Variable Speech Styles in the Production of English Flapping

Hikyoung Lee
(Korea University)


The present study examines stylistic variation in the feature of word medial /t/ flapping. Flapping is a pervasive feature of North American English and subject to variation according to formality. The subjects in the study are native and non-native English speaking Korean Americans. Speech was elicited through interviews and formal speech elicitation tasks. Flapping is examined in relation to style, age of arrival in the US, sex, and age. The results from the analyses on flapping as well as an examination of the interaction of sociolinguistic variables are presented. In general, results indicate that age of arrival was the most salient social factor with speakers who arrived relatively early showing a higher rate of flapping. Speakers also showed a steady increase of flapping according to a decrease in formality. These results indicate that early exposure and awareness affect use. Stylistic variation in flapping is not explicitly taught to either native or non-native English speakers. Thus, in the absence of sufficient exposure to English, EFL learners can only acquire appropriate usage norms through instruction.

I. INTRODUCTION

Style is an aspect that all languages possess, but is often neglected in language instruction. Style concerns pragmatic competence and thus, entails the appropriate use of different styles according to different situations. In English, style plays an integral role in language use. Broadly, style refers to the degree of formality of language use and is accordingly categorized. The gradient nature of style enables its placement on a continuum. Differences in style can arise

*I would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers of English Teaching for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper. All errors, however, are mine.*
across different language skills. For example, writing and speaking styles are relatively
distinctive. Stylistic variation exists within the skill of writing and is observed in the abundance
of stylistic guidelines provided by writing manuals. These writing manuals are usually
specialized towards different genres of writing (e.g., academic paper writing). However, the
demarcation of style in speech is not as transparent. The shades of formality in various speech
styles often cannot be discerned and are usually entwined.

In English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts,
stylistic variation is most likely implicitly acquired. This is due to the paucity of textbooks and
instructional materials that offer expositions of style, especially in relation to speech styles. Style
is also often considered to be in the teaching realm of advanced learners of English rather than a
communicative necessity that needs to be taught early on. While deviant stylistic use does not
cause miscommunication nor communication breakdown, it is indicative of the non-nativeness\(^1\)
of a speaker.

In this light, the goal of the present study is to examine the nature of style and how it is
manifested in relation to a particular linguistic feature. The feature of flapping is chosen for
analysis, due to its characterization as a North American English speech phenomenon and
because it is susceptible to stylistic variation. The subjects are both native and non-native
English speakers. Therefore, the variable of style in relation to flapping is investigated to
measure the extent of stylistic acquisition, which has previously only been documented in native
speakers of English from limited ethnic backgrounds (Labov, 1966).

II. BACKGROUND

In this section, a review of style as a sociolinguistic variable, an overview of the linguistic
feature of word medial /l/ flapping, and the research questions raised in the present study are
given.

1. Stylistic Variation

Style refers to the increasing formality or awareness of how an individual is speaking in
addition to what is being said. Labov (1972) states that “there are no single style speakers” (p.
208) and that “styles can be arranged along a single dimension, measured by the amount of

\(^1\) The terms non-nativeness and nativeness are used by the author to indicate the degree of English nativeness
of a non-native English speaker. The terms allude to the gradient nature of nativeness.
attention paid to speech” (1984, p. 29). The stylistic dimension is usually divided into the classifications of casual versus careful speech. Jones (1909, p. 4) called the two extremes of style colloquial and formal with “various shades between the two extremes.” The speech needed in order to conduct systematic analyses is the vernacular, where minimum attention is paid to speech (Labov, 1984, p. 29). Vernacular in other words is “from the participant’s point of view the least marked for special features whether linguistic or social” (Sankoff, 1980, p. 54). In addition, styles can be “ordered along a single dimension, measured by the amount of attention paid to speech” (Labov, 1974, p. 112).

