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"They Speak More Caucasian": Generational Differences in the Speech of Japanese-Americans*

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In this paper, we attempt to explain the generational differences in the English phonology of Japanese-Americans. We believe that these speech differences are linked to changes in identity and social networks brought about by the events which took place in the United States during the Second World War. The internment of thousands of Japanese-Americans in concentration camps drastically affected individuals by breaking up their social networks, and permanently affected their community and its relation to the larger society. We have collected data on the phonological processes of /t/d deletion and monophthongization of /ey/ and /ow/ from recorded interviews with Japanese-Americans of the second and fourth generations. Investigation of generational differences with respect to these processes suggests that the English spoken by second generation *nisei* bilingual speakers exhibits retention of features from the substrate (Japanese) language. The speech of the fourth generation *yonsei* speakers, however, has clearly converged with that of the matrix dialect. We attribute this generational divergence to the dramatic change in the identity and social networks of the Japanese-American community.

0. Introduction

Assimilation by American immigrants is anything but a predictable, matter-of-course process. Over and over again, immigrant groups of diverse origins struggle, adapt, acculturate, and, for some, assimilate into what they perceive as mainstream language and cultural norms. These differential experiences stand in contradiction to the popular notion of a "melting-pot", and the expectation that immigrants who come to the United States are not only willing but eager and somehow destined to become "Americanized". This process of assimilation, as Fishman (1966) points out, hides "[the] anomaly...that so many could be de-ethnicized so easily..." This study will explore the linguistic side of the de-ethnicization process of Japanese-Americans. The language of this particular ethnic group has been neglected in the sociolinguistic literature. As far as we can tell, the only study that has addressed the issue of Japanese-American speech is Spencer (1950). Written soon after the end of World War II, he noted that "the

development of [*nisei*]¹ English follows a somewhat distinctive and aberrant path". Spencer argues that *nisei* speech is a distinct American English dialect, which developed in the "enclave" of *nisei* society. He gives a brief overview of *nisei* phonology, syntax, choice lexical items, and intonation patterns. Spencer concludes his paper in the following manner: "It is hardly possible to predict the extent to which this process will continue. Presumably the offspring of the *nisei* are continuing the speech habits of their parents.... It is too early to tell whether the resistance to things Japanese which is so characteristic of the *nisei* will follow a like pattern among a group whose members are now infants". This paper is, in a sense, an attempt to address Spencer's question, and to postulate ways in which, a half-century later, we might be able to make sense of the historical and linguistic data to provide an answer.

We conducted interviews with native English speakers who were *nisei* and *yonsei*, ranging in ages from 65 to 17. The speech of these four individuals, along with the speech of four Euro-Americans of similar ages, was analyzed. The variables we targeted for examination were final coronal deletion in consonant clusters and monophthongization of /ey/ and /ow/. Our results show that when compared to other speakers of the same ages from the Euro-American ("Standard" English) dialect, there is a significant divergence in the speech of the *nisei* speakers. However, the speech of the *yonsei* is not significantly different from the Standard English dialect, reinforcing our finding of significant differences across the generations of Japanese-Americans.

Though the work we are presenting here is a case study, and more data must be analyzed, we speculate on possible explanations for why the speech of later generations of Japanese-Americans has converged with the speech of the matrix dialect.

1.0 -t/d Analysis

1.1 Introduction

We decided to examine /t/d deletion as one of our sociolinguistic variables for two reasons. First, it has already been extensively studied and shown to occur in many native dialects of American English (Guy (1980), Labov (1968), Santa Ana (1991) among others). Second, since the substrate language, Japanese, does not allow complex codas in syllables, the pattern of coda cluster reduction may indicate whether or not the dialect is subject to substrate influences. A prediction about how this might affect

¹ The names of the immigrant generations used by the Japanese-American community are also relevant and will be used here. They are the *issei*, the original Japanese-born immigrants; the *nisei*, first generation U.S. born, native English speakers; the *sansei*, second generation U.S. born, and the *yonsei*, third generation U.S. born. Since most Japanese immigration to the U.S. occurred during a specific period in history, the generational terms also serve as rough age brackets.

