The effect of length of residence on the phonetic accommodation to three English dialects

When an individual moves to a new area with a different dialect and takes on some of the phonetic characteristics of that new dialect, it is known as accommodation (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991). Accommodation is classified as short-term and long-term (Trudgill, 1986, p. 11) and Chambers (1992) and Trudgill (1986) explain that if short-term accommodations are repeated enough, then the effect becomes long term (Chambers, 1992, p.11). This suggests that for speakers who do tend to accommodate to the local norms, the longer they are in a particular region with more opportunities to accommodate, the greater the extent of the accommodation will be and the more likely these long term accommodations will appear in their speech after they have left the dialect area. However, does this pattern hold when the same individual has lived for several years in multiple dialect areas? The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between the amounts of time lived in a particular areas and the extent of accommodation in the production of stressed vowels in the speech of one Canadian with a very unique linguistic background.

The speaker in question has been in contact with four dialects of English for significant amounts of time. These English dialect regions include Canada for 36 years, New Zealand for 8 years, Southeast England for 14 years and Scotland for four-month periods, every year for 10 years. Each of these dialects have a unique vowel inventory which makes studying the extent of accommodation in the production of stressed vowels a suitable method.

The speaker is a professor at a university and is recorded while lecturing to gather as natural a speech sample as possible. The study has 18 hours of recorded data, which will be analyzed by isolating the stressed vowels and analyzing their first and second formants. Preliminary findings suggest that the speaker’s acoustic realization of certain vowels has shifted away from Canadian norms. Furthermore, the longer the subject spent in a dialect region, the more he accommodated to the phonetic qualities of that dialect.

This study moves beyond the qualities of Second Dialect Acquisition to the qualities of third and fourth dialect acquisition, which contributes to our understanding of the malleability of phonological systems and patterns of sound change.

References

