is not very large, many of the participants knew each other through various network connections or practices.

The total number of speakers recorded in this study was 23. 7 speakers were African American and 16 were European American with 9 females and 14 males in total. Speakers ranged in age from 18 to 80 with a representative of each gender and ethnicity for three different generations: young (18 – 30), middle aged (40-65), and elderly (65 +).

Table 3.1 Speaker information

	Female	Male	Total
African American	4	3	7
European American	5	11	16
Total	9	14	23

Interviews were conducted either in the home or business of the speaker or at the local library and were captured digitally using a Marantz CD recorder. Following a standard sociolinguistic interview, questions were asked by the researcher in order to elicit sufficient data for analysis. Participants were encouraged to speak as freely on topics of personal interest, but standard questions were used to inquire into past experiences, current activities,

and thoughts for the future. Interviews typically lasted for a minimum of 45 minutes with some lasting as long as the length of a standard CD, 80 minutes.

4. Vowel Differentiation along Generational and Ethnic lines in Bertie County

Residents of Bertie County are often told that their speech stands out to listeners from neighboring counties as distinctive. Specifically, it is the pronunciation of vowels that makes Bertie County speakers stand apart from speakers of neighboring varieties, especially to people from regions to the south and west of Bertie. How reasonable is it to claim that Bertie County vowels are different from those of other speakers in the Coastal Plain Dialect area? Also, are there any factors that cause variation in production of vowels among Bertie speakers? This chapter presents acoustic analysis of three different phonemes, /au/, /o/ and /æ/, in order to investigate generational and ethnic variation in the fronting of these phonemes in Bertie County. Drawing on previous impressionistic work, a comparison is made to see if acoustic analysis of vowel features matches or disagrees with the conclusions drawn from qualitative research.

Bertie County is located at the junction of three dialect areas in the northeastern section of North Carolina, as is indicated in Figure 4.1.

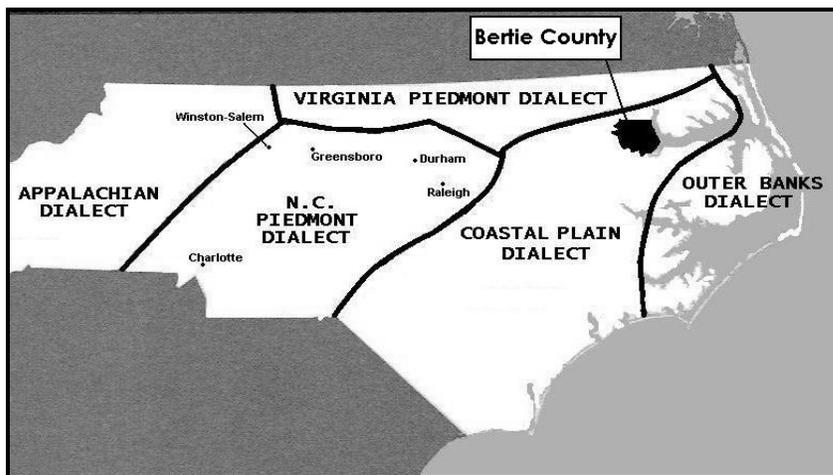


Figure 4.1 Dialect Area Map of North Carolina (adapted from Wolfram et al., 2002)

Because Bertie is situated at a point where the Coastal Plains dialect, Virginia Piedmont dialect and the Outer Banks dialect (sometimes referred to as Pamlico Sound dialect) converge, it has likely been influenced by contact with these dialect areas. Both the Virginia Piedmont and Outer Banks varieties feature /au/ diphthongs that are distinctive from Coastal Plain pronunciations. However, whereas the /au/ of Eastern Virginia has a tendency of not only fronting the glide, but of also raising the nucleus only before voiceless obstruents (Thomas 2001: 109), Bertie's /au/ falls in line with the Outer Banks variety because it fronts the glide and does so before both voiced and unvoiced segments, as described by Wolfram & Thomas (2002), Wolfram et al. (1999), and Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1997). In LAMSAS, as Wolfram & Thomas (2002) state, Guy S. Lowman, Jr transcribes an example of a raised glide as [u[^] ~ ʊ[^]] for one of the speakers from Bertie in the word *proud* (108). This provides evidence that Bertie's pattern is closer to Outer Banks English than to Virginia Piedmont since /d/ is a voiced obstruent. However, Wolfram & Thomas also assert that /au/ fronting is a receding trait since it used to be in greater distribution (although limited to the Coastal Plain) than it is today. Bertie supports this stance in that elderly speakers are more likely to front /au/ than are younger speakers. However, unlike Hyde County, where vowel variants are used by both African American and European American speakers equally, there is less crossing of the ethnic boundary in Bertie.

As for the /o/ phoneme, Thomas (1989) demonstrates that although /o/ fronting is found across the country, it is in the South where it has witnessed remarkable fronting (327). Wolfram & Thomas (2002) also point out that /o/ fronting is an innovation that started in North Carolina. In addition, it is generally considered to be a feature of European American

speech, but is heard in African American speech due to accommodation to sound changes in European American communities (Thomas 2001: 170).

To help illustrate the vowel features of Bertie speech, vowel formant plots are included. These plots were created from digital CD recordings that were transferred into .WAV format and then analyzed using the software program, PRAAT, to get a reading for the first and second formants. For monophthongs, a reading was taken in the center of the vowel, whereas diphthongs were measured at both the nucleus and the glide taking a measurement at 35ms from the beginning of the diphthong for the nucleus and by taking another measurement at 35ms from the end of the vowel. Points on the plot represent a mean of 7 to 10 tokens taken for each vowel, and arrows show the direction in which diphthongs glide. No more than 2 tokens of each word were taken into consideration. Also, tokens preceding liquids /l/ and /r/ were avoided due to coarticulatory effects of those segments on the vowels. Pre-nasal contexts were also avoided except for in the case of /au/ diphthongs due to limited number of tokens for that vowel.

Figure 4.2 and figure 4.3 show the difference between two elderly female speakers. The African American speaker in Figure 4.2 does not front the glide of /au/, but the European American speaker does front the glide in her speech. However, the elderly European American male in Figure 4.4 shows that he does not front his /au/ as does his female counterpart.

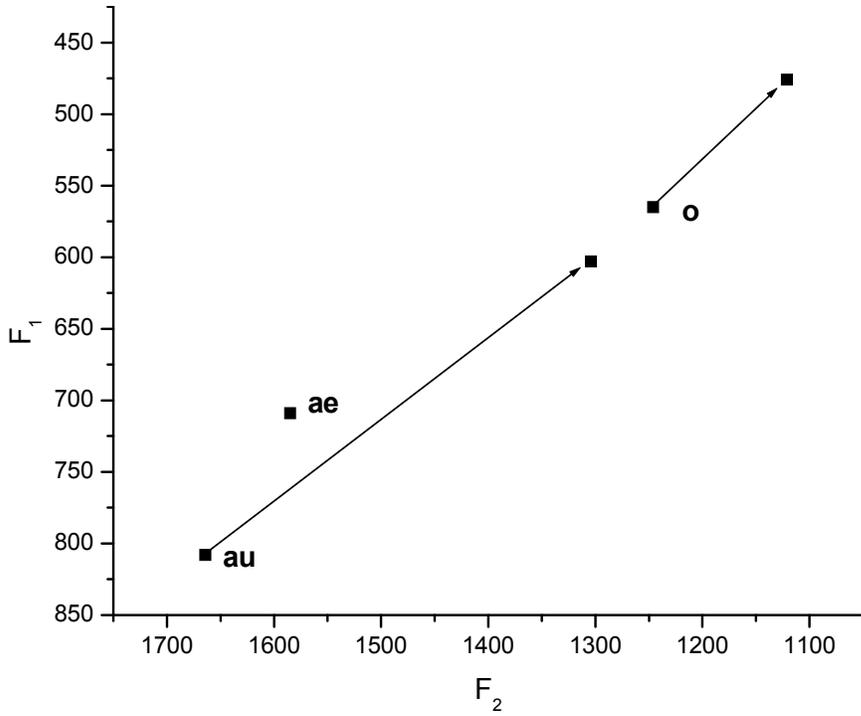


Figure 4.2. /au/, /o/ and /æ/ formant plots of an Elderly African American Female, b. 1925

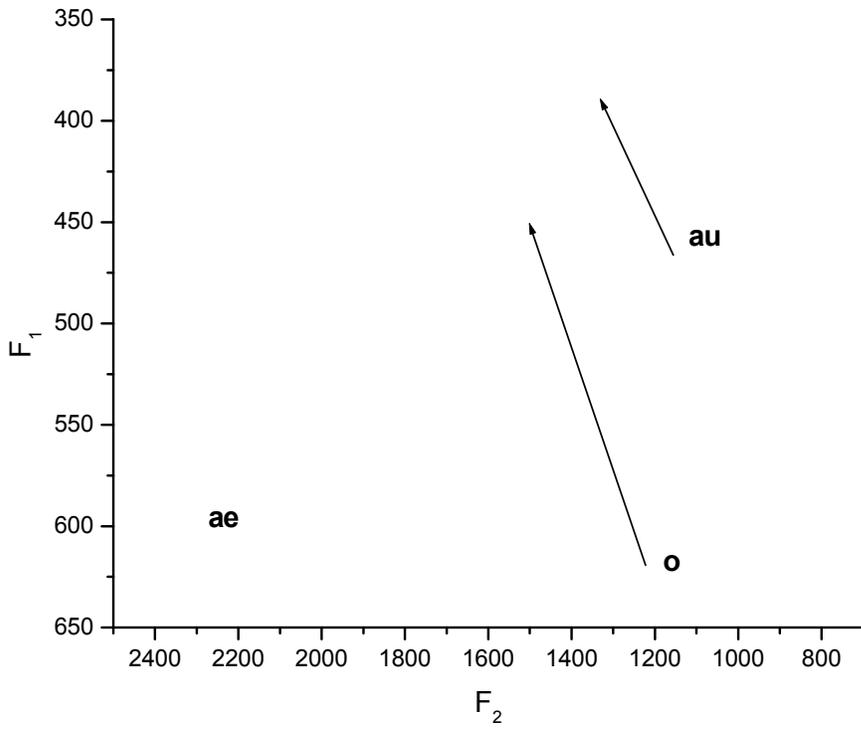


Figure 4.3. /au/, /o/ and /æ/ formant plots of an Elderly European American Female, b. 1918

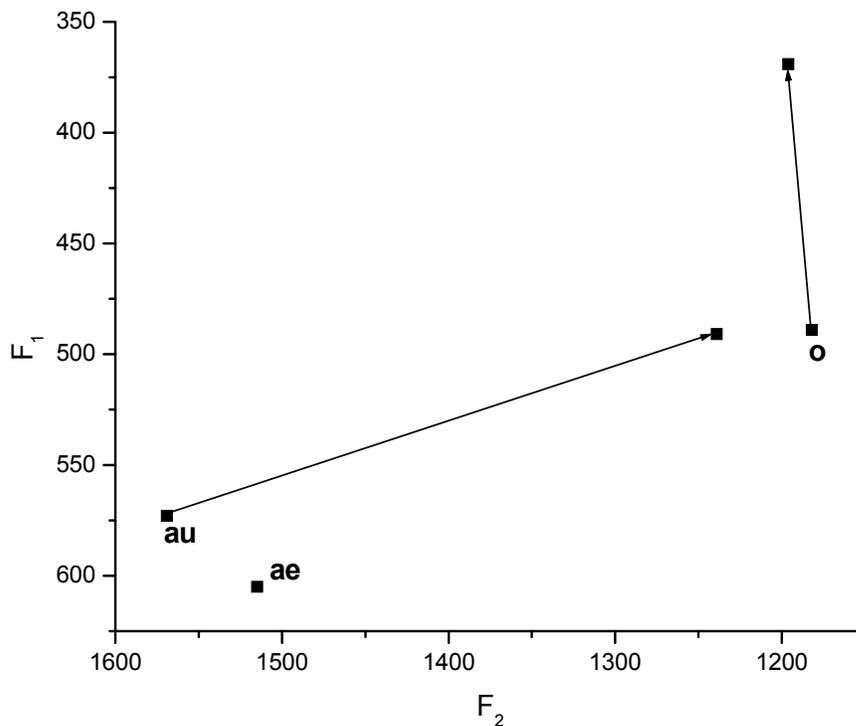


Figure 4.4 /au/, /o/ and /æ/ formant plots of an Elderly European American Male (b. 1916)

However, in spite of the fact that only the speaker in figure 4.3 fronts /au/, both European American elderly speakers show a tendency to front /o/ where the corresponding African American speaker does exhibit any front of /o/ at all. /æ/ on the other hand is fairly stable.