* We are especially indebted to the members of the Japanese-American community whom we interviewed, who shared their experiences and knowledge of their community with us. We would also like to thank Penny Eckert, John Rickford and Tom Veatch for making their tapes available to us, John Baugh, Kenji Hakuta, Shirley Brice Heath, Paul Kiparsky, John Rickford, Yukako Sunaoshi, Elizabeth Traugott, Tom Veatch, and Tom Wasow also provided helpful comments and references.

consonant clusters in substratally influenced English is that in environments with following consonants, deletion should be highly favored, while in environments with following vowels, deletion should be highly disfavored. This prediction is borne out in the results of the *td* data analysis. We use as our data set 438 tokens taken from eight speakers. These speakers were divided into four cells according to race and generation. The groupings were then: Older Japanese-Americans (misei), Older whites, Younger Japanese-Americans (yonsei), and Younger whites. The distribution of race, generation, and age are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

	Japanese	White
Older	Tosh (62) Rob (59)	Ann (61) Debbie (65)
Younger	Trish (17) Allie (17)	Trendy (16) Joan (16)

1.2 Methods

The speech of the eight individuals was auditorily coded for the presence or absence of *td* in word final consonant clusters. Tokens were coded for three contextual factors: preceding environment, following environment, and grammatical category. Probabilistic weights representing the influence of each factor were then determined using the multivariate analysis program, IVARB. The IVARB program, like other versions of VARBRUL, is a multiple regression program which uses the procedure of maximum likelihood estimation to calculate an input probability (how often the rule applies regardless of the environment), and a probability coefficient for each independent factor (this represents the independent contribution to the probability of the rule applying in a given environment). Probabilities above .5 indicate that the factor favors the rule; probabilities below .5 indicate that it disfavors the rule; and figures around .5 indicate that the factor has no effect either way. IVARB determined that the most significant factors were race and, and following environment, while preceding environment was marginally significant. Grammatical category was found to be insignificant.

2.3 Analysis

For the purposes of this talk, we will limit our discussion to the social patterning and the patterning found in the following environment factor group. The overall probability weights of deletion are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Older Japanese-Americans (Tosh, Rob)	.78
Older White Americans (Ann, Debbie)	.22
Younger Japanese-Americans (Allie, Trish)	.41
Younger White Americans (Trendy, Joan)	.41

A statistical test designed to measure goodness of fit for the VARBRUL runs showed that the twogroups of young people were not significantly different and therefore could be considered to have the same system. However, the older and younger whites were significantly different, as were the older and younger Japanese-Americans. Thus, there are three significantly different groups: OJ, YJ, OW, YW. Results of their deletion probabilities with regard to following environment weightings among the three groups are given in Table 3:

Table 3

	Older White Speakers	Young People	Older Japanese-Americans
obs/nasals	.83	.86	.57
liquids/glides	.57	.49	.66
pause	.55	.53	.64
vowels	.17	.18	.30

Goodness of fit was calculated by multiplying the difference of the two log likelihoods of the factors (one associated with the factors separate and one associated with the factors collapsed) by 2. If the product was less than 3.84, then collapsing of factors was considered to be a good fit.

Next we consider two views of the pattern of internal constraints for the different groups. The first view distinguishes several sonority classes: obstruents and nasals vs. liquids and glides vs. vowels vs. pause. The data indicate that the speech of the older whites and the younger people have very similar hierarchies of following environment effects in that obs/nas strongly favor deletion, liquids and pause slightly favor deletion, and vowels strongly disfavor deletion. This suggests a complex hierarchical structure like that described in previous studies of *td* deletion (Guy 1980). The speech of the older Japanese-Americans, on the other hand, differs significantly from the other groups in that this hierarchy is absent. As seen in Table 3, the weights for non-vowel segments cluster around .6 or so. The obs/liq difference was nearly significant for the older white and young people groups, but not at all for the older Japanese-American group. The second view of the data collapses together natural classes which are not

significantly different, so that a minimal set of classes are distinguished. Results of the collapsed factors are shown in Table 4:

Table 4

Older Generation Caucasians		Younger Caucasians and Japanese-Americans	
pause	.55		.52
cons	.76		.88
vowel	.17		.16
Older Japanese-Americans			
pause	.64		
consonants	.59		
vowels	.30		

Collapsed Results of Older Japanese-Americans

cons/pause	.60
vowels	.30

In the case of the older Japanese-American group are the effects of following pause and consonants insignificant. That is, the figures in Table 3 and 4 indicate that the older generation of Japanese-American speakers make a minimal binary distinction between vowels and everything else. This is in sharp contrast to the at least ternary distinction exhibited in the speech of the other speakers. We can attribute the binary nature of the patterning found in the older Japanese-American speech to conditioning by substratal influences. The fact that following pause is ordered before following consonants suggests that, in general, /t/ds are likely to be deleted. Only in the environment preceding vowels, deletion is disfavored. As mentioned earlier, Japanese disallows complex coda clusters. In addition, word-final consonants (except /r/) are also illegal in the language. A consequence of this is that when foreign words with such illegal consonant clusters or word final consonants are incorporated into the language, vowels are epenthesized (Ito 1986). We attribute the high deletion rate in the following environment of consonant and pause to be related to this substrate constraint. Consonants tend to be deleted word finally when a consonant or pause follows, because such an environment would produce an illegal coda in the substrate language. The driving principle seems to be, then, to delete word final /t/ds in all environments unless it is followed by a vowel.

