SPEAKING
FROM THE
HEARTLAND
The Midland Vowel System
of Kansas City

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Publication of the American Dialect Society 103
Supplement to American Speech, Volume 93
For Shelley, William, and Emily
This book exists thanks to the generosity of many people. Above all, I am indebted to the anonymized interviewees who gave their time for my weird research project, and to the friends, family, and kind acquaintances who helped recruit interviewees.

I am similarly indebted to Matthew J. Gordon. This book is a substantial revision of my dissertation, which Matt supervised. I am grateful to him for introducing me to sociolinguistics, for guiding my emergence into the field, and for continuing to be a mentor, advocate, and friend.

I am thankful to many friends and colleagues for their support at various stage of this project and during my early career. Among them are Sharon Black, Martha D. Patton, Martha Townsend, Vicki Carstens, Claire Horisk, and Michael Marlo at the University of Missouri; Gregory Richter at Truman State University; Michael Hobbs, Richard Black, and Richard Sonnenmoser at Northwest Missouri State University; and Jo Angouri, Tony Liddicoat, Catherine Gordon, Ema Ushioda, and Helen Spencer-Oatey at the University of Warwick. I am grateful to Robert Bayley for his willingness to consider my overlong and ungainly dissertation for PADS, and for helping steer it to its present form. I also thank the anonymous reviewers for feedback that greatly improved this project and Charles Carson for his supremely patient and precise editing. This work has also benefited from conversations with and inspiration from many of the people who are cited in the references section; I am fortunate to be in a field where you can know the people whose work you wish to emulate.

Most personally, I am grateful to my family. Thank you to my parents, Linda and Randy, and my mother-in-law, Cindy. Most of all, thank you to my wife and partner, Shelley. She has loved, encouraged, and supported me much more than I deserve.
NOTES ON NOTATION

Throughout most of this volume, I use lexical sets based on Wells (1982) to refer to phonemes. These sets use keywords to represent vowel classes so that, for instance, fleece indicates the phoneme /i/ in words like feet, meat, bean, and believe. I use this notational set for accessibility—it gives linguists and nonlinguists alike an immediate reference for the speech sounds under consideration in this research. This notational system also makes it very explicit when a token is being considered for its historical phonemic assignment versus its phonetic realization, in a way that might not be quite as clear with the conventional use of /i/ versus [i]. The vowel class keywords are set in small capital letters.

I have made some modifications to the sets in Wells (1982) for this research. First, based on patterns general to many American Englishes (and described as such in Wells 1982), I do not include his vowel classes that are based on English “Received Pronunciation” and are not present in Kansas City English. These include the bath and cloth classes, which for most Americans are part of the trap and thought classes, respectively. Wells (1982) also recognizes the conditioning effect of following /r/ on vowels to create several subsets (e.g., force is goat followed by /r/); following this model, I created several novel lexical sets to represent vowels in specific phonetic environments of interest. These include front short vowels with following nasal consonants (e.g., kin is kit followed by a nasal consonant) and allophones of price in different following voicing environments. I have assigned keywords to these novel lexical sets that pattern orthographically after the Wells (1982) lexical sets of which they are allophones (e.g., I use den to mimic the spelling of Wells’s dress class to make it maximally transparent that the allophones within the den set are historically assigned to the dress class).

Table A lists lexical sets and their International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) equivalents. It also lists the corresponding notations from The Atlas of North American English (Labov, Ash, and Bobger 2006; abbreviated ANAE throughout this book) and from the machine-readable ARPAbet used by The CMU Pronouncing Dictionary (Lenzo 2013).
The label Kansas City may present some confusion, since it can refer to either one of two adjacent cities across the Missouri-Kansas border or to the general metropolitan area in both states. I use Kansas City to refer to the metropolitan region, KCMO for the specific city of Kansas City, Missouri, the anchor city for area, and KCK for Kansas City, Kansas, a smaller city on the Kansas side of the border. These labels are consistent with local usages.

Interviewees are referred to by a pseudonym and their birth year. Where interviews from members of the same family are included in this study, each interviewee in the family is given a common last initial. For example, Peyton-D-1993 and Elly-D-1999 are brother and sister and their
interviews are both included in this data, while Bethany-1989 is unrelated to any other interviewee.

I frequently use linear models throughout this work. The outputs of these models can be used to estimate vowel measurements with the following formula:

\[ y = (\text{coefficient} \times x) + \text{intercept} \]

The intercept and coefficient values are outputs of the linear models. In regressions that estimate vowel measurements for categories (e.g., for social conditioning in table 3.1), \( x = 1 \). In these cases, a vowel measurement in a given category can be calculated by adding the coefficient and intercept together. In regressions that compare two numerical vectors (e.g., the equation that corresponds to figure 4.2), entering a value for \( x \) will provide an estimated value for \( y \). In these cases, a formant measurement can be calculated for a specified year (or for a formant measurement from a structurally related vowel, as in the equation corresponding to figure 4.3).

Single-point measurements of F1 and F2 are plotted frequently throughout this book. When tokens are plotted from the casual speech portion of interviews, these vowel plots often show hundreds of tokens. In the print version of this book, to avoid obscuring the plotted points, tokens are not labeled. In the online version (http://doi.org/10.1215/00031283-7318966), these tokens are color coded, and more detailed versions with the tokens labeled are available in the supplementary materials. Other graphics in the online version are also color coded to aid analysis. Finally, many vowel plots show a dashed horizontal line through 650 Hz in F1 and/or a dashed vertical line through 1550 Hz in F2. These are intended to represent approximate midpoints in vowel space and to provide a common reference between various vowel plots.