Figure 4.5 below represents a middle-aged African American female who shows fronting of /au/ and /o/. This is most likely due to accommodation to European American vowel space as this speaker lived in a rural, mostly white community in Bertie County. However, like the speaker in figure 4.3, /æ/ is represented as being backed farther than /au/. In comparison to figure 4.5, figures 4.6 and 4.7, both representing middle-aged African American men, show a more typically African American vowel system in that both /au/ and /o/ backglide. /æ/ is fairly forward for both speakers.

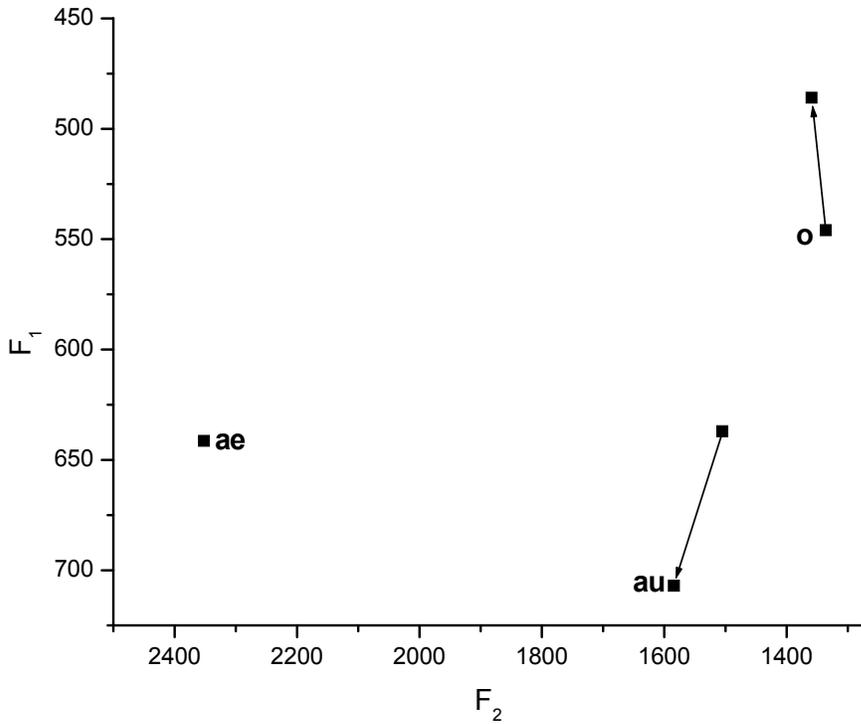


Figure 4.5 /au/, /o/ and /æ/ formant plots of a Middle-aged African American female, b. 1942

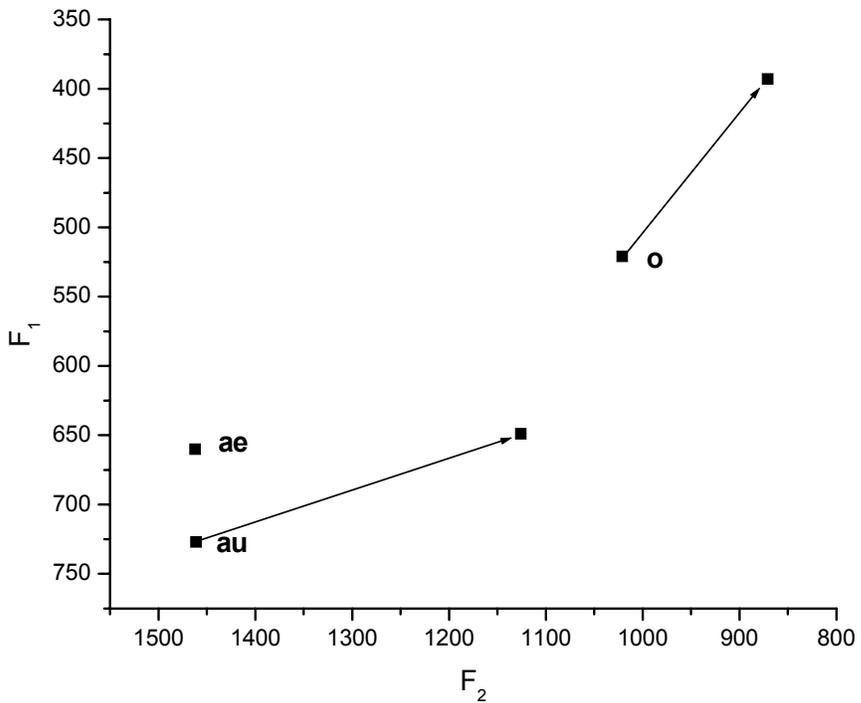


Figure 4.6 /au/, /o/ and /æ/ formant plots of a Middle-aged African American Male, b. 1940

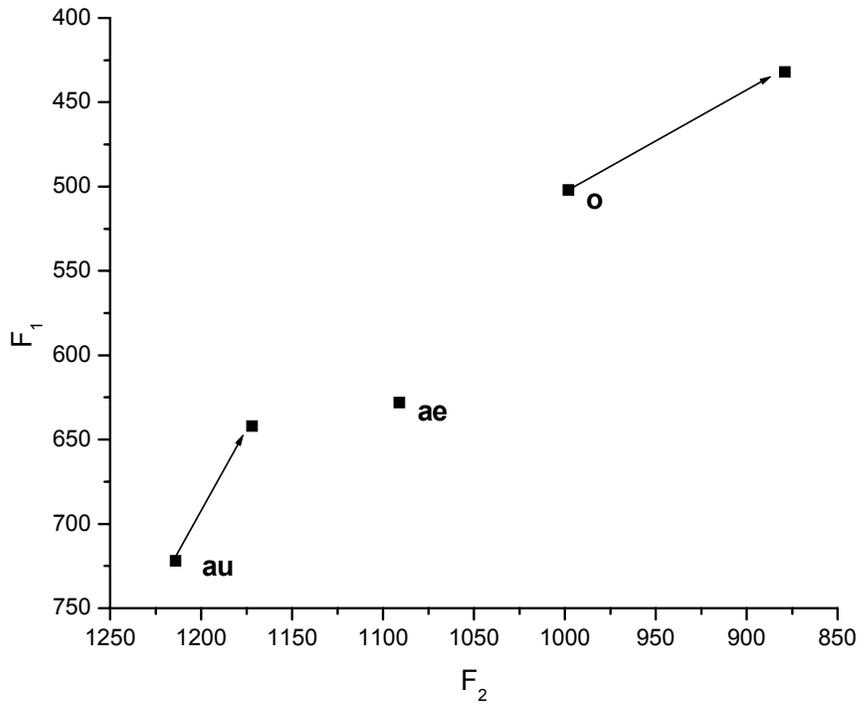


Figure 4.7 /au/, /o/ and /æ/ formant plots of a Middle-aged African American Male, b. 1938

It is interesting to note that in figure 4.8, the female speaker seems to avoid fronting /au/. A possible explanation of this is that several of the tokens included for this speaker were in pre-nasal environments and therefore might have skewed the formants.

Impressionally speaking, the speaker shows a tendency towards frontgliding in /au/.

This is also true for /o/ as is well shown in figure 4.8. /æ/, however, shows backing, but could

be explained by the inclusion of a pre-/g/ token in this case. In comparison, the male

counterpart in figure 4.9 shows less fronting, but exhibits raising of both /au/ and /o/, a

pattern that is very different from his African American counterparts in figures 4.6 and 4.7.

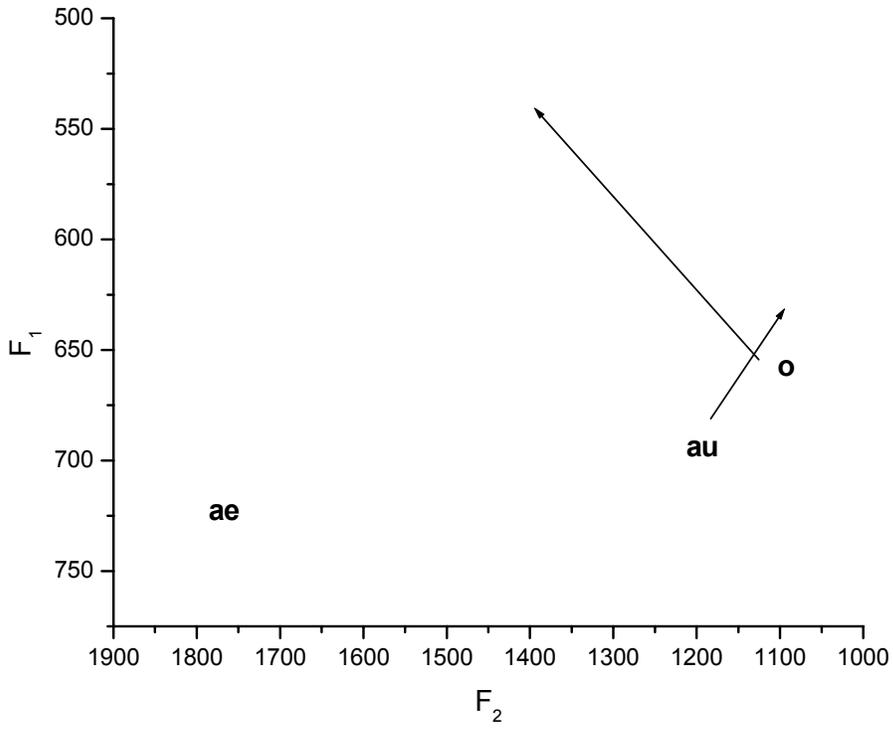


Figure 4.8 /au/, /o/ and /æ/ formant plots of a Middle-aged European Female, b. 1952