2.0 Monophthongization

2.1 Introduction

This section will explore the patterning of our subjects with respect to the monophthongization of /ow/ and /ey/, the diphthongs in "boat" and "bait". These results parallel those on /t/d deletion, showing that Japanese-American nisei speakers are significantly different both from their Euro-American

counterparts of the same age and from the Japanese-American yonsei speakers. In addition, young Euro-American and Japanese American speakers are shown to pattern together in their frequencies of monophthongization, as shown Table 5.

Table 5

Speakers	Deletion	Monophthongization
Older Japanese-Americans	.78	.70
Younger Japanese-Americans	.41	.55
Younger White Americans	.41	.40
Older White Americans	.22	.32

2.2 Background

The /ow/ and /ey/ phonemes are underlying long vowels with diphthongal phonetic realizations. These diphthongs originally arose in the mid 19th century, in a development known as Long Mid Diphthonging, where the previously monophthongal /o:/ and /e:/ developed rising inglides. Purely a phonetic change, Long Mid Diphthonging caused no structural alterations.

Today, monophthongization of /ey/ and /ow/ is a common phenomenon in many areas of the English-speaking world. It has been documented in African and Indian varieties of English, in northern England, in the West Indies (Wells 1982), in the Northern Midwest States of the US (Labov, Yaeger and Steiner 1972), and in Newfoundland (Clarke 1991). Wells (1982) notes that in the dialect that he calls "General American" /ey/ and /ow/ are usually diphthongal, and that the monophthongal variant is found only in unstressed syllables and in pretonic positions, like the first syllable of "vacation". Further investigation of these diphthongs in our particular linguistic area, Northern California, confirmed the above: De Camp's 1958 description of the pronunciation of English in San Francisco does not note the monophthongization of /ey/ or /ow/ However, Spencer's 1950 article on Japanese-American language behavior, notes that "such clusters as ej, ow, and the like, normally follow long vowel patterns in nisei speech."²

For the purposes of this study, we are concerned only with the question of whether or not a front or back upglide is present in the diphthongs, and not with internal nuclear vowel quality and multiple complementation. The issue of the quality of diphthongal nuclei has been extensively studied by Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner (1972), and /ow/ fronting in California (as in [houn] to [heum]) has been analyzed by Luthin (1986).

² Spencer (1950) p. 13.

2.3 Methods

In order to explore overall stress and prosodic patterns of monophthongization in our speakers, we analyzed with the help of IVARB 704 tokens of /ey/ and /ow/ extracted from our interviews. The speakers were grouped exactly as in the /d/ deletion study above, with four cells containing Older Japanese-Americans, Younger Japanese Americans, Older whites, and Younger whites respectively. The speech of our eight informants was digitized using Xwaves, a waveform analysis and display program. Waveform displays of each token were isolated and coded for monophthongization, phrasal stress, preceding segmental and prosodic environment, and following segmental and prosodic environment. Monophthongization was coded auditorily, and an intercoder reliability check was performed which eventually yielded a two-way distinction (monophthongal vs. diphthongal) with over 90% reliability. Stress was coded with a two-way distinction according to a procedure for impressionistic phonetic coding developed by Veatch (1991). Preceding and following phonological segments were coded within and across words, and preceding and following prosodic boundaries were coded with a three-way distinction: no boundary, that is when the diphthong takes the preceding or following segment as onset or coda; syllabic boundary, where the diphthong and its preceding or following segment are not constituents within one syllable, and word boundary, where the diphthong is either word-initial or word-final.

2.4 Analysis

VARBRUL results for this data found the significant constraints conditioning monophthongization to be the following, in order of significance.

Table 6

- Input Prob: 0.29 Log Likelihood: -357.179 Significance: 0.0005
- 1) Stressed vs. unstressed status of diphthong
 -- stressed: 0.38
 -- unstressed: 0.80
 - 2) Place and generation of the speaker
 -- older white: 0.32
 -- younger white: 0.40
 -- older Japanese-American: 0.70
 -- younger Japanese-American: 0.55
 - 3) Whether the diphthong is /ey/ or /ow/
 -- ey: 0.40
 -- ow: 0.61
 - 4) Following prosodic boundary
 -- no boundary (diphthong syllabifies with following segment as its coda): 0.59

-- syllable boundary (diphthong and following segment are not in the same syllable): 0.56

-- word boundary (where diphthong and following segment are not in the same word): 0.40

In these results we see that the phrasal stress of the segment has the most significant effect in predicting how often it will be monophthongized, with stresslessness having a very high degree of correlation with monophthongization across all speakers. This finding is consistent with prior research on this phenomenon cited above, where it was found that General American dialect speakers tend to monophthongize /ey/ and /ow/ in unstressed and pretonic position.