In casual speech, which is the closest to the vernacular (Labov, 1966, p.90), attention to the forms of speech is minimal. On the other hand, careful speech is that often found in an interview where the subject is aware of the formal situation. In addition to these two speech styles are controlled styles such as the reading of a passage, the reading of a word list, and a semantic differentials task. The reading of a word list is considered one end of the formal stylistic continuum, with the reading passage following and the semantic differentials at the other end of the continuum. In the semantic differentials task, the speaker’s attention is intentionally diverted from pronunciation by asking for the differences in meaning between a pair of words. Thus, casual speech is usually obtained through sociolinguistic interviews, which are face-to-face interviews. However, careful speech is usually elicited through formal elicitation tasks.

Stylistic variation is said to “derive from social variation” and is considered “less sharp” than social variation (Labov, 1972, p. 314). In other words, “stylistic context can be ordered along a single dimension according to the amount of attention paid to speech so that we have stylistic as well as social stratification” (Labov, 1972, p. 237). In this sense, Labov (1966) established style as an independent variable. A sample of the linguistic variables which were examined in relation to style and social class were (r), (eh), (oh), (th), (dh) (Labov, 1966, p. 222). However, one of the most widely cited variables in Labov’s study is (ing) which is considered a stable sociolinguistic marker (Labov, 1966, p. 280; 1972, p. 238). The styles Labov (1966) examined were casual speech, careful speech, and reading style in relation to social class. Results of his study showed that style was stratified according to social class.

Other approaches to style such as Audience Design (Bell, 1984) and Accommodation Theory (Giles & Powesland, 1975) have emerged, in which the identification of stylistic components differ. According to Labov (1972, p.109), whether we consider style a continuum or not “[style] must be approached through quantitative methods.” Thus the methodology used in analyzing stylistic variation here will follow Labov’s quantitative approach to the stylistic continuum.
2. Word-Medial /t/ Flapping

The feature examined in this study is word medial /t/ flapping. Word medial /t/ flapping is a process of lenition is a pervasive phenomenon in North American English which sets it apart from other varieties of English. Flapping in certain phonological contexts can serve as an indicator of whether the English speaker is native or non-native. On the other hand, the absence or incorrect placement of flapping is considered unnatural or an indicator to Americans of a foreign variety of English. However, whether the speaker learns English as a native or non-native speaker, flapping is not taught overtly in school. In particular for non-native speakers, flapping is almost certainly acquired unconsciously with a tendency for the overgeneralization of this rule in contexts where flapping does not occur for native speakers.

Flapping is a feature that distinguishes British English, in which it is not considered to occur (Gramley & Paxtold, 1992, p. 339; Stevens, 1972, p. 76; Trudgill & Hannah, 1994, p. 41), from most overseas varieties of English, in which it occurs to a variable degree.² It is clearly a pervasive feature of North American English (Geigerich, 1992, p. 226; Ladefoged, 1993, p. 168; Kreidler, 1989, p. 110; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 1998, p. 47). The absence or incorrect placement of a flap can signal that the speaker does not speak the variety of English spoken in the US or is a non-native speaker of English. Prator and Robinett (1985, p. 103) offers advice for the ESL student, "pronounce this special medial /t/ 'somewhat like a /d/,' without aspiration and very rapidly."

The flapping rule is dependent on stress and is posited as follows:

(1) Flapping rule (Kahn, 1976, p.58)

\[
/\text{t}/ \rightarrow [r]/[-\text{cons}] \quad [\text{+syllabic}]
\]
\quad [-\text{stress}]

The generalization [-cons] includes /l,n,/r/. The analysis of flapping is based on Kahn’s generalizations concerning word-internal flapping (Kahn, 1976, pp. 56-61, pp. 104-105). The envelope of variation in the study is the following phonological environments shown in Table 1.

---

² Flapping is found in Irish English, South African English, and Australian/New Zealand English (Trudgill & Hannah, 1994).
Table 1: Environments for Word-Medial /l/ Flapping (Lee & Kobayashi, 1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) v _ v</td>
<td>wall(er)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1' ) v v _ v</td>
<td>nega(r)ive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) v l _ v</td>
<td>shelt(r)er</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) v n _ v</td>
<td>twen(r)ly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) v r _ v</td>
<td>part(r)ly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) v _ l</td>
<td>lif(e)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For native speakers of American English, flapping in environment 1) is almost categorical while 2)-5) show relative degrees of occurrence. In environment 1'), the secondary stress on the final syllable may make flapping less likely than in 1). In particular for environment 2), Kahn (1976, p. 58) states that the production of /l/ must be non-consonantal to induce flapping and that for most (but not all) speakers there is a tendency to maintain a consonantal pronunciation for /l/ and not flap. He also comments that when /l/ is consonantal “if the tip of the tongue contacts the roof of the mouth in its articulation, flap seems to me to be simply impossible” (Kahn, 1976, p. 58).