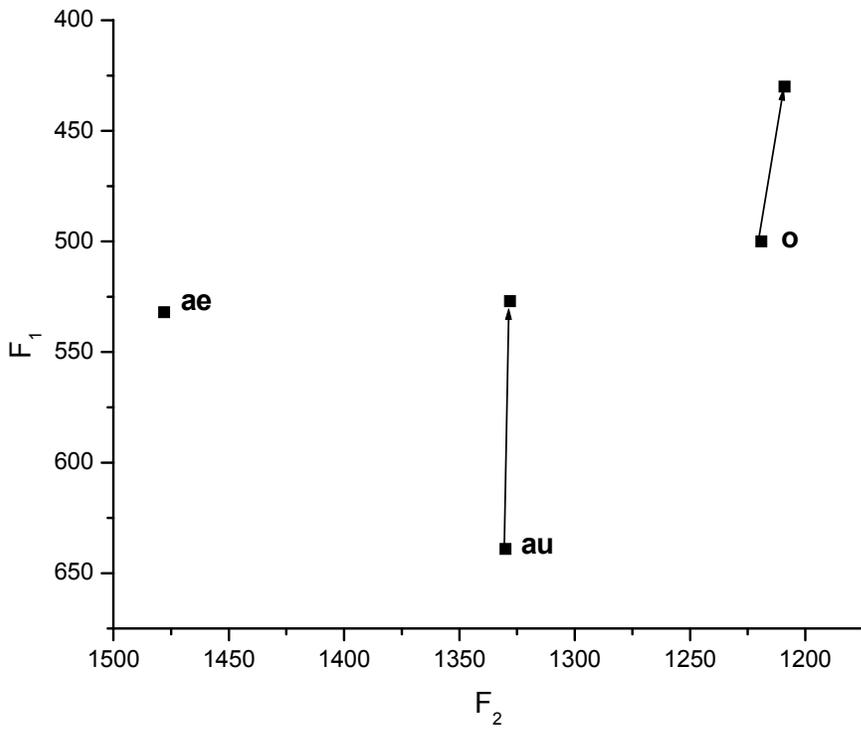


Figure 4.9 /au/, /o/ and /æ/ formant plots of a Middle Aged European American male, b. 1942

Figures 4.10 through 4.13 illustrate the vowels of young speakers. As opposed to the elderly and middle aged groups, there are no instances among all four speakers of /au/ fronting which illustrates that this form is indeed receding in Bertie County. Out of all four speakers, only the African American male (who is studying to be television news announcer at university) displays any tendency towards /o/ fronting, albeit weak fronting. /æ/ is pretty typical except for the speaker in figure 4.10. Once again, the aberrant /æ/ is found in a female speaker which suggests more fine tuning of formants or, if fine tuning does not remedy this situation, an investigation into this phenomenon by including more tokens.

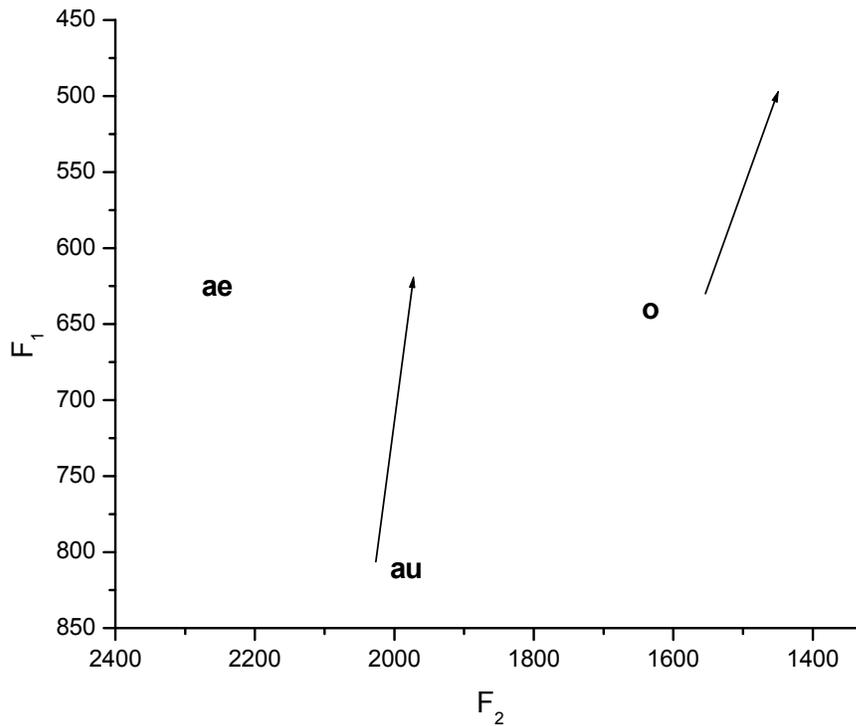


Figure 4.10 /au/, /o/ and /æ/ formant plots of a Young African American Female, b. 1988

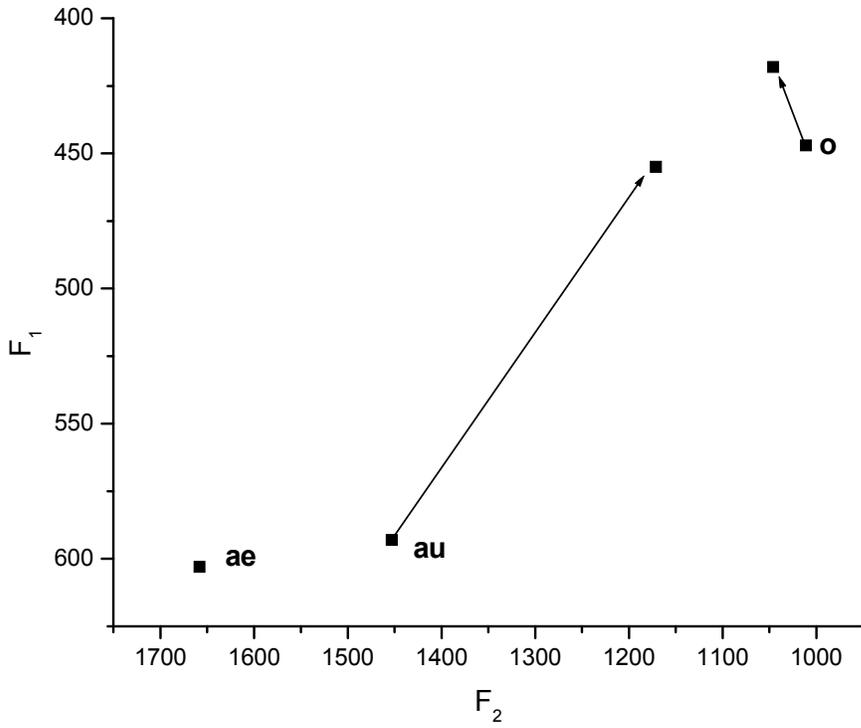


Figure 4.11 /au/, /o/ and /æ/ formant plots of a Young African American Male, b. 1980

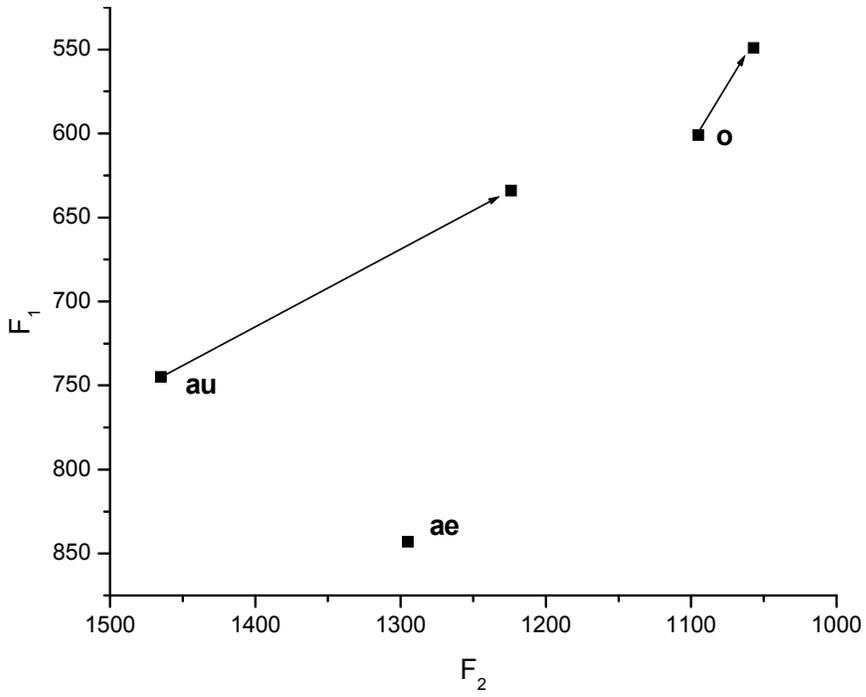


Figure 4.12 /au/, /o/ and /æ/ formant plots of a Young European American Female, b. 1984

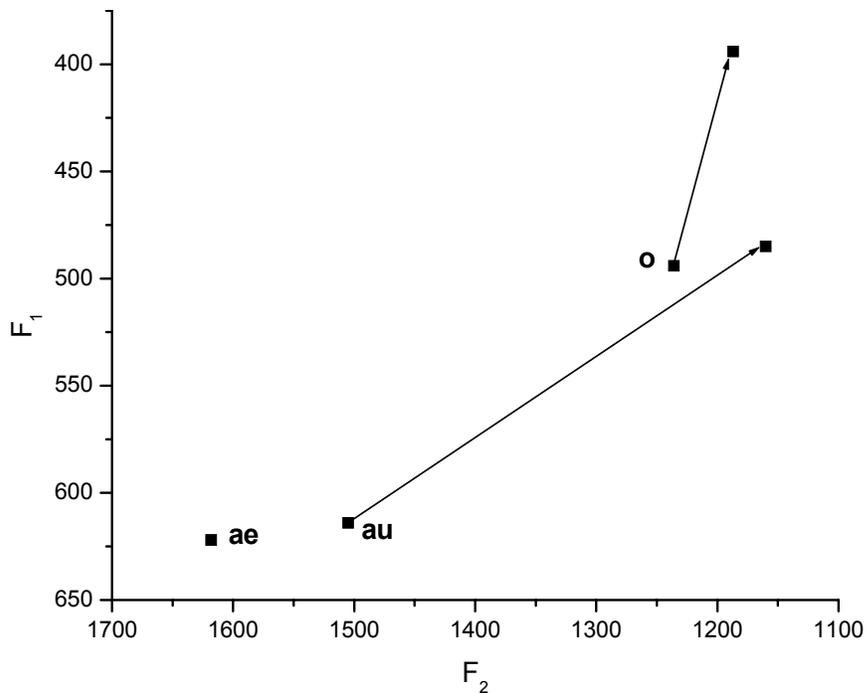


Figure 4.13 /au/, /o/ and /æ/ formant plots of a Young European American Male, b. 1980

In summary, the vowel formants shown here display a tendency for /au/ and /o/ fronting to appear in the speech of older participants rather than for younger speakers. Although the /au/ recession is expected due to age differences, the /o/ fronting is surprising given the location of Bertie County in eastern North Carolina. If inclusion of more young speakers indicates that this trend is continuing, then one possible hypothesis is that young European American speakers in predominantly African American county are accommodating to backed /o/ as a feature of AAVE.

Previously, I conducted an impressionistic study of fronting of /au/ and /o/ diphthongs in order to see if there were any generational or ethnic variation for these two vowels in Bertie County Speech (Bowers 2005). Using the model devised by Thomas (1989) I devised the scoring system in table 4.1 based on phonetic range. For /au/ I looked only at the glide and assigned a score based on the phonetic representation of /u/ in the glide. The scale reflects the degree of fronting as well as differences in height of the /u/ glide. Although [u] is

lower than [u] it is generally located farther back in vowel charts. In addition although [ʊ] is higher than [ə], they both exhibit the same degree of fronting. Therefore, as an impressionistic scale, it is the combination of fronting and height differentiation that characterize the scoring with the higher scores moving in the general direction of increased fronting and height.

