Consonant cluster reduction among S’gaw Karen refugees in North Carolina
A preliminary study of association with following phonetic environment, morphemic makeup

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Overview

Big Question: How does phonetic environment and morphemic sensitivity in Consonant Cluster Reduction (CCR) correlate with refugees’ L2 English?

Study: Data from sociolinguistic interviews with Karen refugees is used to examine the patterns in CCR

Conclusion: For 9 Karen second language learners of English in this preliminary study, CCR does not correspond with following phonetic environment or morphemic makeup, patterning closely with CCR in English creoles.

The Phenomenon: Consonant Cluster Reduction

Consonant cluster reduction (CCR) is a frequently analyzed pattern of English, occurring in every variety and shown to vary with linguistic and social factors. CCR occurs when speakers do not produce one or more consonants in a word-final cluster (e.g., “almas’ here” vs. “almost here”)

• Phenomenon of all varieties of English

• In native varieties of English, correlates with certain following phonetic environments and morphemic structures

• In sustained contact varieties, some sensitivity to these factors, while still reducing more overall

• English creoles constrain against almost all coda clusters

• Refugee communities allow for early observation of future sustained contact English varieties

What CCR patterns characterize the English of refugees to the United States?

The Problem

Wolfram (1985) studied Vietnamese refugees in America. Found that CCR rates correlated with morphemic makeup and following phonetic environment sensitivity within the first seven years of resettlement.

However, no studies have tried to replicate Wolfram’s work among other refugee populations.

Research Question and Study

How do rates of CCR among Karen refugees in Chapel Hill pattern with phonetic environment and morphemic makeup?

This study presents the preliminary results from 9 sociolinguistic interviews conducted with members of the Karen refugee community in Chapel Hill, NC, USA.

Methods

Interviews

9 total

5 Males | 4 Females

Ages: 18 – 53

Lengths of Residency: 1 – 9 yrs

14-30 minutes

Factors Recorded:

• Age of Resettlement

• Length of Residence

• Native Language:

• Personal History

• Cultural Traditions

• Immigration History

Topics:

• Following Phonetic Environment

• Morphemic Makeup

Analysis

Results:

No association between CCR and either following phonetic environment or morphemic makeup (p=.36, .59).

Further Research

Additional Interviews

This study represents the data produced by 9 out of 53 interviews

Length of Residence?

This morpho-phonological process shown by second language learners may have an effect on CCR rates.

Age of Resettlement?

Data from four locations; unequal ratio of females to males

Select References