A brief survey of flapping in existing dictionaries shows that flapping is an optional and not obligatory phenomenon within the domain of prescriptive norms. The purpose of Kenyon & Knott’s A Pronouncing Dictionary of American English (1953) is “to show the pronunciation of cultivated colloquial English in the United States.” Although the dictionary includes mention of dialectal features, they do not acknowledge a flapped /l/ and do not provide a symbol for one. Jones’ English Pronouncing Dictionary (Roach & Hartman, 1997: 15th Edition of Jones 1917) provides both British RP and American pronunciations of words. This dictionary does provide a phonetic symbol of a flapped /l/ with a diacritic. As for British RP pronunciation an examination of the Collins Cobuild E-Dictionary on CD-Rom, which provides sound files of lexical entries shows that flapping is completely absent.

The occurrence of flapping can also be attributed to social factors. Kriedler (1989, p. 110) claims that “the speaker is likely to have the feeling that non-tapped consonants are right or better and so produces distinct consonants in circumstances where the social motivation is sufficiently strong” but if flapping is not socially motivated the linguistic environment is the

---

3 Table 1 was first formulated in Lee and Kobayashi (1997) based on examples in Kahn (1976).
4 Kahn is one of the few formulations of word medial /l/ flapping available in phonology literature. As flapping is a feature that shows variation in native English speakers, Kahn serves as a generalization that is not subject to dialectal variation. As an anonymous reviewer points out, speakers may tend to aspirate the /l/ and not necessarily flap in environments such as when the /l/ follows a /n/.
cause. "Educated Americans" are said to make no difference between a flapped /t/ and a /d/ (Prator & Robinett, 1985, p. 103). As for the perception of flapping, Stevens (1972, p. 76) claims that "most Americans believe that they always do make it and will usually deny, if challenged, that their pronunciation of e.g. later and ladder is the same."

Studies of word medial /t/ flapping in native speakers have shown that flapping is indeed variable according to linguistic and social contexts. Woods (1991) examines flapping in Ottawa English by examining the effects of social class and style. He found that there was a considerable amount of social class differentiation with linear sequencing of the classes in terms of style (Woods, 1991, p. 136). Shockey (1984) examined long-term accommodation in American subjects who moved to England. She argued that speakers were attempting to accommodate to British English in order to increase intelligibility and thus reducing the amount of flapping in their speech. Strassel (1998) examined two large speech corpora and the effects of social factors. She found that there are no significant differences in flapping rates according to gender or education and that there appears to be regional patterning of flapping in the US (Strassel, 1998, p. 130, p. 132).

3. Research Questions

In light of the overview of style and word medial /t/ flapping, this study attempts to shed light on and draw attention to stylistic variation of a single linguistic feature. As aforementioned, word medial /t/ flapping is a feature of North American English. Therefore, the use of this feature serves as an identity marker, which identifies the speaker as being an American English speaker. Flapping is also susceptible to stylistic variation, which implies that it is not only the mere acquisition of the feature, but the acquisition of the proper stylistic norms of the feature that is important.

There are few if any existing studies on stylistic variation in English speakers of Asian decent. Korean Americans as relatively new and recent immigrants to the US, serve as an ideal community to investigate English use in both native and non-native speakers of the same ethnic background. Examining one particular ethnic community reduces or even eradicates the influence of ethnicity on the results of the study.

The empirical investigation presented here attempts to answer the following general research questions:

(2) Research questions

Q1: Do Korean American speakers show stylistic variation in the use of word medial /t/ flapping?
Q2: Do the native English speaking Korean Americans show similar stylistic variation patterns to the non-native English speaking Korean Americans?
Q3: Do social variables such as sex, age of arrival in the US, and age affect stylistic use in the speakers?

