NZE short front vowels in contact situations: a comparison of non-mixers, dialect experiencers and interlopers[1]

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This paper focuses on the short front vowels /I/ and /e/ in New Zealand English referred to here by their standard lexical sets as the KIT and DRESS vowels. The paper analyses the effects of dialect exposure on these vowels in the speech of three types of New Zealanders: non-mixers (NM), dialect experiencers (DE) and interlopers (INT). NM are the ideal traditional-type participants in sociolinguistic studies: people born and raised in their current speech community who have never lived outside of it. They have no prolonged direct contact with any other English dialect. DE are also born and raised in their current speech community, but they have lived elsewhere for over a year some time since the formative age of 14. Labov (1972: 30), in his study of Martha's Vineyard, notes that some residents of Martha's Vineyard had attended college in other parts of the USA. These individuals would be labelled as DE. The third group, INT, are individuals who moved into the area after the age of 14. INT are second dialect learners. They were not born, nor were they raised in their current speech community. Table 1 summarises the similarities and differences between these three groups. It shows that NM are free from substantial direct contact with other varieties, while DE and INT have been involved in different types of language contact situations. Also, DE temporarily moved out of their current speech community, while INT have moved in.

It was expected that the NM would be the most typical members of a speech community, having the fewest outside contacts. They were expected to sound less like people from other places (Chambers 1995: 85-88). It was also expected that INT would show the most irregular use of the vowels as outsiders to the speech community who moved into the area well beyond the threshold age for the acquisition of phonological rules (Chambers 1995: 87, Long 1990). Chambers argues that insiders, not interlopers, normally lead in sound change, and this was expected to be the case here. I was uncertain what to expect with DE as there are very few studies that examine the effect of temporary experience abroad on a speaker's language use. There were two radically different possibilities. One might first envisage that DE could have less advanced features of NZE as a result of either attempting to sound less like a NZE speaker, or attempting to sound more like a non-NZE speaker. In both of these scenarios, one might expect DEs to be conservative NZE speakers and raise fewer of their DRESS vowels and centralise and lower fewer of their KIT vowels. A second possibility is that DE, in an attempt to integrate back into the community, would hypercorrect and produce more advanced

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variants. This would mean that DEs would raise more of their DRESS vowels, and centralise and lower more of their KIT vowels than NMs. Labov (1972: 30-32), for example, found that speakers would had lived outside of Martha's Vineyard sometimes had more of the stereotypical centralised diphthongs than those who had lived all of their lives on the island.

The present paper looks at data taken from a very brief large-scale taped rapid survey carried out in Auckland between January and December 1997. In this survey, individuals were approached in public places by a native NZE interviewer with whom they had had no previous acquaintance. The interviews were recorded on a professional DAT recorder. In order for an individual to be eligible to participate in the survey, they had to be currently residing in Auckland and self-identify as an Aucklander. The study aimed to elicit data from 1000 individuals. In the end, information was collected from 1243 respondents because many of the individuals in the first 1000 surveys could not be considered ideal respondents, for reasons detailed below. The present paper analyses the first 1000 surveys.[2] A large number of participants was possible because of the short nature of the survey. The interviewer asked four questions each requiring one-word responses. These responses contained one token of the KIT vowel and one token of the DRESS vowel. The DRESS token occurred in response to the question: 'What letter of the alphabet comes before the letter 't'?' and the KIT token occurred in response to the question: 'Complete this sentence: Dogs bark, cats meow and snakes (hiss).' Both vowels appeared before /s/ in the single word responses 's' and 'hiss'. After the interview was completed, personal histories were collected and analysed. The background information sheet requested details on suburb and history of residence, time spent outside of Auckland, age, gender, ethnicities, and occupation.

The variables were analysed impressionistically. To increase the reliability of the transcription, the data was coded on two separate occasions. When there were differences, the data was excluded from the study. For the present purposes, the vowels were coded as having three separate variants, described below.

KIT vowel labels	**DRESS vowel labels**
(1) Short (I)	(1) Raised (e)
(2) Centralised (I)	(2) Slightly raised (e)
(3) Lowered (I)	(3) Not raised (e)

When the KIT vowel was front or slightly retracted, it was coded as (1), when it was centralised, it received a (2), and when it was both centralised

[2] Only 830 responses are examined here. In order to ensure that the same speakers were analysed for both the DRESS and the KIT vowel, speakers were excluded if one of their responses was invalid. Reasons for exclusions included the following: they did not answer one question correctly, their response was inaudible or there were descrepancies between the first and second codings for one of the variables.

and lowered it was given a (3). Short (e) was analysed as having a raised variant (1), a slightly raised variant (2), and not raised variant (3). The phonetic symbols for each of these are presented diagrammatically above. A more detailed examination of the variables suggests that raised (e) is more complex than described here, having both raised and centralised variants (Bell 1997a: 7). Although centralised variants also appear in my data, they are not analysed as separate variants in this study.

