INTIHAR, KENDRA DAY. Dialect Preservation and Leveling in Hickory, North Carolina. (Under the direction of Erik Thomas)

The Southern Vowel Shift is showing reversal in many cities in the southern United States. This paper explores the preservation and leveling of the dialect in the Hickory, North Carolina area in an effort to draw a comparison to other major North Carolina cities where research has been done on the topic of SVS reversal. The research conducted in the present study attempts to explore dialect preservation and change in Hickory, NC and the potential adoption of vowels similar to those found in more urban areas with possible relationships to age, gender, and socioeconomic status with special consideration to the following:

Generation
- Do vowels become more regional from one generation to the succeeding?
- Is leveling equally prevalent in males and females within a given generation?

SES
- Are there particular socioeconomic groups where vowels are more/less regional?
- Are Hickory vowels ever preserved as social capital?
- Do speakers ever consciously (or subconsciously) shift toward SAE to distance themselves from or align themselves with particular social groups?

Accommodation
- To what degree does accommodation/convergence occur when Hickory speakers are paired with speakers of other regional dialects?
- Is there variability in accommodation inter-generationally?
- Are younger generations/males/females more likely to accommodate toward or away from SAE?

**Gender**

- Are males or females more likely to preserve Hickory vowels?
- Are there differences in social capital between males and females and between different peer groups?

In addition to using the preexisting corpus of recordings for this research, new recordings have been made and contributed. Recordings from twenty-two (22) speakers have been included in the data analyses presented here.

Findings indicate that while Hickory is one of North Carolina’s larger “small cities,” it has not experienced the same degree of non-Southern dialect contact as the major metropolitan cities in North Carolina. Because of this, there is no current evidence of the reversal of the Southern Vowel Shift in Hickory. The present research will explore the preservation of the regional dialect as it relates to a myriad of tested variables.