The subsequent sections of this paper give a detailed overview and the results of the present study.

III. METHOD

1. Subjects

In the present study, data was collected from 101 Korean Americans. All of the Korean Americans are residents of the Greater Philadelphia area. Region was controlled in order to eliminate any effects dialect might have on flapping. The speech data was taken from three formal speech elicitation tasks and spontaneous speech.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2</th>
<th>Demographics of Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61+</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data analyses are arranged according to speech elicitation task and focus on the frequency rate of occurrence of word medial /t/ flapping. The subjects were comprised of both native and non-native English speakers. The social factors examined are age of arrival in the US (G1=0, G2=1-5, G3=6-10, G4=11-15, G5=16-25, G6=26-40, G7=41+), sex (male, female), and age (18-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61+). The number of subjects in the categories of age of arrival in
the US reflects the stages at which Koreans have immigrated to the US (i.e., Korean immigration history). The disproportionate delineation of biological age reflects the formative periods in which a person goes through in terms of adolescence, education and adulthood.

2. Materials and Procedure

Formal speech elicitation methods were utilized in the present study. The formal methods used were a word list, a reading passage, and a semantic differential task (see Appendix). The semantic differential task refers to a formal speech elicitation task where the speaker’s attention is intentionally diverted from pronunciation by asking for the differences in meaning between a pair of words, which include the target segment (Labov, 1984, p.43).5 In addition to formal speech, spontaneous speech was also elicited through interviews with the speakers. The interviews were 30 minutes long on average and centered on interrelated topic modules (e.g., hardships in immigrant life). The subjects were informed that the interview would be a candid tape recording and that their anonymity would be ensured. Although face-to-face interviews with the researcher were preferred, 66 were interviewed face-to-face while 35 subjects were interviewed over the telephone. In the latter case, the subject was recorded using a telephone cassette recorder. The interviews were 30 minutes long on average and were transcribed by the researcher.

As for the formal speech elicitation tasks, in the word list, there are 16 words which have a word medial /u/. In the word list, the word ‘motel,’ was included in order to test whether non-native speakers would incorrectly flap the /u/. The reading passage was designed in order to include as many words which had a word medial /u/ as possible. In the reading passage, there are 25 words which have a word medial /u/. The final task was the semantic differential task. The subjects were given three pairs of words and were asked to first read the pair and then explain the differences in meaning. Here, a total of seven occurrences of word medial /u/ (e.g. two in the word ‘identity’).

3. Data Analysis

The data analyses were comprised of a means analysis of judgments concerning word medial /u/ flapping and what social factors showed influence. Initially, the researcher coded and judged the occurrences of flapping. Next, a reliability test was conducted with a native English speaker.

---

5 The first utterance of each target word in the semantic differential task was discarded because the speakers tended to consciously read the words once before offering definitions.
The test was an impressionistic rating of the tokens and did not consist of a formal acoustic analysis. The inter-rater reliability rate was 97.23%. The influence of variables such as sex, age of arrival in the US, and age were also investigated in relation to style. It is speculated that differences in stylistic use will arise due to these variables as initially postulated in the research questions.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data was analyzed quantitatively by examining the frequency rates of the occurrence of word medial /t/ flapping among the subjects. The first component of the analysis is a frequency analysis of flapping in terms of each style. The second component is an analysis of stylistic variation in flapping presented according to each social variable across styles.

