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

Chapter 8 Conclusions

Within the context of rapid urbanization and migration, migrants from different regions of China build intense social and language contact on a daily basis, both with local Beijingers and with other migrants. In addition to their own native variety of Chinese, both local Beijing native speakers and migrants are subject to the influence of the promotion of Standard Chinese as well as the establishment of an urban local linguistic identity in postmodern Beijing. Against such social backgrounds, this dissertation investigated how normative forces affect language choices and the formation of pronunciation norms, with special focus on rhotacization in the Beijing speech community. Specifically, it investigated the attitudes that speakers have towards the use and users of rhotacization and language varieties (Chapter 4), the effects of social factors on speakers' language choices concerning rhotacization, namely rhotacization frequency in their naturalistic speech (Chapters 5 and 6) and the variation and variants of the most frequently used rhotacized rime (Chapter 7).

Chapter 4 was concerned with attitudes towards the different language varieties spoken in Beijing and towards rhotacization more in particular. Despite the special relation between rhotacization, Beijing Mandarin, and Standard Chinese and the social context of urbanization and migration in Beijing (see Chapter 2), previous sociolinguistic studies on rhotacization did not pay much attention to lay viewpoints on the use and users of these linguistic forms and varieties and to using the attitude results to explain the quantitative results. In this chapter, respondents were asked their opinions on the differences between BM and SC, the imitation of BM by migrants and their rhotacization as well as the advantages and disadvantages of speaking BM and use rhotacization.

Results showed that most Beijing native and non-native respondents reported that BM and SC are different from each other and that BM is characterized by its rhotacization. Moreover, most of the respondents reported that the imitation of BM and rhotacization by migrants is noticeable. More non-native respondents also reported that they adopted Beijing Mandarin and rhotacization after they came to Beijing. However, although most respondents chose the option "speaking BM brings no advantages or disadvantages," the explanatory comments from the non-native respondents showed that speaking BM could probably bring some disadvantages to the speakers, due to the low social status of Beijingers. The reported advantages are mostly non-linguistic, and most of the respondents reporting advantages have a Rhotic dialect background and have not been in Beijing for a long time.

The results reported in Chapter 4 provide evidence that the use of certain linguistic forms used by migrants can be strongly influenced by their attitude towards the social status and characteristics of the native speakers and such influences change with the length of time in the community where the migrants stay. Furthermore, this chapter also extends our understanding of the relationship between people's language attitudes towards a specific linguistic salience and their users and their language practice.

Chapter 5 investigated the ongoing change in rhotacization in the Beijing speech community by comparing the general frequencies of rhotacization tokens in different speaker groups. The results showed that the social factor dialect

background plays a key role in determining the number of rhotacization tokens a speaker would produce. Furthermore, age is an important factor as well, as we found that the young native speakers used fewer rhotacized words than their old native counterparts. Moreover, the young Beijing and young Rhotic speakers used an equal number of rhotacized words. These results provide quantitative evidence for the change in the number of rhotacizations in speakers' naturalistic and spontaneous speech, across different social groups.

The results of this chapter are consistent with the findings for the change in rhotacization among Beijing native speakers. Previous studies assume that the number of rhotacized words actively used in the speech of Beijing native speakers is decreasing from the old generation to the young generation, but few studies have been conducted to measure this quantitatively in spontaneous speech. Furthermore, previous studies suggested an association of rhotacization in Beijing Mandarin with masculinity, while the results of this chapter provide no quantitative evidence that male and female Beijing native speakers use different numbers of rhotacized words in their speech. Chapter 5 therefore reveals the effects of social factors on speakers' language choices of rhotacization and provides strong evidence for the ongoing change in rhotacization in the Beijing speech community.

