



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

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

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## Summary

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 constraints of urbanization, Standard Chinese, native dialects, and the expression of belonging. This dissertation is composed of eight chapters.

**Chapter 1** introduces the research framework and the research object of this dissertation and the research questions to be addressed, as well as a brief chapter-by-chapter overview.

**Chapter 2** presents the linguistic and social backgrounds of this dissertation and previous research on the topic, namely, rhotacization in general, rhotacization in Beijing Mandarin (BM) and Standard Chinese (SC), Beijing speech community, and urbanization and migration. This chapter aims to present the phonetic, lexical, and grammatical features of rhotacization, the special relationship between rhotacization and BM and SC, as well as the social backgrounds triggering the rhotacization change. In addition, this chapter also compares postvocalic *r* in Mandarin and western languages. Although *r* comes after a vowel in those languages, rhotacization in Mandarin also has lexical and grammatical features. From the perspective of phonetics alone, rhotacization in Mandarin is also related to sound change, tone and neutralization etc. Therefore, postvocalic *r* in Mandarin and western languages should not be simply taken as the same thing.

**Chapter 3** describes the research design and data collection methods of this dissertation, namely, the criteria of participant selection, pair-talking and sociolinguistic interviews, and the collection of natural and spontaneous speech, as well as the speech recording. One of the objectives of this dissertation is to investigate the language choice and pronunciation norms formation of rhotacization in speakers' natural speech in the Beijing Speech community. Therefore, except examining the speech of Beijing native speakers, that of migrants from rhotic and non-rhotic dialect backgrounds is also examined. In addition, this study adopts the data collection method of "talking with a familiar person at a familiar place about familiar topics". The purpose is to overcome the bias that previous studies usually only examine native Beijing speakers' rhotacization and only their speech of the read-aloud rhotacization.

**Chapter 4** investigates speakers' language attitudes towards language use and users in the Beijing Speech Community. More specifically, lay viewpoints of BM and SC, of rhotacization use and users, of rhotacization imitation, and of the advantage/disadvantage of using BM. There are three main findings. First, rhotacization is recognized as the most typical feature of BM by both Beijing natives and migrants. Second, BM rhotacization imitation by migrants, among other ways of speech imitation, is salient in respondents' perception, which is, however, perceived as "unnatural, awkward & stiff, and not like" and is believed

to be unnecessary by both Beijing natives and migrant respondents. Third, in general, instead of BM, SC is the more prestigious variety in Beijing. When being asked about the advantage/disadvantage of using BM, more respondents report “no advantage/disadvantage”. However, the Beijing native respondents report that they would speak SC to avoid being recognized as a Beijinger, e.g., using fewer rhotacized words. Among the middle-aged and old non-native respondents, this question triggers their emotional expressions, like “Migrants work hard and are more capable. Beijingers do not. Speaking BM is not a big deal. Speaking SC is enough”. Most young rhotic speakers, however, believe that speaking BM could bring advantages, and they will study and speak BM; such a viewpoint is probably related to the length of living and studying in Beijing and their knowledge of the city.

**Chapter 5** studies the effects of social factors on rhotacization frequency in speakers’ natural speech. There are three main findings. First, among Beijing native speakers, age is a critical factor. The young speakers show the lowest rhotacization frequency and the old highest. Second, gender has no significant effect on the frequency; speakers in different age groups but of the same gender also have no significant frequency difference. Third, dialect background has a significant effect. The rhotacization frequency by Beijing native speakers is highest and that by non-rhotic speakers the lowest. There is no significant difference between young Beijing native speakers and young rhotic speakers. The results of this chapter reveal that 1) young rhotic speakers are influenced by BM and its rhotacization, and 2) there is an ongoing de-rhotacizing process among Beijing native speakers.

