

/-t d/ deletion in Japanese-Canadian English

Junko Hibiya

International Christian University

This poster presents some results of a synchronic study of the nature of linguistic variation in Japanese-Canadian English with a particular focus on the transition between the second- and third-generation speakers.

More than three decades of empirical research has repeatedly shown that /-t, d/ deletion, is a general feature of North American English (Labov 1989). It is conditioned by the following linguistic internal constraints.

- a. if the syllable containing /-t, d/ is stressed
- b. consonant cluster length
- c. the phonetic features of the segment preceding /-t, d/
- d. the phonetic features of the segment following /-t, d/
- e. the grammatical feature of /-t, d/
- f. if the segments preceding and following /-t, d/ agree in voicing

The tape-recorded speech of ten second-generation (five males and five females) and two third-generation (both males) Japanese-Canadian individuals living in British Columbia and Ontario is investigated for this feature. The data were elicited from sociolinguistic interviews conducted in 1991, 1995, 1997 and 2002 by the present investigator in English. These speakers are located and recruited by means of the “friend of a friend” method (Milroy 1980). Each interview lasted for one hour to two.

All relevant tokens were extracted from the recording and coded showing deletion or retention of the final apical stop. They were initially coded for the above six factors to examine the relationship between /-t, d/ deletion in Japanese-Canadian and other varieties of English. Data entry and data analysis were carried out using Gold Varb.

The variable rule analyses indicate that the phonetic feature of the following segment and the grammatical status affect the process for all twelve speakers. The remaining four did not reach the statistical significance level of $p < .05$ among the second-generation speakers.

Japanese-Canadian English spoken by second-generation individuals both follows and diverges from the general English pattern. With respect to the effect of the following segment, it approximates the pan-English pattern, supporting the influence of the sonority hierarchy. However, the data also revealed that the second-generation speakers are not uniform in the ordering of grammatical constraints. Five speakers delete the regular past tense marker and a final monomorphemic stop almost at the same rate. Three speakers contrast sharply with the above five; they do not diverge from the general pattern. We also find the expected phonological interference in the data of one second-generation individual who was sent back to Japan at the age of one and started to acquire English as a second language after his return to Canada at the age of thirteen.

The Japanese-Canadian population before 1942 was mostly concentrated in close-knit communities in British Columbia. The three speakers who exhibit a remarkable similarity to other native English speakers are exceptional in this respect; all of them grew up in a non-Japanese environment where they had ample opportunities to acquire the highly systematic variable system.

Due to a rapid language shift that took place after World War II, the two third-generation speakers of the present study are monolingual speakers of English. They follow the pan-English pattern.