ABSTRACT

CHUNG, MAY FUNG. The Hmong Among Many: A Descriptive Analysis of a Southern Interlanguage Variety. (Under the direction of Dr. Walt Wolfram)

Even though Asian Americans are perceived as a distinct racial group, their speech has not been categorized as a unified ethnolect (Wolfram & Shilling-Estes, 2006). However, Ito (2010) looked at bilingual Hmong Americans in Wisconsin, and whether they accommodated to the local norm. Although some accommodation to the matrix dialect was found, other features like the low-back vowel merger did not seem to play a noticeable role in Hmong English (Ito, 2010).

Limited language variation studies have explored Southern Hmong American speakers, perhaps out of consequence of recent tides of migration (late 1990s). A look at prosodic variation among Hmong individuals in Wisconsin and North Carolina reveal speakers have similar speech rhythms, regardless of the matrix dialect. Young second-generation bilingual Hmong-Americans (n=20) are acoustically analyzed from a rural Southern city to see if they accommodate their European American (n=9) counterparts. The vowels of Hmong Americans seem reminiscent of European American speakers, except for back vowels, possibly a transference from the Hmong language. Finally, the Hmong Americans in Hickory have adapted the -ING and IN alternation of their European American peers. While some morphological elements were distinct, they may be interlanguage effects of learning English as a second language.

My research adds to discussions of particular similarities and distinctions that constitute ethnolinguistic varieties, as well as lend cultural implications of Asian American identity inherent in speech.