

The Labovian Carousel – A good fit for all sorts of Dutch

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Within Dutch vowel systems, the long segments – monophthongs and diphthongs – can be described as stages in a chain shift. According to Labov (1994:116, 283v) vowel chain shifts generally adhere to the following principles:

- I. In chain shifts, long vowels rise.
- II. In chain shifts, short vowels fall.
- IIa. (follows from II) In chain shifts, the nuclei of upgliding [= closing] diphthongs fall.
- III In chain shifts, back vowels move to the front.

In line with observations in Dutch and German historical dialects, the rise of long vowels (principle I) tends to involve a stage of a centering diphthong.

These principles can be combined into a robust model of long vowel change, that has proved particularly apt for Dutch historical vowel change, as far as spontaneous internal changes is concerned. The possible evolution of historical vowels in a chain shift describes (part of) a circular movement as it lowers and then possibly rises again, hence my term Labovian Carousel. I will show the application of Labovian Carousels as a model for vowel change on a range of historical West Germanic vowels to their reflexes in the current Dutch dialects.

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