Table 4.1 Impressionistic scale for /au/ glide fronting (adapted from Thomas 1989)

<i>Score</i>	<i>Phonetic Range</i>
1	u
2	ʊ
3	ə
4	ɚ

For /o/, I borrowed the scoring system shown in table 4.2 directly from Thomas. This system scores diphthongs not only on how fronted the glide is, but also by taking into account the degree to which the nucleus is fronted as well. Again, the higher the score, the more fronted the vowel is.

Table 4.2 Impressionistic /o/ fronting scale (from Thomas 1989)

<i>Score</i>	<i>Phonetic Range</i>
0	o: -- oó
1	ou -- óu
2	ǔu -- ɔu -- ɹu -- ɛu
3	əu -- ɚɹ
4	ɚɹ -- ɚɹ
5	ɚɹ -- ɚɹ

After taking between six and ten tokens for each of 23 speakers (7 African American and 16 European American), I assigned a score to each token based on the scale in table 4.1 and then averaged the scores and plotted year of birth of speaker against the mean vowel score. I coded African American and European American speakers differently in order to see if as well as generational variation there was ethnic variation also. The impressionistic scores of /au/ glide fronting in figure 4.14 suggest that while older European Americans front the /au/ glide, younger European American speakers do not. African Americans in general tend not to front /au/, but several middle-age anomalies appear in an otherwise smooth line.

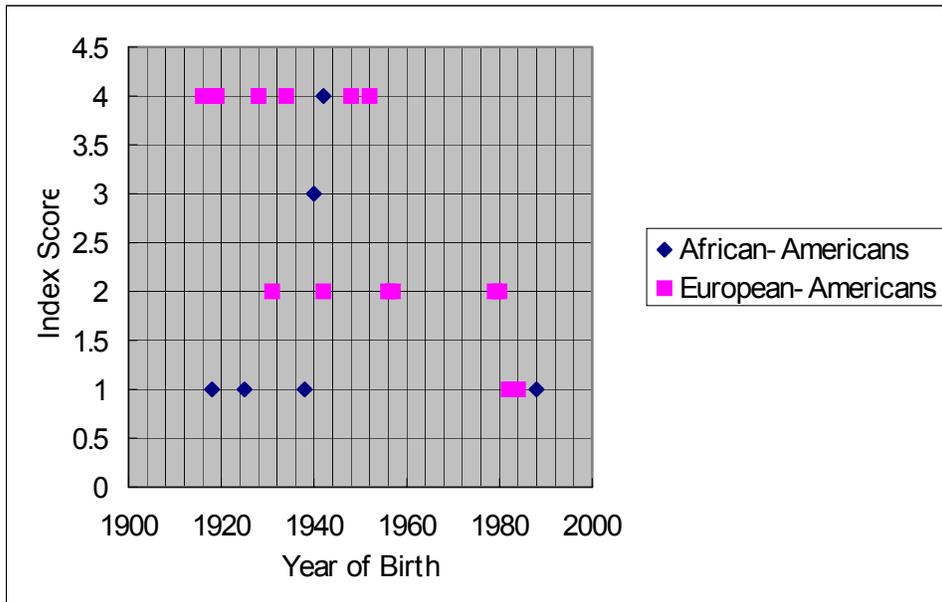


Figure 4.14 Impressionistic scores of /au/ glide fronting

As figure 4.15 demonstrates, /o/ fronting, on the other hand, seemed to be more identifiable by impression for European American speakers across the board although the lowest scorers were elderly speakers. However, there were elderly speakers who scored quite high as well on the /o/ fronting index. Yet, only two of the Middle-aged African American

speakers scored higher than 2 on this index. From an impressionist perspective, /o/ fronting is identified with European American speakers rather than African American speakers.

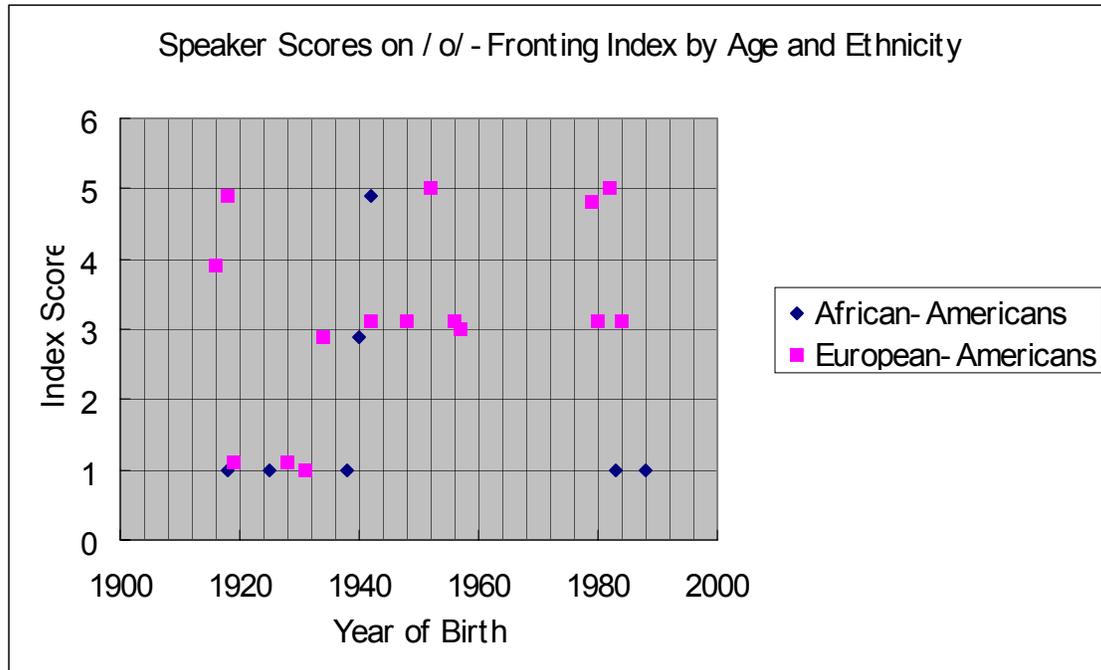


Figure 4.15

Since the fronting for /o/ and /au/ showed up in impressionistic analysis, I decided to perform instrumental analysis to see if the results would be similar. Using a Marantz digital CD recorder, I recorded speech for 12 speakers with one speaker per cell by generation, ethnicity and gender. Using PRAAT software took measurements of the first through third formants in the same manner as for formant plots (in the center of the vowel for monophthongs and 35 ms from the beginning for nuclei and 35ms from the end for glides). Then using Traunmüller’s formula (1990) as cited in Adank et al.(2004), I normalized the measurements so that I could compare between speakers. Because different speakers have different lengths of vocal tracts, comparison without normalizing would be a misstep. The

results, featured in figures 4.16 through 4.25, do not show any surprises in comparison with the earlier impressionistic transcriptions.