Although the participant selection criteria were generally successful, a number of speakers claimed to be Aucklanders who were born outside New Zealand. These INT constituted a diverse group coming from a wide range of communities. They were all fluent speakers of English before arriving in New Zealand, although not all of them were native speakers. In all cases, this meant possible interference either from their first dialect or their first language. They were similar in that they had typically spent ten years or more in the country (some had spent up to 20) and had not lived elsewhere since their arrival. All were 14 years or older at their time of arrival in New Zealand. They formed an unusual group of interlopers in that they wanted to be included in a study on New Zealand English and felt that they were eligible to participate despite subtle attempts by the interviewers to dissuade them. Their reactions suggested that they did not consider themselves to be outsiders or marginal members of New Zealand society.

Personal histories of the New Zealand-born participants showed that many of them were born and raised in New Zealand, but had lived abroad for a number of years after the age of 14. On average, these participants had spent 2-3 years working or studying abroad in a wide range of countries. This paper looks at how these two groups of speakers, who were initially excluded from the study, shed light on the processes involved in language contact and the NZE short front vowel shift.

Table 1: Types of Participants

	Non-Mixers	Dialect Experiencers	Interlopers
Born in Present Community	✓	✓	
Raised in Present Community	✓	✓	
Prolonged Exposure to Another Dialect		✓	✓
Currently Living in Speech Community	✓	✓	✓

As the purpose of the original study was not to examine the different groups of speakers, the numbers of participants in each group varies. The present study examines data from those respondents who produced tokens of both the KIT and the DRESS vowel. This included 620 NM, 125 DE, and 67 INT. The number of INT is rather small for two reasons. First, we tried to persuade these speakers not to participate in the study, and second, many of the non-

native speakers in the INT group provided answers to the questions that did not contain the KIT vowel. The analysis is based on data from individuals who provided tokens of both short (e) and short (I).

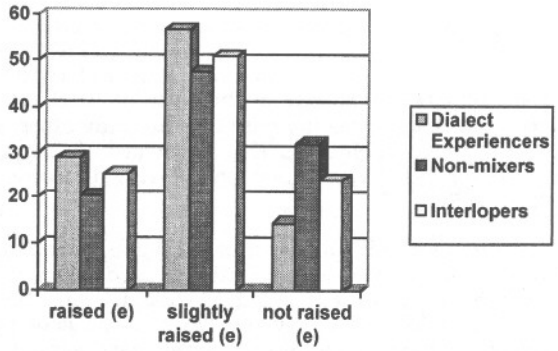
Short (e)

The three groups are remarkably similar in their use of short (e). Most speakers, in all three groups, use a slightly raised variant rather than a low-mid or high one, as illustrated in Figure 1. This is similar to findings from other NZE research on the DRESS vowel (Bell 1997a, Trudgill, Gordon and Lewis 1997, Batterham 1995).

Although all three groups in this survey prefer the slightly raised variant, they show slight quantitative differences in their use of the different variants of short (e). NM have the fewest raised variants (20.5%), DE have the most raised variants (28.8%), and INT fall in between (25.4%). The same pattern emerges when we examine the slightly raised (intermediate) variant of the DRESS vowel in Figure 1. NM have 47.4%, DE have 56.8%, and the INT are again in the middle at 50.7%. The position of the INT is unexpected. Although they are second dialect learners who were born and raised outside of the speech community, their use of the DRESS vowel does not mark them as marginal members of the speech community. The similarity between INT and native New Zealanders may have had something to do with the type of interlopers who chose to participate in the survey. These participants self-identified themselves as Aucklanders and felt eligible to complete a survey on New Zealand English. They may, as a result, have been more motivated to sound more like a NZE speaker. This initial similarity needs to be explored in more detail. It is also possible that these similarities may not appear in a more detailed interview.

Figure 1: Variants of the DRESS vowel among three groups of New Zealanders

	NM		DE		INT	
RAISED (e)	127	20.5%	36	28.8%	17	25.4%
SLIGHTLY RAISED (e)	294	47.4%	71	56.8%	34	50.7%
NOT RAISED (e)	199	32.1%	18	14.4%	16	23.9%
TOTAL	620	100%	125	100%	67	100%



The results in Figure 1 show that DE use more of the completely raised variants (28.8%) than NM (20.5%) and they also use more of the slightly raised variants (56.8% vs. 47.4%). Overall, DE in this rapid survey appear to select more advanced variants of the DRESS vowel than NM. Dialect contact does not appear to decrease the use of salient features of NZE short (e). Rather, it seems, to have increased it. It appears, for this variable, that both INT and DE may hypercorrect to show their allegiance to the NZ speech community.

