

**“I don’t ca(r)e about football”:  
Rhoticity in second language acquisition and local identity**

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This study follows a recent strand of sociolinguistic literature that examines the identity construction of non-native speakers (NNS) (Bayley, 2007). The research question is how identification with local culture relates to the non-prevocalic /r/ production of NNS.

The current study samples undergraduate students (N=10) from China at the Ohio State University, which boasts its long school tradition in college football, and massive (domestic) student participation in the related activities. New to this way of expressing school pride, the NNS students tend to show a wide range of different reactions.

Previous work on NNS and identity in English has examined rhoticity as a sociolinguistic variable (Sharma, 2005; Rindal, 2010). In this case, its social meaning largely results from its being a salient distinction between most British and American varieties, the two major models in TESOL education. The participants in the current study used mostly British materials for English class in the secondary education while having NNS instructors. Upon coming to US, they have been exposed mostly to the rhotic local dialect.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted (45min ~ 1.5hrs) in which the participants talked about their life in China, impression of the US, participation in and attitudes towards OSU school traditions and language attitudes. Only the linguistic data about life in China and college spirits are acoustically analyzed. While rhoticity is often analyzed as a binary variable, the current study reports normalized F3 (Hagiwara, 1995) as the acoustic correlate of rhoticity to capture the nuanced variation in NNS /r/ production. Several social factors are considered in the statistical analysis: College spirit orientation is a scale (0-19), preferred English variety (British/American), topic (China-related/OSU-related) and English proficiency (TOEFL score). Three linguistic factors were also examined: stress, preceding environment and following environment.

All social and linguistic factors were fitted in a linear mixed effects model. College spirit orientation is a significant predictor ( $p=0.0129$ ), which indicates that the participants with higher college spirit orientation are more rhotic. Preferred English variety is also significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting speakers preferring American accents are also more rhotic. No other social factors showed effects, including English proficiency. The results present a case of constructing identity in college using second language (L2) resources.

## References

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