Chapter 6 further examined the effects of social factors on the frequency of rhotacization types across speaker groups. This chapter is based on the results of the general rhotacization frequencies in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 showed that different social factors affect the frequency of rhotacization tokens, but it does not show how many different lexical items were involved. In other words, Chapter 5 does not tell us whether the frequencies we found were caused by speakers repeating the same rhotacized words (counting the tokens) or whether different words were involved (counting the types). Chapter 6 sought an answer to this question. The answer is that the number of different rhotacization words is also diminishing along the age dimension within the group of native speakers. Together, Chapters 5 and 6 provide a complete picture of how the number of rhotacizations tokens in general and how the number of rhotacization types are changing in the Beijing speech community. The results reported in these two chapters extend our understanding of the effects of social variables on the frequency of a linguistic variable in a speech community and provide new evidence that the frequency study of a linguistic variable can be conducted in different ways that allow us to recognize the variable change dynamically.

Chapter 7 tapped into the social and linguistic constraints on the variation and change in rhotacization by examining the acoustics of the most used rhotacized rime. In this chapter, the occurrence of all rhotacized rimes in our data set was measured, and the most frequently used rhotacized rime across groups was identified. The results showed that *ianr* is the most frequently used rime. Consequently, the acoustics of this rhotacized rime was studied and both social and linguistic constraints (*ianr* in three different linguistic categories) were considered. In the acoustic analysis, the formant trajectories, vowel space, and duration of *ianr* were examined and its variants were identified. The results showed that both linguistic and social variables affected the variation of *ianr*. The

case of *ianr* revealed that its linguistic contexts, such as onset, glide, tone and lexical meanings, could somehow affect its realization and lead to variation. Especially when those linguistic variables interacted with social variables, the variants of the rhotacization could be varied.

The results reported in Chapter 7 provide clear evidence that in research on language choices and variation, such as in the present study of rhotacization in Mandarin, not only the social constraints but also the possible linguistic constraints should be carefully sorted out and categorized. In this way, the variants and the ongoing change in the linguistic variable in question can be comprehensively observed.

This present study on the language choices and change in rhotacization in the Beijing speech community contributes to urban sociolinguistic research on pronunciation norm formation. Furthermore, in previous studies, the internal language constraints themselves received little attention, whereas in this study, it was found that the linguistic constraints, such as the tonal context and the suprasegmental influence of a tone on a rime, have effects on the use and pronunciation of rhotacized syllables. The results suggest that future studies on language variables may have to carefully sort out the internal/linguistic constraints, as they can interact with social factors and jointly affect the formation of pronunciation norms for a language variable. Below we provide an overview of some areas of future interest.

First, previous studies on the language choices and change in rhotacization in Beijing Mandarin focused exclusively on the speech of native speakers. However, apart from examining the speech of native speakers, that of non-native speakers in the speech community should also be included in the study. In this study, we did examine the language use and language attitudes of non-native speakers. However, we are aware of the small number of participants, especially that of non-native speakers, due to the limited access to the non-native speakers during our fieldwork. Therefore, in future research, a larger sample size of both native and non-native speakers would definitely assist in increasing the statistical power and generalizing the research findings.

The second is the qualitative examination of the rhotacized words used by the speakers. Chapter 6 focused on comparing the single occurrence rhotacization frequencies produced by speaker groups, which somehow is an examination of language change in terms of quantity. Further work may involve the comparison of the word classes, lexical meanings and variation in the rhotacized words used by speakers from different groups. Such an investigation could enable us to better understand the qualitative changes in rhotacization, which, together with the present quantitative results, may shed light on the actual change in rhotacization in the Beijing speech community.

Third, in this study, we focused exclusively on the rhotacized forms of words in naturalistic speech. It could also be interesting to examine those words that could have been rhotacized but were not, or the switch between the rhotacized form and non-rhotacized form of a same word within the speech of one individual speaker. This phenomenon should be considered in the speech of both native speakers and non-native speakers, as this would likely contribute to

our understanding of the ongoing change in rhotacization across different speaker groups dynamically.

Fourth, Chapter 4 analyzed the lay attitudes towards the language use and users of rhotacization and language varieties. It would be instructive to conduct an analysis combining a study of language attitudes with a study quantitative language choices and change, by correlating the results of speakers' attitudes towards language varieties and users with that of speakers' actual rhotacization frequency. This could provide us with a better explanation of the frequency results and also help us better understand the relationship between language attitudes and language use.