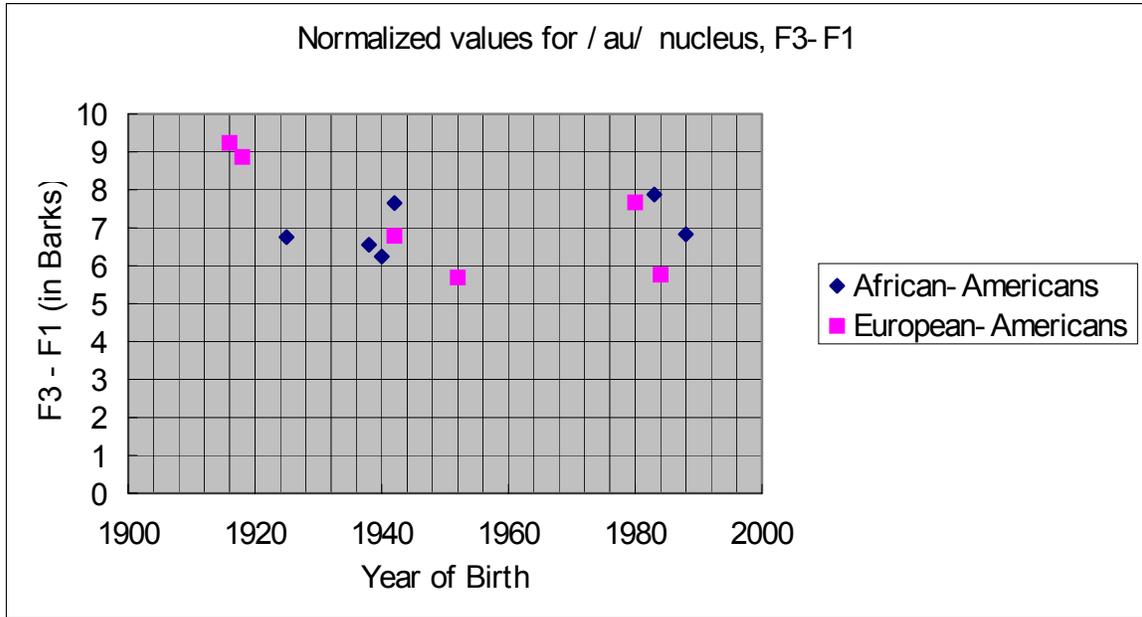


Figure 4.16

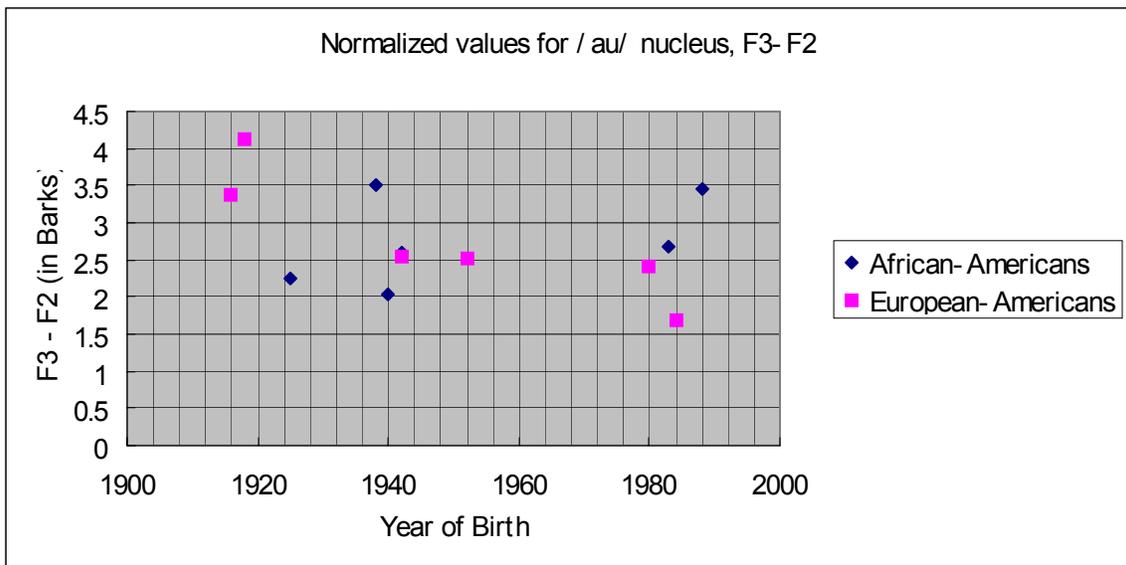


Figure 4.17

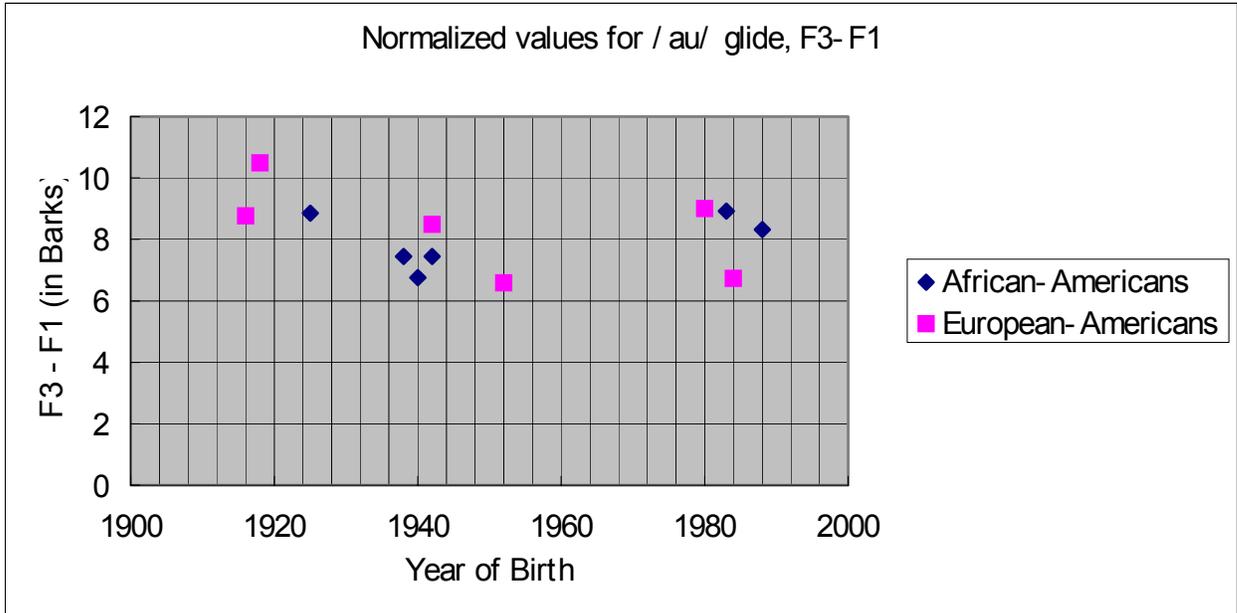


Figure 4.18

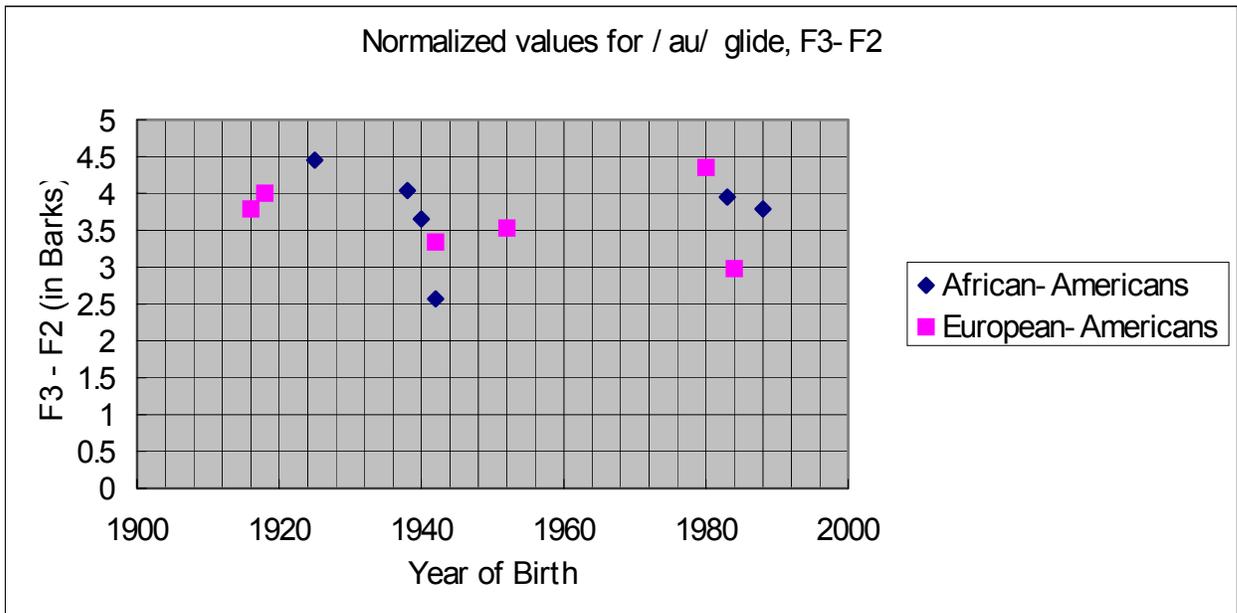


Figure 4.19

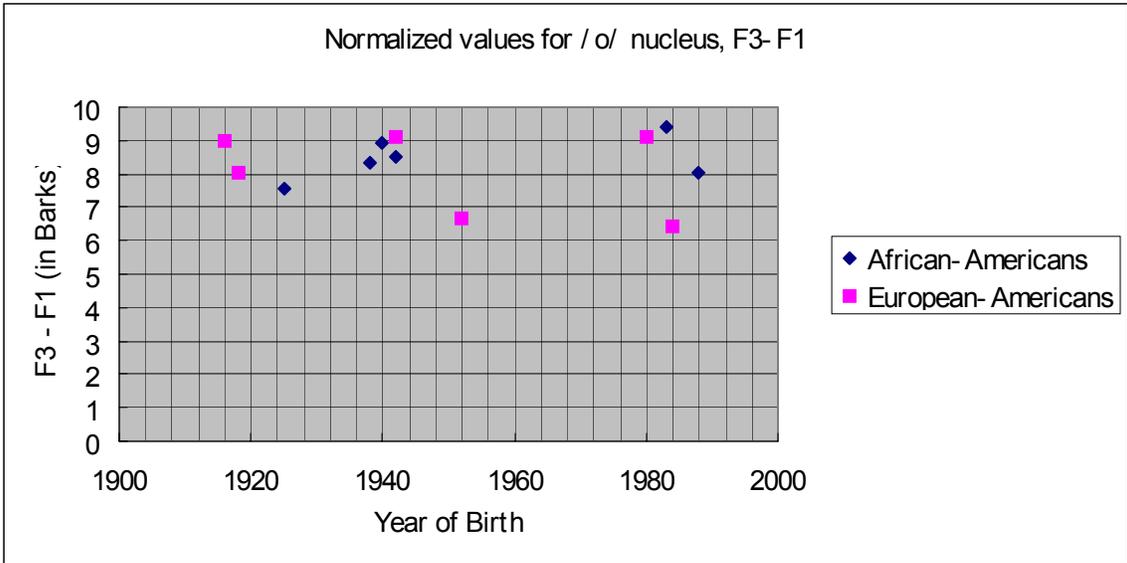


Figure 4.20

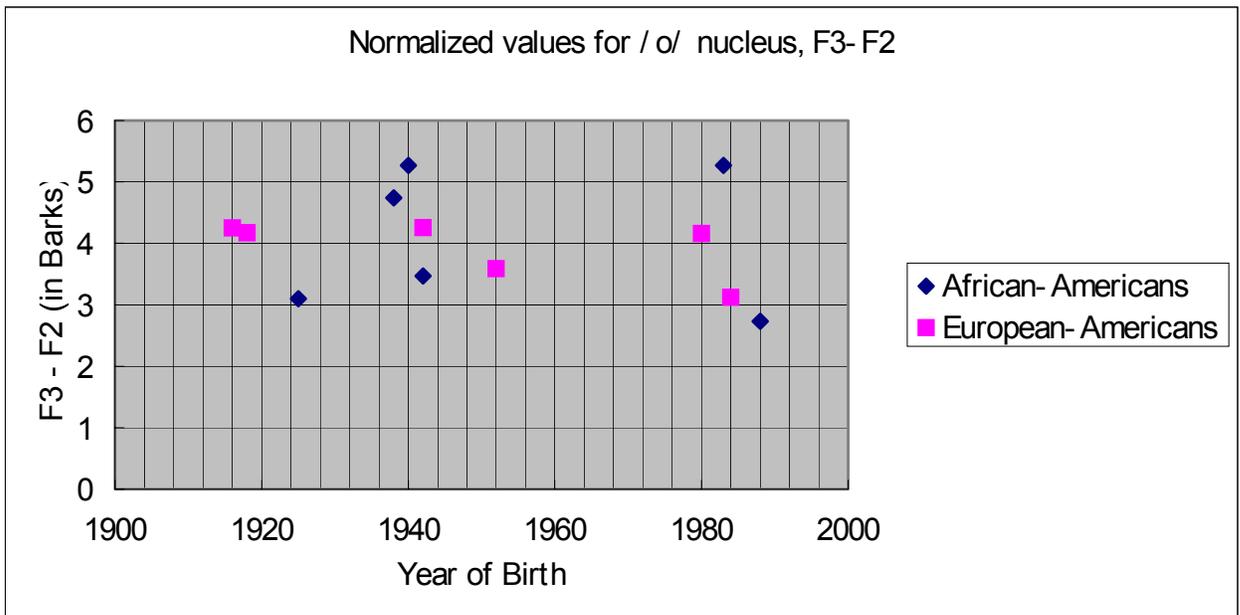


Figure 4.21

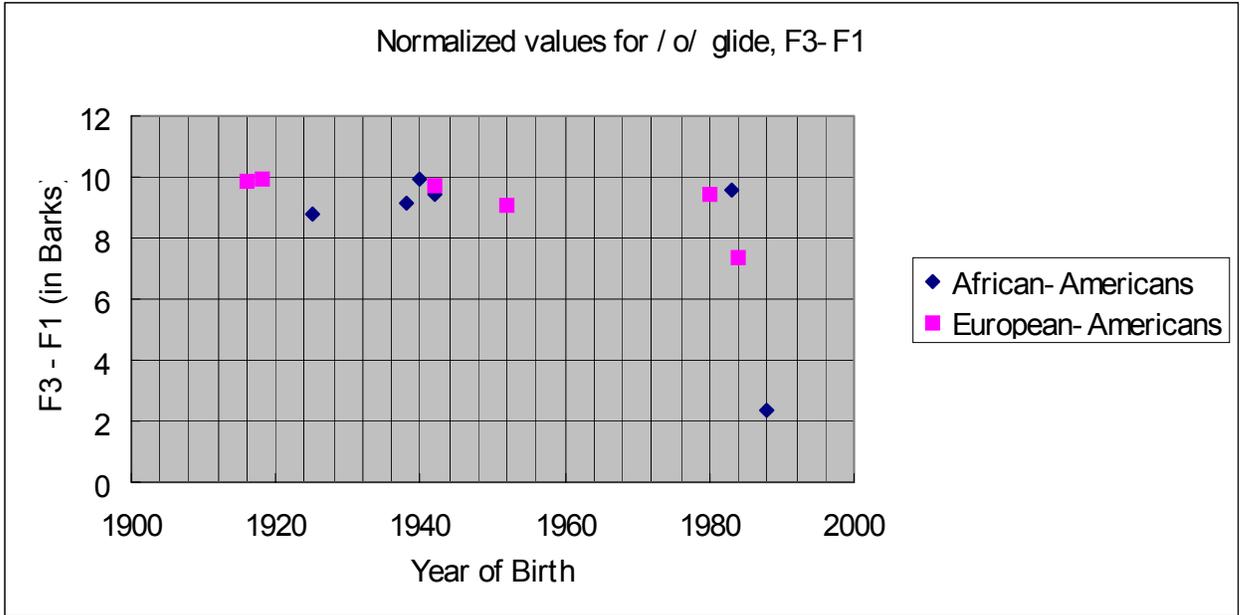


Figure 4.22

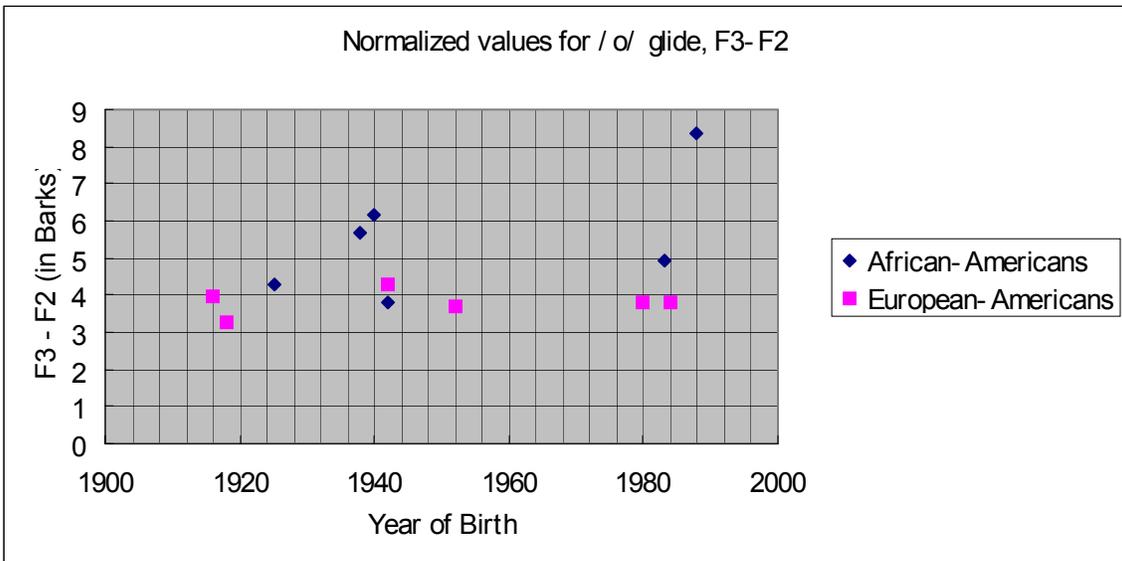


Figure 4.23

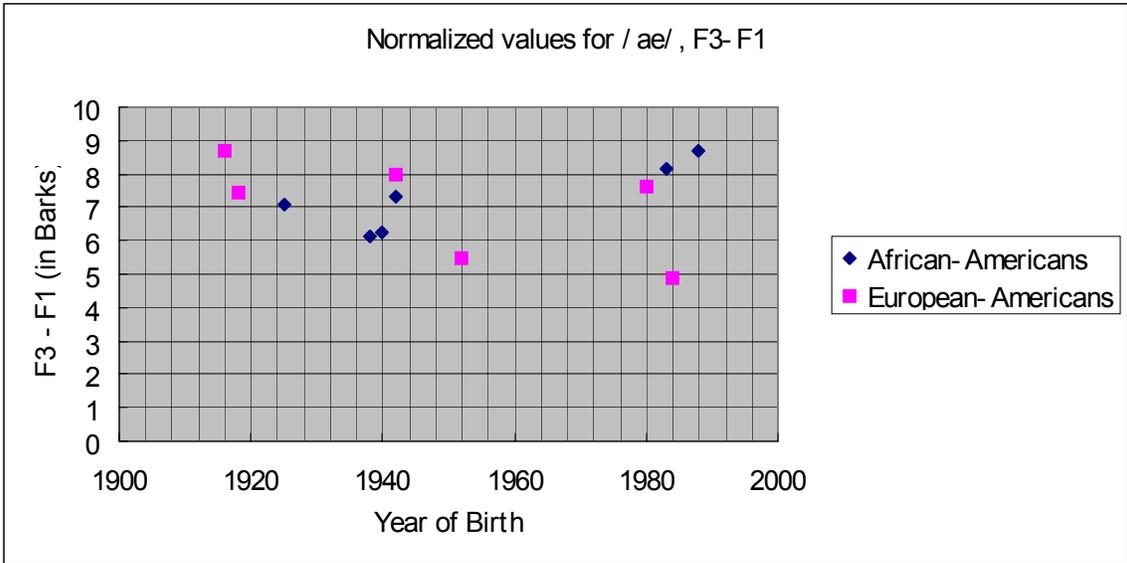


Figure 4.24

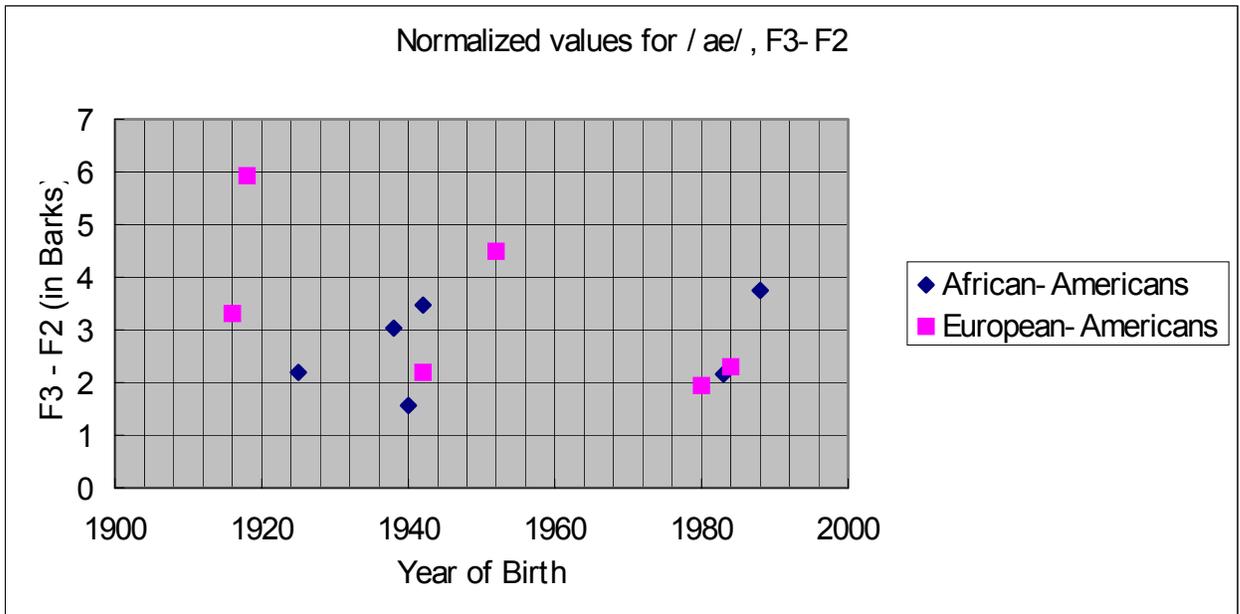


Figure 4.25

5. Bertie County Lexicon

The main reason for researching lexical items of Bertie English is to ascertain both what lexical entities compose Bertie English and how this combination of lexical features makes Bertie distinctive as an English variety. Just as Wolfram, Hazen and Schilling-Estes (1999) indicate in their research on Outer Banks English, the point to emphasize here is that what is distinctive about the dialect of Bertie County is not the lexical features found in the area, but the way they are combined to form Bertie County English. That is, Bertie County English does not present us with any heretofore unidentified words, but nonetheless warrants investigation due to the unique juxtaposition it exhibits of features shared with other dialects.

In order to demonstrate similarities between Bertie English and neighboring dialects, a convenient starting place is to identify lexical items used in Bertie and one or of more of the dialect areas nearby. Table 5.1 below presents a short list of lexical items recorded during fieldwork in Bertie and shows what other dialect regions share these terms. I have chosen to compare Bertie English largely against other Southern forms of English: Outer Banks dialect, Appalachian (also known as Highland South) Dialect and Coastal Plain dialect. In addition, at least two lexical items identified here show an affinity with non-Southern varieties.

Table 5.1 A Sample Lexical Comparison of Bertie English to Other Dialect Regions*

Lexical Item	Bertie	Outer Banks	Appalachian	Coastal Plain	Non-South
reckon 'believe, imagine'	✓	✓	✓	✓	
carry 'convey, accompany'	✓	✓	✓	✓	
cut on/off 'turn on/off'	✓	✓	✓	✓	
tobogan 'stocking cap'	✓	(✓)	✓	✓	
yonder 'long time ago'	✓	✓	✓		

Table 5.1 Continued

Lexical Item	Bertie	Outer Banks	Appalachian	Coastal Plain	Non-South
skeeter hawk 'dragonfly'	✓	✓		✓	
pizer 'porch'	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)		(✓)
boot 'trunk of car'	✓			(✓)	(✓)

*Table adapted from Wolfram et al. (1999). (✓) refers to features that are used infrequently or by restricted groups in the area.

