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Acquisition of glottalization by native and non-native Vermont children

Previous studies of glottalization in Vermont have argued that although many features of the Vermont dialect involving vowels appear to be fading, glottal stop replacement of /t/ seems to be holding steady, or possibly increasing. The present poster explores this hypothesis further by comparing the speech native Vermont children to that of those who have moved to Vermont from other parts of the United States.

Nineteen 12- and 13-year-olds (9 boys and 10 girls) were audio taped while reading a passage and word list, both containing numerous opportunities for glottal stop replacement. The informants were divided into three groups: 1. Vermonters with at least one parent native to Vermont; 2. Vermonters with both parents from outside Vermont; 3. Speakers who had moved to Vermont within the last 4 years. Tokens for all speakers were coded impressionistically and analyzed using Goldvarb 2.0.

Results were as follows: There was a significant difference in the glottal replacement shown by both groups of native speakers (1 and 2) and those who had moved to Vermont from elsewhere. However, in spite of the fact that they were showing less of the overall replacement, the non-native group followed all of the constraints and patterns of the native Vermonters. That is, they, like the native speakers, were more likely to use glottal stop in the following environments:

- Word-final, as opposed to medial, position in words.
- Following vowels, liquids, and nasals rather than obstruents.
- Preceding vowels and liquids as opposed to obstruents, nasals and vowels.
- Monomorphemic words over regular past tense verbs.

Gender and style (reading passage vs. word list) were not significant.

From the above results, it was concluded that although the “new” Vermont speakers were less likely to replace /t/ with glottal stop, they were, nonetheless, acquiring this feature and following the same patterns as native Vermont speakers. The similarity between those with and without Vermont parents suggest that this feature is more easily learned than, for example, the Philadelphia short-a examined by (Payne, 1980; Roberts, 1997) or vowel backing in Southern England English (Chambers, 1992). In addition, the finding that glottal stop replacement appears to be a robust feature of Vermont speech, unlike most of the vowel patterns in Vermont, supports the assertion that consonant dialect features may be less vulnerable to leveling processes than vowel features (Milroy, 2003).

References:

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