

Second dialect acquisition: the case of /r/ Christine Berger, University of Toronto

Now that mobility has become very common in modern societies, children of transplanted families are faced with the challenge of acquiring either an entirely new language or a different dialect of the same language when moving from one region to another. The current paper investigates the process of second dialect acquisition in the speech of three children transplanted from Ottawa (Canada) to York (England). The children were recorded over a period of six years while they were playing or doing crafts in the presence of their Canadian English-speaking parents (The KID-Corpus, Tagliamonte & Molfenter 2007).

Informed by Chambers' (1992) principles of second dialect acquisition and Tagliamonte and Molfenter's (2007) study on the elimination of T-voicing, e.g. **pudding** → **putting**, in the same corpus, this paper aims to shed more light on the complex acquisition process that children go through when they acquire a second dialect. Multivariate analysis of about 5300 tokens permits statistical modelling of the children's shift from a fully rhotic Canadian accent (CE) to a non-rhotic British accent (BE), i.e., e.g. 'heart' [hart] → [hɑ:t]. Which factors condition the choice of one variant to the other as the children gradually acquire the new dialect?

Interestingly, unlike T-voicing, a feature that the children manage to eliminate in favour of the British variants, they never fully achieve the local system, i.e. categorical r-lessness. One of the reasons that the children are not more successful may be because acquiring a new rule, i.e. r-less pronunciations (with its concomitants *linking* /r/ and *intrusive* /r/) (Hay & Sudbury 2005), is more complex than dropping an old one, i.e. T-voicing (Chambers 1992: 682-687). Nevertheless, the frequency of r-lessness increases steadily in real time resulting in a longitudinal state of variation. Throughout the whole period this variation is conditioned by a number of linguistic as well as sociolinguistic factors. Most striking is that the phonological conditioning is present from the earliest stages. Stress, position of /r/, as well as the following phonological environment are significant. /r/ tends to be dropped in unstressed syllables, most likely morpheme-finally and when it is followed by a glide. These underlying constraints remain the same throughout the six years. At the same time each child goes through different stages in the acquisition process, i.e. the *frequency* of r-lessness changes, revealing that there are more than universal phonological effects in operation. In pursuing an interpretation of these findings, I will discuss their implications for 2nd dialect acquisition generally, as well as for our understanding of the linguistic and social motivations for linguistic change.

Chambers, J.K. 1992. "Dialect Acquisition". *Language* 68. 683-705.

Hay, Jennifer & Andrea Sudbury. 2005. "How rhoticity became /r/-sandhi". *Language* 81.4: 799-823.

Tagliamonte, Sali & Sonja Molfenter. 2007. "How'd you get that accent? Acquiring a second dialect of the same language". *Language in Society*.