The bulk of items in Table 5.1 show an association of Bertie speech with general Southern speech. Terms such as *reckon* for 'suppose', *carry*, as in "Can you carry me to the store?" where the speaker is requesting a ride by automobile and not to be transported in ones arms like an infant, and *cut* instead of turn on or turn off the light clearly show that Bertie speech is Southern in nature. Another item shared in all dialects is *tobogan* for 'stocking hat'. Bertie speech also exhibits *yonder* to mean "way back when" which is a feature that is not typically found in the Coastal Plain, but is found in Outer Banks and Appalachian speech. In this example, Bertie speech starts to show an affiliation that prefers farther removed dialects. Following up on this is the usage of *skeeter hawk*—a term for "dragonfly" that is only used infrequently in either Appalachian or Coastal Plain dialect—which suggests an alignment with Outer Banks where it is part of general usage. In further support of the claim that the two dialects share an affiliation, elderly residents of Bertie recalled hearing the lexical item, *pizer*, used instead of porch by elderly relatives during their childhood. As Table 5.1 indicates, *pizer* was not generally used in the Coastal Plain area, but was in restricted usage on the Outer Banks, as well as the Appalachian area and non-South areas such as New England. Although Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1997) account for the non-South usage of *pizer* as due to "common historical sources for the dialects" (103) as opposed to "contact,"

the proximity of Bertie to the Outer Banks suggests a wider distribution formerly for *pizer* than can currently be demonstrated.

One of the most interesting lexical items in Bertie, however, is the last one, which is not shared with any neighboring dialect region. The use of *boot* to refer to the trunk of a car, although chiefly thought of as a British term, is widely used by contemporary Bertie speakers ranging in age from early twenties to late eighties. In *DARE*, Cassidy et al. (1985) document usage of this item in Athens, Georgia, and also cites usage in Southeast Kentucky and Central Western Wisconsin. Most likely this parallel development of this term in these areas of the US is akin to the British use of *boot* for trunk since the *Oxford English Dictionary* refers to it as existing in the 18th Century to refer to the receptacle for luggage under the seats of the guard or coachmen on the coach. From personal correspondence, I have been able to document instances of *boot* usage in Tyrrell County in the Outer Banks dialect area and in Pitt County in the Coastal Plain district, but in general, this item, though of interest, cannot be used at this point in time to indicate alignment with any area outside of Bertie County. Its usage, however, is recognized by Bertie speakers and as a shibboleth in that it allows them to identify fellow speakers from the same region.

