Local Identity, Accommodation Of The Outsider And Language Use In A Coastal Maine Community

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The local identity practices of speakers are not as straightforward as predicted (e.g. Labov 1972). Alongside linguistic considerations, social motivations may significantly affect a speaker’s selection of local variants. However, a speaker’s strategies and motivations to practice and maintain a local identity are often difficult to deduce. Here, I investigate the role of local feature maintenance for speakers living in a tourist-dependent community, where the need to accommodate the outsider is a matter of economic importance, building on work in Martha’s Vineyard (Labov 1963). My analyses rely on data collected from sociolinguistic interviews (N=12 speakers, 576 tokens) from native residents of Mount Desert Island, a post-insular tourist-dependent community.

I find a salient and locally identified feature of the community (post-vocalic /r/ drop) to be falling out of use, as predicted by findings in other /r/-less New England communities (Irwin and Nagy 2007). Although the feature is maintained to an extent in the older and middle generations, it has vanished from the youngest speakers of the community. Among the middle and older generation speakers, I found an interaction between capital score (i.e. whether a speaker’s economic livelihood was locally or non-locally dependent), speaker age and phonological considerations (e.g. vowel back-ness) significantly impacts variant choice. Based on this evidence, it appears that members of the Mount Desert Island speech community are abandoning a need to sound local in favour of adopting widespread regional changes towards a more standard variety – a trend often found in post-insular situations.

References

