The sociolinguistics of rhotacization in the Beijing speech community
Hu, H.

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This dissertation investigates the social, attitudinal, and linguistic mechanisms behind language choice and language change in postmodern urban China. More specifically, it investigates the language choice, use and pronunciation norm formation of rhotacization in Beijing, the country's capital city, due to the normative forces of urbanization, Standard Chinese, native dialects, and the expression of belonging. This dissertation studies the language attitude towards and language use of rhotacization in the Beijing Speech Community in quality and quantity, with the methods of sociolinguistics and phonetics.

The language attitude study shows that both Beijing native speakers and migrants report the perceived salience of rhotacization in the Beijing Speech Community and rhotacization imitation by migrants. In addition, both native and migrant respondents associate migrants with the upwards social mobility in Beijing, in the background of Standard Chinese promotion and influx of migrants. The prestige of Standard Chinse, the difficulty of learning rhotacization, and the non-necessity of using Beijing Mandarin are also reported.

An important result in the phonetic study demonstrates that, as an important feature in both Beijing Mandarin and Standard Chinese, rhotacization is undergoing the decline of both tokens and types in native speakers' natural speech. However, compared to migrants, Beijing native speakers still produce the biggest number of rhotacization tokens, types and variants.

Together, this dissertation reveals the social, attitudinal and linguistic forces on language choices and pronunciation norms formation in postmodern urban settings, advancing our understanding of the mechanisms from various aspects.

:LOT **Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics**
Landelijke Onderzoekschool Taalwetenschap

:LOT
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Han Hu

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Universiteit
Leiden
Centre for Linguistics