

PASIFIKA ENGLISH IN NEW ZEALAND

The Pasifika population of New Zealand stands at 266,000, just under 7% of the country's total population (Statistics New Zealand, 2008). One in three Pasifika people live in Manukau City (South Auckland) and the population is very young, with 38% being under the age of fifteen. The four largest groups are Samoan, Cook Islands Māori, Tongan and Niuean. These communities appear to be undergoing a process of language shift from their Polynesian languages to English. The Pasifika Languages of Manukau Project (see Starks, 2005) found that half of the interviewees aged 15-24 had limited proficiency in their community language. For a young Pasifika person in NZ whose dominant language is English, there is the potential to project their ethnic identity through a distinctive way of speaking English. This could lead to the emergence of a Pasifika ethnolect in New Zealand.

So far, very little research has been conducted on Pasifika English in New Zealand. The results presented below come from four main sets of data. The data in Starks et al. (2007) and Bell and Gibson (2008) both come from the recorded interviews conducted for the Pasifika Languages of Manukau Project mentioned above. The data in Kennedy (2006) are based on recordings from primary schools around New Zealand, one of which had a majority of Pasifika students and was situated in Manukau City. Starks & Reffell (2005, 2006) are based on recordings of Manukau primary school students reading a picture book. The data in Gibson & Bell (2006) come from the speech of three characters in the animated comedy series *bro'Town*.

DH-stopping and TH-fronting

The variables which have received most attention are those represented in spelling by *th*: (ð) as in *the, those, they*; and (θ) as in *think, anything, birth*. Several studies have found evidence of 'DH-stopping', where (ð) is pronounced [d] (*they* → *dey*), and 'TH-fronting', where (θ) is pronounced [f] (*birth* → *birf*). TH-fronting occurs most at the end of words and DH-stopping appears at the beginning of words, particularly at the start of an utterance. This feature is likely to be a transfer effect from the Polynesian languages, which do not have the dental fricative sounds used in English. (Bell & Gibson, 2008; Gibson & Bell, 2006; Kennedy, 2006; Starks & Reffell, 2006)

Non-prevocalic /r/

New Zealand English is non-rhotic, apart from one diminishing regional exception in the south of the South Island. This means that the /r/ sound is not pronounced after vowels in words like *card* or *shirt*. There are signs, however, that some young Pasifika speakers sometimes pronounce the /r/ after the NURSE vowel, in words like *girl* and *shirt*. Both Kennedy (2006) and Starks & Reffell (2005) found occurrences of non-prevocalic /r/ in their recordings of primary school students in Manukau City. Gibson (2005) found that three NZ Samoan hip hop artists pronounced /r/ after NURSE 95% of the time. The use of this feature in rap is not surprising seeing as the pronunciation of NZ hip hop is similar to American Hip Hop. It is very interesting if this feature is now coming to mark Pasifika identity in speech seeing as there is no reason to believe that non-prevocalic /r/ is caused by transfer from the Polynesian language substrates.

Low rates of linking /r/

In general NZE, the /r/ is usually pronounced in phrases such as *car and bus* where /r/ is at the end of a word, followed by a vowel. Kennedy (2006) found that in the South Auckland school with a majority of Pasifika students, less than 25% of linking /r/s were realised. Low rates of linking /r/ are also attested in Starks & Reffell (2005), Bell & Gibson (2008) and Gibson & Bell (2006). This feature may be related to the fact that Polynesian languages have open syllable structure and tolerate long strings of vowels without intervening consonants.

Non-aspiration of initial /p/.

Gibson and Bell's (2006) analysis of *bro'Town* found that the middle-aged character *Pepelo* (who is portrayed as speaking English as a second language), had very little aspiration on initial /p/ in words like *pub* and *parenting*. The younger characters' aspiration, however, was at the level expected for general NZE. Starks et al. (2007) also report that initial voiceless stops tend to be unaspirated. Stops are unaspirated in Polynesian languages, so this may be an example of a transfer feature which appears in the speech of L2 speakers of English but has not come to mark ethnic identity for the younger generation.

Devoicing of final consonants

Starks et al., (2007) found that voiced word-final consonants tend to be devoiced, so that *five* sounds like *fife* and *old* sounds like *olt*. They commented that this feature is more common for older speakers. This may be another example of a feature which occurs for speakers with English as a second language, but not for speakers of the youth vernacular.

Final remarks

Most of the data discussed above is based on the speech of young Pasifika people in Manukau City, so we should avoid generalizing these results to the Pasifika communities overall. It should also be noted that none of these studies show a clear distinction between Pasifika English and Māori English, so we cannot yet say whether or not these are distinct varieties. In order to gain comprehensive insights into the speech of Pasifika people in New Zealand, we need to conduct research which considers ethnic identity alongside a range of other factors such as age, amount of time spent in New Zealand, place of residence, gender, orientation to youth subcultures and so on. The emergence of a Pasifika ethnolect will depend on whether or not young Pasifika people feel that their ethnicity is a distinctive component of their identity.

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