**Chapter 6** examines the effects of social factors on rhotacization type frequency, based on the results of Chapter 5. There are three main findings. First, among Beijing native speakers, age has a significant effect on the rhotacization type frequency. The young speakers use fewer types than the old. Second, gender is not a critical factor. There is no significant difference between gender groups. Third, dialect background has a significant effect on the frequency. Beijing native speakers use the most and non-rhotic speakers use the least. Together with the results of Chapter 5 on the rhotacization token frequency, we mainly have three main findings. First, dialect background is a crucial social factor. Regarding both token frequency and type frequency, Beijing native speakers produce the most and the non-rhotic speakers the least. Second, for the token frequency, there is no significant difference between the young Beijing native speakers and the young rhotic speakers; but for the type frequency, the former is found to be capable of using more different types than the latter. This reveals that young rhotic speakers are influenced by BM and its rhotacization, but they have limited rhotacization types in mind. Therefore, they repeat the rhotacization they know to achieve their goal of producing a greater number of rhotacized words. Third, among Beijing native speakers, the young use significantly fewer rhotacization tokens and types, compared to the old. This means that “de-rhotacizing” is undergoing among Beijing native speakers and the younger the speakers are, the fewer rhotacization tokens and types they are actively using. The promotion of Standard Chinese, the long-term and profound social and language link between

Beijing natives and migrants, as well as the population superiority of migrants are all possible causes of the observed de-rhotacization.

**Chapter 7** investigates the social and linguistic constraints on rhotacization variants and pronunciation norms formation of rhotacization. The methods of Acoustic Phonetics are used in this chapter, and the formant trajectories, vowel space, and duration of the most used rhotacized vowel are measured. There are three main findings. First, in the studies on language variation, besides the syllable contexts, lexical and suprasegmental factors (e.g. tone) should also be taken into account. This chapter categorizes the most used rhotacized vowel *ianr* into three categories, namely OT, NT, and NG, due to the effects of lexical meaning and tones (original tone and neutral tone) on *ianr*. It turns out that *ianr* in different categories have different formant trajectories and vowel space patterns. In general, on the formant trajectories, OT *ianr* and NT *ianr* show similarities, while NG *ianr* has three flat formant contours with very mild fluctuation. On the F2-F1 vowel charts, OT *ianr* takes the largest space, which covers the area between near-close and near-open. NT *ianr* and NG *ianr* take a smaller space, which is usually above the mid-central area. Second, social factors show different effects on the three types of *ianr*. 1) The non-rhotic speakers produce no NG *ianr*. 2) On the formant trajectories, we also observe a rise at *ianr* formants endings with the rhotic and the non-rhotic speakers. This suggests that though non-native speakers do rhotacize the rime, the retroflex effect is probably not sufficiently realized, and the speaker's tongue is de-retroflexed at the rime ending, while Beijing native speakers do not. 3) On the F2-F1 vowel charts, non-native speakers do not show group differences. However, among Beijing native speakers, the three *ianr* categories are overlapped for the old speakers but clustered for the young. This shows that native speakers in different generations use different tongue heights when producing rhotacization and thus produce different variants.

**Chapter 8** summarizes the main findings of each chapter and presents the shortcomings of this dissertation, as well as issues for future research.

Above all, this dissertation has demonstrated the normative forces, namely, urbanization and migration, Standard Chinese, native dialect and expressions of belongings, on the rhotacization use and pronunciation norm formation. This dissertation studies the language attitude and language use of speakers in the Beijing Speech Community in quality and quantity, with the methods of sociolinguistics and phonetics. Regarding language attitude, both Beijing native speakers and migrants report the perceived salience of rhotacization and rhotacization imitation by migrants. On the other hand, in the background of Standard Chinese promotion and influx of migrants, both native speakers and migrants associate migrants with the upwards social mobility in Beijing. They also report the difficulty of learning rhotacization, the prestige of SC, and the non-necessity of learning BM. Regarding language use, as an important feature in both BM and SC, rhotacization is undergoing the decline of both tokens and types in native speakers' 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.