In *American Regional Dialects*, Carver (1987) explains that the rural nature of the South in general is represented in the quantity of regional terms for plants and animals that prevail (112). Given Bertie County's rural nature, it is no great surprise that much of what characterizes the lexicon of Bertie also applies to folk names for plants and animals. An example of a plant name that has also been a crop for farmers in Bertie County is *Japan pea*. This term is used chiefly by elderly residents of Bertie County to refer to soybeans. This term, according to *The Soy Daily*, was documented in 1852 when A.H. Ernst of Cincinnati, Ohio

sought a patent from the Agricultural Division of the Patent Office for soybeans under that name. Although the origin of the word is not from the South or from North Carolina, the fact that it remains used by elderly speakers of Bertie in the same way that retreating term such as *pizer* remains in use suggests that it is a remnant vestige of a once more widely used term. This claim is also supported by *DARE*'s description of *Japan pea* as obsolete.

What is significant about this term, however, are its phonological aspects. Although the name of the country of Japan from which soybeans originate is pronounced as [dʒə'pæn] in most American dialects, the pronunciation of the Bertie English lexicalized form of *Japan peas* is rendered as ['dʒeipæn 'piz]. The fact that the stress has moved to the first syllable instead of its former location in the second syllable, although typical of selected lexical items in Southern dialects, can be explained either as an obsolete pronunciation of *Japan* that lives on only in the lexicalized term for soybeans, or as an innovation that occurred only in the South for *Japan peas*, but not for the name of the country. Although it seems more likely that this innovative stress shift should have occurred across the board, it is phonologically possible that the combination of *Japan* with *peas* would cause a phonological realignment of stress to reestablish equilibrium.

Because written records do not give examples of former pronunciations for either *Japan* or *Japan peas*, this cannot be ascertained at present.

As for animals, the category of pests seems to

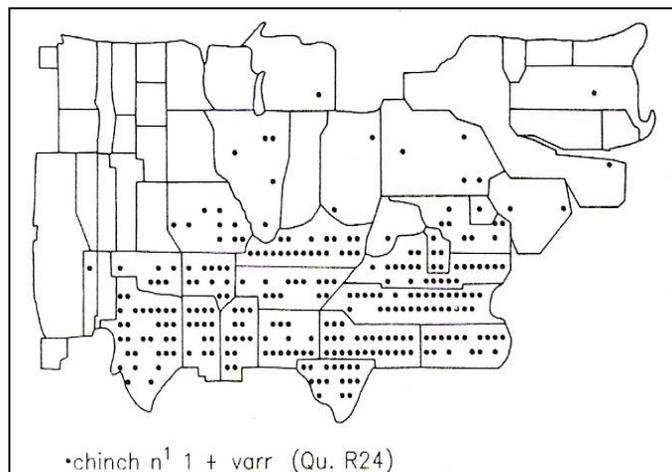
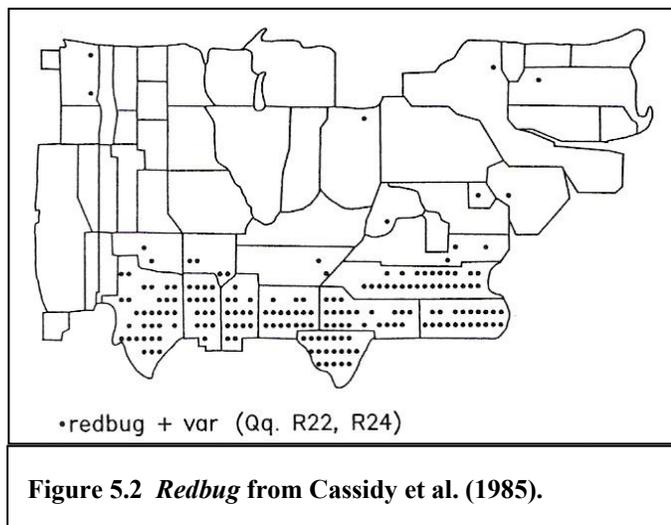


Figure 5.1 *Chinch* from Cassidy et al. (1985).

represent a surprisingly large number of lexical variants in Bertie. In particular, terms for biting bugs and snakes were well documented during the fieldwork interviews. Many of the terms found in Bertie are also found in other areas of the South. For example, *skeeter*, which is the basis for the formation of *skeeter hawk* that was included in Table 5.1, is used in the Outer Banks and the rest of North Carolina to varying degrees. Carver cites *dirt dauber* as being used in the South to mean any wasp that builds its nest in out of mud and *chinch bug* to mean *Cimex lectularius*: the common bedbug (113). As shown in Figure 5.1, DARE corroborates this term as chiefly used in the South and Southern Midlands. The figure indicates that *chinch* is well documented in North Carolina. Indeed, the form is recorded in the *OED* as far back as 1625, but is now characterized as “now confined to the U.S” in usage. All of these regional terms for insects are used by Bertie residents, but the only utterance of *chinch* was by an elderly woman. As younger generations are unaware of this term’s meaning, it appears to be a retreating form even though it is not labeled as such by *DARE*

Bertie English additionally relies on color to identify certain types of insect pests. For example, although several Bertie English speakers reported the use of the standard term

‘chigger,’ the majority of speakers identified *redbug* as the preferred term for the small red blood-sucking insects, *Trombicula alfreddugesi*. Carver does not report *redbug* as in usage in the Upper South, but cites it as



representative of the Lower South dialect which does not include North Carolina in its core.

Incidentally, this term enjoys a wider distribution than Carver presents since the Texas Cooperative Extension also reports the use of *redbug* to denote “chigger,” and as Figure 5.2 demonstrates, not only does DARE report wide usage of *redbug* across the South and Midland South, but it is also well represented in North Carolina.

Another example that involves the use of color for naming purposes is *yellow fly*. Bertie County speakers interviewed uniformly identified this biting insect, *Diachlorus ferrugatus*, by this colorful name instead of using the standard term, “deer fly”. In fact, one elderly female speaker responded that she did not know there was another term other than *yellow fly*. This term, although used in Bertie County, is not limited to Bertie, as it is also designated by Florida Department of Agriculture to be the common name used in Florida for this species.

Another group of pests prevalent in Bertie County and enjoying regional name variation is the snake order. Although the two most prominent exemplars of this category are venomous, it also includes the non-venomous variety of king snake, *Lampropeltis getula*, which is widely referred to as *chicken eater* in Bertie County and other parts of Eastern North Carolina. Carver refers to *chicken snakes* as a term that is used in the South to denote colubrid snakes that “...have a supposed propensity for young chicks and eggs...[but]...is probably more help than hindrance in it cleanup of the mice and rats that live in barns and other farm buildings” (113). This description matches the local description of *chicken eater*, and the similarity of the names suggests that *chicken eater* is a variant of *chicken snake*. *DARE* supports this claim as it not only equates the two terms, but also documents *chicken-eater* as in use in Louisiana and North Carolina in 1968.

As for venomous snakes, the wetlands of Bertie County provide an ideal home for the *water moccasin*, a semiaquatic pit viper that goes by the scientific name, *Agkistrodon piscivorus*. This snake is also known by the more standard variety of *cottonmouth* in Bertie County according to local residents. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary* and *DARE* all identify both terms as names for *Agkistrodon piscivorus*. Although both terms are used in Bertie County, this does not differ greatly from the general usage in the Southern United States where the snakes are found.

A relative of the *water moccasin*, *Agkistrodon contortrix*, or more commonly known as “copperhead,” is also found in Bertie County and is referred to as a *poplar leaf moccasin*—a name that exhibits lexical variation among Bertie speakers. One respondent in Bertie County described this snake as having “poplar leaf” in its name due to the coloration and pattern of markings that resemble poplar leaves and enable the snake to camouflage itself among fallen leaves from a poplar tree. Braswell, Palmer and Beane (2003), herpetologists for the North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences, confirm the use of *poplar leaf* for this snake in their book on venomous snakes found in North Carolina. In their discussion of nomenclature methodology, they state: “Usage of common and scientific names follows Collins (1990)—although it will be a long time before the name Copperhead will replace ‘highland moccasin,’ ‘poplar leaf,’ ‘white oak,’ or ‘pilot’ for many North Carolinians” (7). Their acknowledgement that several different lexical varieties exist for this animal, although not describing the location to which each variety belongs, substantiates the definition provided by the Bertie speaker mentioned above.

However, other speakers in referencing this same animal used a term that largely resembled but differed crucially from *poplar leaf moccasin*. In one instance, an elderly male

speaker mentions that his niece was bitten by a *pop-a-leaf moccasin* while she was performing farm work. This variant, whose pronunciation [ˈpɒpəlɪf] is also documented in *DARE* as *popple leaf*—a variant of *poplar-leaf snake*, was not limited idiosyncratically to this particular speaker, but was also reported by other unrelated Bertie speakers. When presented with the task of deciding which of the two forms was more “correct,” Bertie Speakers presented different argument for each term.

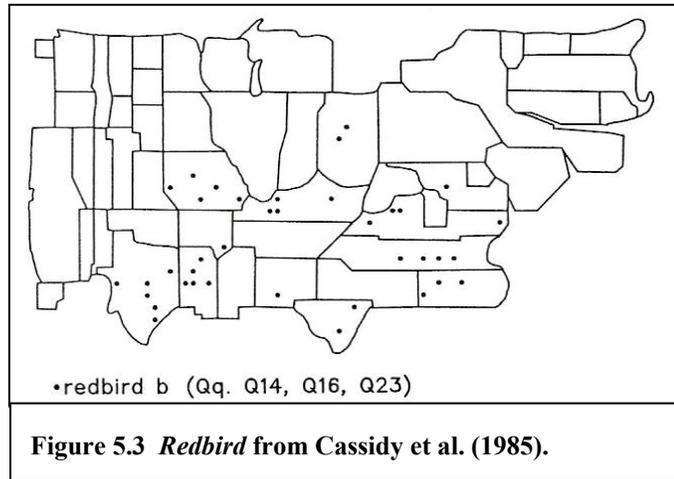
The rationale for the name *pop-a-leaf moccasin* rests on the characterization of the snake as extremely alert and ready to bite (or *pop*) anything that moves, including a leaf that either falls or blows in the wind. This aggressive depiction does not rely on the actual character of the snake, but does indicate an awareness of this animal based on the proliferation of *poplar leaf moccasin* snake bite incidents. According to Braswell et. al, copperheads are “...not aggressive...[but]...inflict perhaps 90 percent of all venomous snakebites in North Carolina. Most bites result from stepping on or touching the snake” (19). For this reason, it is more likely that the snake initially gained its regional name *poplar leaf moccasin* due to the markings that render it indistinguishable among leaves or as *DARE* states “[b]ecause its triangular head resembles a poplar leaf” (282). In either case, since this type of snake is responsible for the majority of snake bites, *Poplar leaf* could then be reanalyzed as *pop a leaf* through folk etymology to reflect this perceived antagonistic disposition and rapid action. However, regardless of causality, both variations are not only present in contemporary usage but characterize Bertie English.

As for other regional names for plants and animals that are used in Bertie, there are many instances of Southern terms that have been documented in Bertie English. Just as

Carver states, “A cardinal is called a *red bird* for obvious reasons” (113).