Short (I)

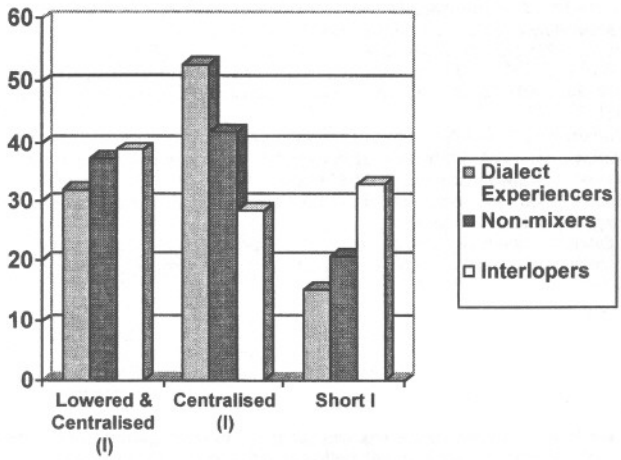
The two groups of native speakers (NM and DE) are remarkably similar in their use of the KIT vowel. Both groups show little preference for the front variant of the KIT vowel (20.8% vs. 15.2%), labelled as Short (I) in Figure 2. DE and NM both prefer centralised variants of the KIT vowel, and both groups show a preference for a raised centralised variant close to barred I. The relatively low occurrence of the front variant of the KIT vowel and the frequent use of the raised centralised variant have been reported in other studies of NZE vowels (Batterham 1995, Bell 1997b, Trudgill et. al 1997). Of the two centralised variants of the KIT vowel, DE show more of a preference for a raised centralised variant than NM do (52.8% vs. 41.8%). NMs have a slightly higher percentage of the lowered centralised variant of the KIT vowel than their DE counterparts (37.4% vs 32%). However, DE are also the group with the smallest number of front variants (see Figure 2). DE do not use more front vowel variants; they just use more raised centralised variants. For the KIT vowel, short-term dialect contact seems to have a slight homogenising effect on the DE.

INT pattern differently from both NM and DE. Their vowels vary greatly, with similar percentages of the short front vowel (32.8%) and low centralised schwa-like variants (38.8%). See Figure 2. Their greater use of short [I] is not surprising as one would expect that some of these speakers are simply

retaining the variant in their first dialect. However, their preference for a centralised lowered variant (rather than a raised centralised variant) suggests that these INTs may again have a preference for extreme forms rather than intermediate ones. Horvath (1991), in a study of Greek and Italian immigrants in Australia, found that her second-generation Greek immigrants chose more extreme vowel variants than the Australian Anglo-Celtics. It may be that advanced variants of variables, particularly salient ones, may be selected by certain groups of immigrants as they try to find a place in the speech community. It is also clear that INT do not form a cohesive group. They differ greatly in their articulation of the KIT vowel, and they do not appear to pattern like the other members of the speech community.

Figure 2: Variants of the kit vowel among three groups of New Zealanders

	NM		DE		INT	
SHORT (I)	129	20.8%	19	15.2%	22	32.8%
CENTRALISED (I)	259	41.8%	66	52.8%	19	28.4%
LOWERED & CENTRALISED (I)	232	37.4%	40	32%	26	38.8%
TOTAL	620	100%	125	100%	67	100%



Conclusion

This study examines single tokens of a variable collected in a rapid survey amongst three different groups of speakers residing in Auckland, New Zealand. The results show the three types of Aucklanders have many similarities in the use of variants of the two vowels. For example, all three groups prefer slightly raised variants of the DRESS vowel. The results also point to some differences. The results suggest that when salient variants are not stigmatised, there may be a tendency for speakers with outside contacts to have more advanced variants of some variables than speakers with no such contacts. In this study, both DE and INT use more advanced variants of the DRESS vowel. NMs, the traditional participants in sociolinguistic studies, do not use the advanced variants of the DRESS vowel to the same extent. The results are less conclusive for short (I), but even here there is no evidence that dialect contact decreases the use of NZE variants. These results suggest that researchers should place more emphasis on the effects of short-term dialect contact. Perhaps when considering the origins and spread of sound changes we should not only consider the origin of the speakers, but we should also pay attention to the population movements of members of the speech community. Research on commuters suggests that these speakers bring in sound changes into the community (Milroy 1992:188). It is also possible that in some instances, DE together with INT may be responsible, in part, for the advancement of sound changes already present in the community, possibly through hypercorrection or accommodation to perceived local norms. Although mobility is generally viewed as a central homogenising force, some variables mix well, while others do not appear to mix at all.

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