

## General principles of vowel change

Labov's principles of vowel change are recounted here as central to many of the vowel shifts of English.

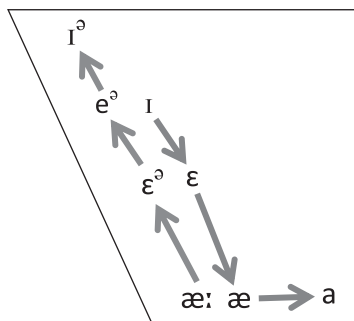
- I. Tense or long vowels rise = peripheral vowels rise.
- II. Lax or short vowels fall = non-peripheral vowels fall.
- III. Back vowels move to the front.
- IV. In chain shifting, low non-peripheral vowels become peripheral.
- V. In chain shifting, high peripheral vowels become non-peripheral before peripheral glides.
- VI. Peripherality is defined relative to the vowel system as a whole.
- VII. Mergers expand at the expense of distinctions.
- VIII. Mergers initiate pull shifts and inhibit push shifts. (Labov 1992: 10f)

### Examples:

#### Understanding Principles I and II

What we see in the more recent Southern Shifts (esp. AusE, NZE, SAfE) is that short, lax vowels become non-peripheral and fall (Principle II). This seems to apply to the Canadian Shift and the California Shift, but not the US South.

- what does “lax” mean? – less muscle tension of the tongue
- which vowels does this apply to? – front /I/ and /ε/



**blue:** Southern Shift (USA)  
**maroon:** Southern Shift (GB, Southern Hemisphere, Canada, California) In the American South short vowels become peripheral and rise according to Principle I.