Say Yah to Da UP, Eh?  
(d)/(t) Stopping in UP English among older-aged Finnish-Americans

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Summary

- In American dialects, /ð/ /t/ can be realized as [d]/[t] - a process referred to as fortition or [d]/[t]-stopping.
- [d]/[t]-stopping previously reported as a substrate effect in heritage communities in the Midwest (and elsewhere).
- Present study examines similar effect among older-aged Finnish heritage communities in Michigan’s UP.
- Analyzed reading passage data from 43 older speakers.
- Reveals fortition process not as common in UP English.
- However, in cases of where [d]/[t]-stopping does occur, working-class males exhibit strongest preference for variant.

Background

- Interdental fricatives, (/θ/ /ð/) realized as coronal oral stop ([d]/[t]), is a well documented and complex linguistic feature.
- Undergoing of a fortition process (i.e., /θ/ /ð/ → [d]/[t]).
- The following varieties exhibit this feature: Cajun English[1], African American English[2], and Wisconsin English[3,4].
- Furthermore, [d]/[t]-stopping in some rural American English speech communities is said to index not only ethnicity but also working-class[5].

Present Study

- Michigan’s Upper Peninsula (UP) is an excellent case to examine the linguistic feature & its complex variation w/in an immigrant speech community.
- Rural region with a complex immigration history.
- Fortition of interdental fricatives has been documented in UP English[3,5].
- However, limited quantitative accounts have been done.
- Present study draws on:
  - Reading passage data
  - A 43-speaker corpus of older-aged Finnish-heritage American English from Michigan’s Marquette County.
- Stratified by language-dominance, sex, and class.

GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTION:

- What degree, if any, is [d]/[t]-stopping occurring in the speech of the older-aged Finnish-heritage speech community in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula (UP)?
- Do speakers exhibit this feature in a semi-conservative speech style, (e.g., the reading of a passage)?
- Do sociolinguistic trends exist for such data, and if so, do they lend support to the claim that this feature indexes working-class?

Dataset

- 1,161 tokens from reading passage task:
  - Tokens per speaker: 21 [d] and 4 [t]
  - Various positions: word-initial, word-medial and word-final
  - Unique words: the, they, that, there, then, them, thought, mouth, with, weather, and nothing.

Table 1: Breakdown of tokens (by position) in passage task

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Ling. Variables</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word-initial</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word-medial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word-final</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results I: Global Distribution

- A 43-speaker sub-corpus out of 69-speaker corpus.
- Controlled variables:
  - Location (Marquette County, MI)
  - Age (59-100 yoa)
- Stratified variables:
  - Sex (male/female)
  - Socioeconomic status (working-/middle-class)
  - Linguistic feature (Finnish-dominant bilinguals/English-dominant bilinguals/English monolinguals).

Table 2: Subset of the 69-speaker Finnish-American corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Groups</th>
<th>Bilinguals</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Breakdown of 43-speaker sub-corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>FINN 1.0</th>
<th>ENG 1.0</th>
<th>ENG 1.1</th>
<th>Mean-dominant</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Monolingual</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>29</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methods

- Data comes from a reading passage task.
- 27 words of potential tokens of interdental fricatives occur.
- For each case, the token produced by each speaker was determined to be either a fricative ([θ]/[ð]) or a oral stop ([d]/[t]) via spectrographic analysis.
- Determine frequency of [d]/[t]-stopping occurrence.
- The cases where [d]/[t]-stopping does occurs:
  - Statistical comparison (e.g., Chi-square of Independence)

Results II: Main Effects

- Strong main effect for Sex factor, with marginal effect for SES.
- Marginal preference for ENG-dominant monolinguals.

Results III: 2-way Interactions

- Marginal preference for all lingua-dominant males and working-class.
- Marginal preference for all lingua-dominant females and working-class.

Discussion

- This study reveals:
  - [θ]/[ð]-variants produced far more often than [d]/[t]-variants.
  - In cases of the latter, [d]/[t]-stopping occurs:
    - most often among working-class males
    - least among middle- and working-class females.
  - The frequency of [d]/[t]-stopping in this study does not support previously claims about UP English.
  - Possible Cause: Conservative speech style.

- Nevertheless, the sociolinguistic trends reported do support the claim that this feature of UP English seems to index working-class.
- Furthermore, [d]/[t]-stopping indexes not only working-class but also class.
- Indicative of a prestigious linguistic marker for local speech and identity in Michigan’s UP English speech community.

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References