The intersection of race and generational factors is the second most significant determinant of probability of monophthongization of these diphthongs. Race and age categories organize the four cells as outlined above into a hierarchy of monophthongization, with older whites monophthongizing the least and older Japanese-Americans monophthongizing the most, and with the young people of both groups in between.

We tested these groups to make sure that they were significantly different from one another, and found that in terms of their rates of monophthongization, the older Japanese-Americans could not be collapsed with any other group, the younger whites could be collapsed with the older whites, and that the younger Japanese-Americans and younger whites could be collapsed as well. Crucially, however, the latter three cannot be collapsed together, and this fact indicates a continuum of variability (Table 7).

Table 7

Older Whites Younger Whites Younger Japanese-Americans Older Japanese-Americans

----- = can collapse

----- = cannot collapse

Our third significant factor is whether the variable is /ey/ or /ow/. Clearly the implication here is that /ow/ is monophthongizing at a higher rate than /ey/. It is at the outset curious that an essentially similar development should affect its two targets at different rates, but historically, processes affecting related targets do vary. A pertinent example of this is Labov's 1963 study of the centralization of the nuclei of /ay/ and /aw/ (as in "bite" and "bout" in Martha's Vineyard. In his generational study /ay/ was found to be centralizing more than /aw/.

The last significant factor is following prosodic environment. This factor group was created to test the hypothesis that diphthongization might correlate positively with vowel length, which is influenced by prosodic boundary, as in Sproat and Fujimura (1993). The three boundary strengths that were coded reflect increasingly strong prosodic boundaries, and they are ordered in a way that allows us to make a useful generalization: the stronger the prosodic boundary following the segment, the less likelihood of monophthongization there is. This is directly related to duration: vowels are longer before stronger

boundaries, and more diphthongal. This finding is consistent with the effect of stress, which also lengthens the vowel.

In this study, it is clear that the community's standard for monophthongization is a moving target, one that is changing in usage through the generations. Monophthongization seems to be variably used as a marker of style among young California speakers, and we have an impressionistic sense that it is used by the more linguistically innovative speakers. From our sample, it seems that Japanese-American ethnicity is not a significant factor in orienting our informants towards innovations in the speech communities. Luthin (1986) in his study of California ow-fronting restricts the phenomenon to 'a well-defined social group...the young, middle-class, white and Asian-American population of the urban areas.'

One of our young white speakers, Trendy, is more innovative and monophthongizes more than the other speaker, Joan. She says things like [nu wE:v] and [yu na]. Both Trendy and Joan, however, attended the SAME school at the time of the interview and had many of the same linguistic resources available to them. The same is basically true for the young Japanese-Americans Allie and Trish. Allie and Trendy, of different ethnicities, both strike us as being hip young people, and also have higher rates of monophthongization than the less hip Joan and Trish. We believe this to be the first time that monophthongization in California is reported in the sociolinguistic literature.

3.0 Conclusion

We have shown in the preceding sections that the speech of the nisei generation of Japanese Americans continues to differ from that of Euro-Americans of their age, as described by Spencer (1950), and that it shows some substratal effects from Japanese. We have also shown that, within our small pool of subjects, the younger generation of Japanese-Americans has assimilated to the mainstream of white linguistic norms. The latter fact might be explained, as it is in many cases, through the common assumption which posits that immigrant groups experience complete assimilation by the third generation. This assumption, however, often masks what is particular about each group and its process of change. Fishman (1966) states: Only rarely has America taken steps to hasten the linguistic and cultural entrenchment of its immigrant groups...and only during periods of social and economic dislocation. Japanese-Americans then are markedly different from other communities, since about fifty years ago they were the target of U.S. government efforts to weaken and disperse their community. This can be seen in a quote by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, at a press conference on November 21, 1944 (Takaki 1989)

"A good many of them (have already left the camps and) have re-placed themselves, and in a great many parts of the country, and the example that I always cite, to take a unit, is the size of the county, whether it's the Hudson river, or in western Georgia which we all know, in one of those counties, probably half a dozen or a dozen families

could be scattered around on the farms and worked into the community. After all, they are American citizens, and we all know that American citizens have certain privileges. And they wouldn't --- what's my favorite word? ---discombobulate--- (laughter) -- the existing population of those particular counties very much. After all -- what? -- 75 thousand families scattered all around the United States is not going to upset anybody."

The denial of their basic rights, along with widespread war hysteria, made Japanese-Americans targets of hatred and chauvinism. These historical events give us reason to believe that at least part of the change in mainland Japanese-American community identity and linguistic identity is closely tied to a breakup in the social networks that were established in the community before the internment camps of World War II.

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