

Consonant cluster reduction among S'gaw Karen refugees in North Carolina

A preliminary study of association with following phonetic environment, morphemic makeup

Lainey Miller | laineyhm@live.unc.edu | 336.314.2585

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. "almos' 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?

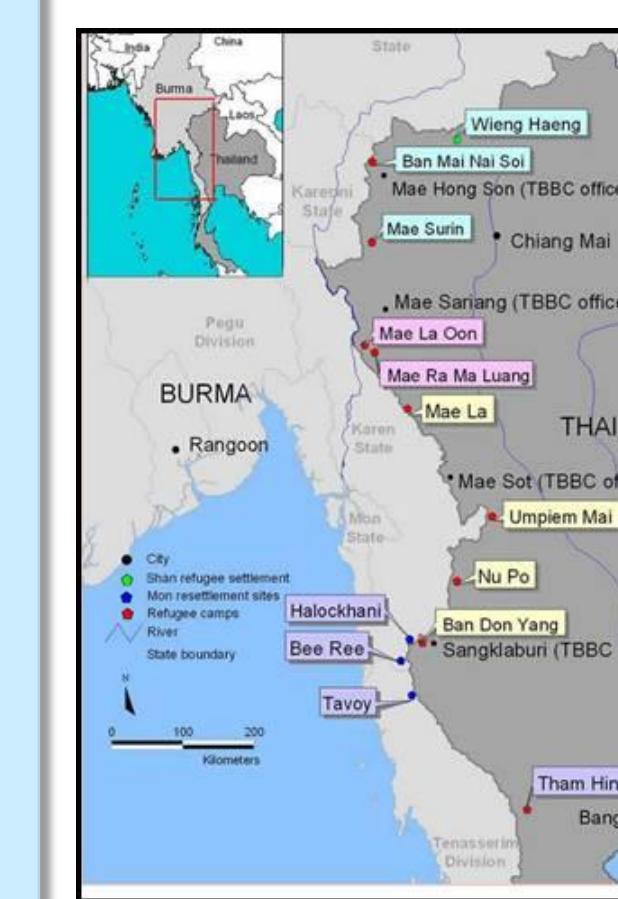
This study presents the preliminary results from 9 sociolinguistic interviews conducted with members of the Karen refugee community in Chapel Hill, NC, USA.

The Karen

Originate from Myanmar. Fled into Thailand from government persecution.

Thousands have resettled throughout the United States, primarily in the South and Midwest.

Expected to be a **long-term community** in the United States. Likely to develop a **new sustained-contact English variety**.



Native Language: S'gaw Karen
 • Tibeto-Burman language family (*Ethnologue, 2016*)
 • Coda clusters not allowed.

Initially, high rates of English CCR anticipated regardless of following phonetic environment.

Methods

Interviews

9 total

15 Males 14 Females

Ages: 18 – 53

Lengths of Residency: 1 – 9 yrs

14-30 minutes

Factors Recorded:
 Age of Resettlement
 Length of Residency

Topics:
 Immigration History
 Personal History
 Cultural Traditions

Coding

Transcribed in standard orthography

Followed Schreier (2005): Transcribed all non-function words (i.e. leaving out *just*) that were expected to end in a sequence of two consonantal segments.

Coded for:
 • Segmental Cluster Content
 • Following Phonetic Environment

Only clusters that met the following criteria were extracted for analysis:

1. Ended in a stop
2. Were not followed by a homorganic consonant
3. Ended in a stressed syllable

Analysis

...
 Type-token frequency control: first three instances of each word only

Cluster waveforms and spectrograms analyzed in ELAN.
 Four CCR rates were calculated for each interview:
 Pre-consonantal
 Pre-pausal
 Pre-vocalic
 Total

Pearson's Chi-Squared Test of Goodness of Fit

Results:

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

FOLL. ENV. $p=.36$	reduced	produced
pre-C 105	83%	17%
pre-# (pause) 73	75%	25%
pre-V 73	84%	16%

MORPH. MAKEUP $p=.59$	reduced	produced
BI 53	77%	23%
MO 198	82%	18%

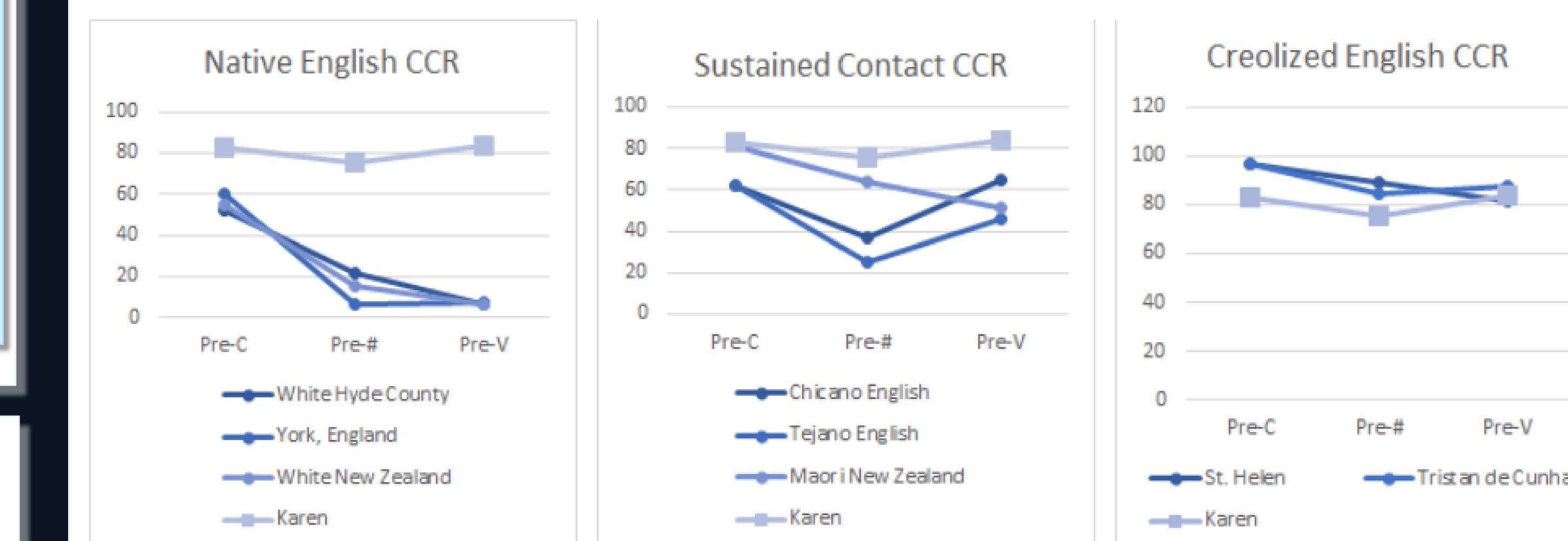
Conclusion:

Data most closely resembled creolized English varieties'

Results in comparison to Schreier's data

Schreier (2005) grouped the CCR rates of English contact varieties by contact history. The Karen data patterns most closely with English creoles.

Following Phonetic Environment



Morphemic Makeup



Further Research

Additional Interviews

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

Length of Residency?

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

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