

## **Pasifika Voices: Re-examining the New Zealand Short Front Vowel Shift**

When ethnic communities shift to English as the everyday language of communication, they adopt features of English that identify them as members of both the larger speech community and their own ethnic group. The Lumbee Indians of North Carolina share many characteristics with the local European and AAVE communities, yet differ from their neighbours in subtle and overlapping ways (Wolfram & Dannenberg 1999). The Sydney Greek and Italian communities focus on different ends of the Australian vowel continuum (Horvath 1991) and the Toronto Chinese and Italian communities each have slightly different constraints on their use of the Canadian Vowel Shift (Hoffman & Walker 2006). This paper adds to our understanding of how ethnic communities integrate into the larger speech community through an analysis of the New Zealand short front vowel shift (NZSFVS) in a small group of Pasifika and New Zealand (NZ) Maori students.

The NZSFVS is a vowel shift that raises the vowels in the TRAP and DRESS lexical sets and retracts and centralises those in the KIT lexical set (Gordon et al, 2004; Trudgill et al 1998; Bell 1987). Although this vowel shift has been well-documented in both the majority Pakeha (European) and indigenous New Zealand Maori communities, there has been no study of the NZSFVS in any of New Zealand's Pasifika communities and no prior analysis of NZ Maori English in Pasifika communities of practice.

This paper considers the vowels in the reading passages of 40 elementary students in one South Auckland school. These adolescents are members of five closely-related cultural and linguistic communities: Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands, Niuean and NZ Maori. The Pasifika students are second-generation New Zealanders or they immigrated to New Zealand at any early age. The selected reading passage contains 100 instances of the KIT, DRESS and TRAP vowels. The findings show NZ Maori students have the greatest evidence of the NZSFVS, although their KIT and TRAP vowels have respective lower levels of centralisation and raising than noted in prior studies of New Zealand English. The Cook Islands Maori students have KIT and TRAP vowels that are identical to those of the NZ Maori students and they have DRESS vowels that are more similar to NZ Maori vowels than to their Pasifika counterparts. These Cook Islands and NZ Maori students appear to be selecting similar linguistic paths and the participants' background details support this. The other major linguistic alignment is between the Niuean and Samoan students; the only groups to have any degree of lowering of the KIT vowels. In both, there is strong evidence of a chain shift, initiated by changes in the KIT lexical set, yet one quarter of all Niuean and Samoan TRAP vowels are pronounced with a Pasifika type vowel. Pasifika vowels are most evident in the Tongan student group who also have the least evidence of the NZSFVS. This finding is perhaps a reflection of both the weaker English language skills of these Tongan students and their strong association between Tongan language and identity. Although general patterns are observable across all five student groups, certain individuals appear to have vowel systems that are systematic whereas others appear to be in a state of flux. The paper explores the patterns within and across student groups, and provides a detailed examination of the vowel system of selected students.

## References

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