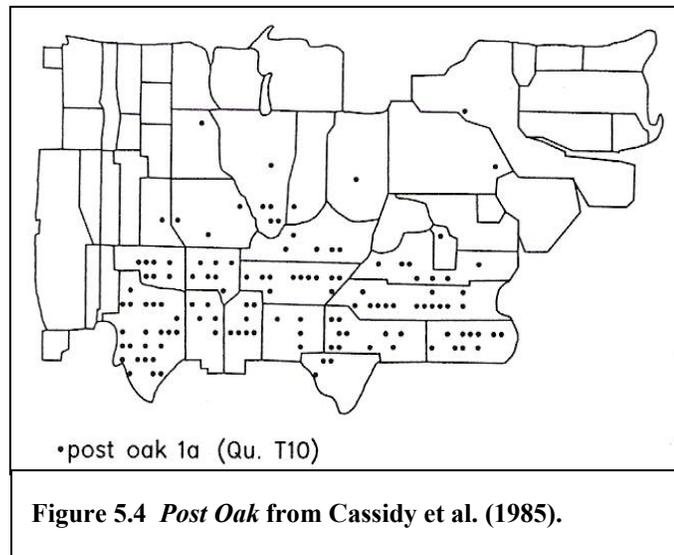
Although DARE does document the usage of redbird in North Carolina and throughout the South, the term is also listed as in use in some

Southern settled areas the Midwest



such as southern Illinois as well, as is indicated in Figure 5.3. In addition, Bertie residents use the term *post oak* in the same way that Carver describes for “...any of several American oaks with moisture resistant wood suitable for fence posts...” (113). Figure 5.4 shows that *post oak*

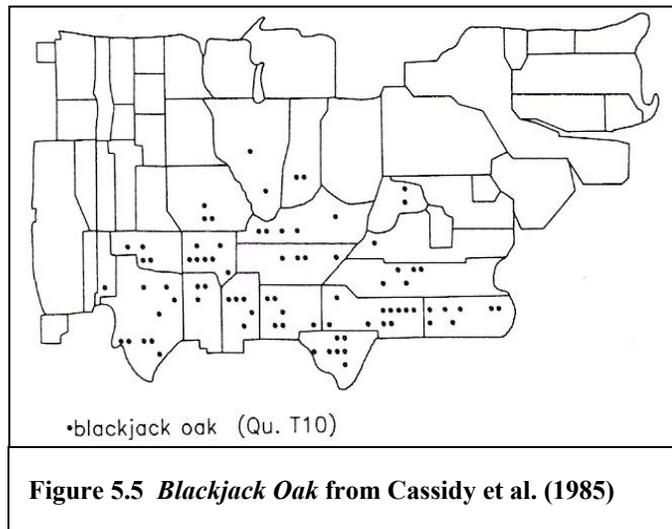
oak is chiefly a Southern lexical variety which supports the instance of its use in Bertie County. In addition, Bertie residents also have a regional name for another type of oak tree. As Eliason (1956) reports in *Tarheel Talk*, *blackjack* is used as far back as 1831 in Rutherford,



North Carolina (260). Although Eliason cannot provide any reason for why this type of oak tree is called a *blackjack* (135), Bertie speakers claim that the shape of the leaves resembles a club. This, however, is likely a folk etymology that attempts to explain an already existing

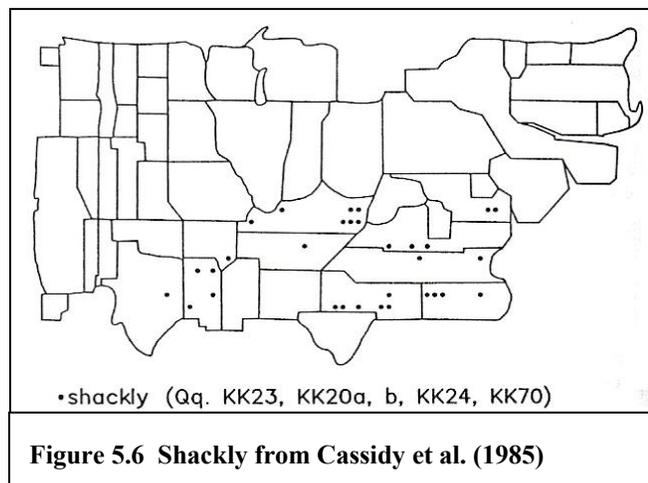
term as Eliason suggests that there is a connection between Scotch-Irish and blackjacks (136).

In addition, *DARE*, as shown in Figure 5.5 reports the usage of Blackjack as widely distributed throughout the South and Southern Midlands, but with most instances of use documented in western North Carolina.



Aside from words depicting plants and animals, Bertie lexicon also includes regional terms that were once widespread but have since retreated. The term *airish* is often used in Bertie County to mean “chilly, cool” in the same way that Carver describes the term as used in the South (112). *DARE* states that “[t]his form is still current in Scots though obsolete in standard English” (28), but also qualifies it as representative of the South and Southern Midlands dialect varieties. Another term exhibiting a similar distribution and retreat is

shackly. As a term meaning something that is shaky or rickety and bearing resemblance to the word “ramshackle”, the usage of *shackly* documented in Bertie referred to a table that was shaky to the touch. *DARE* refers to this term as “formerly widespread, now



chiefly [found in the] South and Southern Midlands” (866). Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* documents this term as in use in Indiana as early as 1843 and labels it as non-

standard by designating it as “dialectal,” it is currently a feature of Southern dialects, as Figure 5.6 demonstrates.

Food items also represent lexical items that characterize Bertie English. For example, a popular snack referred to as “a *nab*” in Bertie County and elsewhere in eastern North Carolina is a packet of six orange-colored sandwich crackers. The orange cracker is cheese-flavored, but the filling of the sandwich is made of peanut butter. In general usage, the term *nab* refers to the specific brand, Toastchee—a registered trademark of the Lance Corporation. However, *nab* can also refer to other brand names of the same type of product as well. The name itself is reported by local residents as a shortened form of *Nabisco*—the company that is purported to have formerly made this type of cracker product. Although there is no evidence to support this claim of connection to the Nabisco Corporation, Mike Zlotnicki, in a January 15, 2004 column that ran in *The News and Observer* of Raleigh, makes a reference to the snack in his discussion of Sunday hunting: “What [allowing] Sunday hunting would do is... benefit the stores, gas stations and restaurants that cater to hunters in rural areas. The makers of nab crackers, Cheerwine and Vienna sausages wouldn't object, I'm sure.”

In addition to *nab* crackers, soft drink names also represent lexical variation that occurs in Bertie English. In this instance, however, there is ethnolinguistic alignment according to the word one chooses for this type of beverage. Respondents reported that two terms used for soft drinks in Bertie are *soda* and *drink*. *Soda*, which is used pan-regionally in the United States, is the form that is reported as generally used by African Americans in Bertie County. *Drink*, on the other hand, is used by speakers of both African American and European American backgrounds, but *drink* is the only term that is used by European Americans. *Soda* is seen to represent membership in the African American speech

community in Bertie. Since *soda* is a term that is more often found in the northeastern portions of the United States, the proliferation of *soda* as used by African Americans very likely represents a lexical parallel to the phonetic phenomenon of backing /o/ and /u/ vowels in African American Bertie English. This linguistic alignment represents exposure to dialect patterns that go beyond the geographic confines of Bertie County and display membership in a spread-out speech community resulting from post-War outmigration patterns.

However, this pattern does not account for all lexical ethnolinguistic alignment. As for other terms whose usage signifies membership in a specific ethnic speech community, a middle-aged female of European American background, when asked for terms any special words that were used in Bertie, supplied *knee baby* with the qualification that it was mostly used by “black folks”. *Knee baby*, in this instance, refers to the next-to-youngest child in the family who is generally a toddler—not the baby in your arms, but the one at your knees. *DARE* defines this item succinctly: “a child who is no longer the youngest in the family” (240) and continues to describe the usage of *knee baby* as a dialect term found in the South—especially in North Carolina—and “now especially frequent among Black speakers” (240). The use of the verb *stay* to signify “to live or reside” although not limited to African Americans, also generally is seen as representative of African American speech in Bertie County. This example, however, does not have any citations that support this as a real phenomenon beyond the opinion of certain speakers.

The lexical items presented in this discussion present qualitative data provided through ethnographic research. As such, they demonstrate not only the character of Bertie life, but also serve to show the combination of lexical items that Bertie English shares with neighboring dialects along with those that it uniquely exhibits. As such, the pattern of word

usage in Bertie County exhibits a shared history with a variety of neighboring dialects, but the resulting composite is exclusively indicative of Bertie English. In addition, the data collected not only document local lexical variation along ethnic lines, but are largely confirmed by documented cases in lexicographical literature.

6. Conclusion

As this work has shown, Bertie County is an isolated and economically depressed community in the Coastal Plain of North Carolina that exhibits a unique combination of linguistic features that connect it with a variety of neighboring dialect areas. The sociohistorical processes that shaped the development of the county still inform social relations. This is not only witnessed in the differences in production of vowels by Bertie speakers of both African American and European American backgrounds, but is also demonstrated in the use of lexical items that help in identifying a speaker's ethnic identity. In addition, the analysis of both lexical items and sociophonetic features presents a trajectory of change in that the words and pronunciations that typically distinguished Bertie speech as different from surrounding areas are eroding in apparent time.

At the opening of this work the situation of Bertie County's topography was described as geographically isolating. As Britain (2004) in his discussion of Giddens (1984) points out, topography itself does not cause linguistic variation or alignment, but rather, the way topography affects communication does impact how linguistic areas are bounded (604). As such, Bertie County was formerly more accessible to Piedmont Virginia because of contiguity and more isolated from the Southern banks of the Roanoke because of Dismal Swamp-like pocosins and wetlands more than the river itself. In fact, during colonial times, when water was the main conduit of transport and communication, residents of Bertie County found themselves tightly allied to points north and east. In contrast, Bertie County during the twentieth century has seen its ties of affiliation shift from East to West and from Virginia to North Carolina. With improved land transportation and communication, previous forms of social interaction are being replaced by increased regional mobility and reduced local

autonomy and individualism. At the same time, fieldwork interviews have revealed that residents of Bertie County are increasingly forced, because of post-World War II sociological trends towards depopulation of rural areas, to shop and seek entertainment outside their county—especially in the coastal plain city of Greenville. Also, most citizens report that they find themselves or family members and friends working outside the county due to the reduction in farm ownership and agricultural employment and the ever shrinking manufacturing base in Bertie County. The flow of workers is increasingly shifting to the South of the Roanoke River, adding insult to injury for locally owned businesses within the county.

In light of these developments, this study frames the importance of not only recognizing and recording the features of Bertie speech, but also the necessity of understanding it in the context of the dialect area convergence and the sociohistorical setting in which it exists. Moreover, the findings here add to the store of linguistic knowledge by providing findings from an outer Coastal Plains bi-ethnic community. This analysis of Bertie County English shows that variation occurs across age and ethnicity not only through demonstration of sociophonetic patterns involving the backing or fronting of vowels, but also by through analysis of lexical items used by residents of Bertie. While this analysis marks a return to inquiry into lexical items of eastern North Carolina, further work must be done, especially in isolating lexical items that indicate a trajectory of change. This research therefore also addresses the fact that work in the Coastal Plain region of North Carolina must be continued to help flesh out a more complete linguistic picture of the state and region.

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