First, the analysis of the word list examined two versions of the word list. WL refers to the word list in its entirety and WL-I refers to the word list minus the two words of 'shelter' and 'salty' where the /t/ is preceded by an /l/ (see Appendix). The extremely low frequency of flapping in this environment in the speakers prompted the omission in order to provide a more accurate analysis of flapping. The word list is analyzed according to age of arrival in the US, sex, and age. The results of both WL and WL-I are given in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>WL</th>
<th>WL-I</th>
<th>RP</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>G1</td>
<td>72.39%</td>
<td>82.73%</td>
<td>94.66%</td>
<td>94.45%</td>
<td>93.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G2</td>
<td>67.70%</td>
<td>77.37%</td>
<td>90.66%</td>
<td>89.21%</td>
<td>93.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G3</td>
<td>66.14%</td>
<td>75.59%</td>
<td>89.33%</td>
<td>96.52%</td>
<td>93.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G4</td>
<td>67.01%</td>
<td>76.29%</td>
<td>88.18%</td>
<td>92.52%</td>
<td>91.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G5</td>
<td>52.72%</td>
<td>60.06%</td>
<td>73.59%</td>
<td>72.63%</td>
<td>82.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G6</td>
<td>43.22%</td>
<td>49.39%</td>
<td>56.50%</td>
<td>65.28%</td>
<td>56.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G7</td>
<td>34.82%</td>
<td>39.79%</td>
<td>37.71%</td>
<td>42.00%</td>
<td>52.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59.02%</td>
<td>57.09%</td>
<td>77.53%</td>
<td>78.14%</td>
<td>85.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>67.37%</td>
<td>65.24%</td>
<td>74.88%</td>
<td>80.58%</td>
<td>80.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>65.91%</td>
<td>75.20%</td>
<td>87.03%</td>
<td>93.90%</td>
<td>90.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>62.49%</td>
<td>71.40%</td>
<td>82.88%</td>
<td>87.34%</td>
<td>88.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>36.91%</td>
<td>48.50%</td>
<td>52.30%</td>
<td>42.20%</td>
<td>53.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>36.94%</td>
<td>49.40%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>42.10%</td>
<td>72.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61+</td>
<td>40.27%</td>
<td>50.20%</td>
<td>50.30%</td>
<td>46.00%</td>
<td>66.45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: WL = Word List, WL-I = Word List - I, RP = Reading Passage, SD = Semantic Differentials, SS = Spontaneous Speech

The frequency rates were taken from a GoldVarb analysis (i.e., a statistical tool for multivariate analysis in quantitative sociolinguistics), which was conducted independently from the present study.
As can be seen from Table 3 there is a steady decrease in WL and WL-I as the age of arrival increases so the gap between G1 and G7 is almost 40% for both lists. There is almost an 8% difference in terms of sex with females showing a higher rate of flapping in both lists than males. In terms of age, there is a decrease in flapping up to the age group of 41-50 but then flapping starts to increase in the 51-60 and 61+ age groups. In subsequent analyses of stylistic variation which include the word list, WL-I will be used and not WL.

Regarding the results for the reading passage, as can be seen from Table 3, patterns similar to the one seen in the word list are found. The rate of flapping decreases as age of arrival increases and females and males show sensitivity to flapping according to different contexts. However, in the category of age a steady decrease is seen in flapping as age increases.

The results of the analysis of the semantic differential task show that again there is a steady decrease in flapping as age of arrival increases. However, the G3 group shows the highest rate of flapping at 96.52%. As for sex, females again show a higher rate than males but the margin is less than 2%. The results for age show that flapping decreases but that the oldest group of 61+ shows a higher rate of flapping than the 41-50 and 51-60 age groups.

Lastly, the spontaneous speech data show that, similar to the results of the formal speech elicitation tasks, the rate of flapping decreases as age of arrival increases. However, regarding sex, females show an overall lower rate of flapping than males. A generalization concerning age is difficult to reach due to the 41-50 age group’s showing the lowest rate at 53% and the 61+ age group’s showing a lower rate than the 51-60 age group.

Stylistic variation is examined according to the social variable at hand. First, style is analyzed in relation to age of arrival group. The results of the analysis are shown according to each style. First, Figure 1 shows stylistic variation in relation to age of arrival. Figure 1 shows that for most of the groups, stratification exists with spontaneous speech showing the highest frequency of flapping.

**FIGURE 1**

Stylistic Variation of Flapping According to Age of Arrival
As can be seen, almost all of the groups show stylistic variation with the word list at one end of the continuum and spontaneous speech at the other end. It is somewhat surprising to note that G2, which is the category, for 0-5 years patterns with G3 (6-10 years) rather than with G1, which comprised speakers born in the US. Another interesting outcome was that G2, G3, and G4 showed almost identical patterns.

Next, stylistic variation is analyzed according to sex. Previous analyses have not yielded significant differences concerning sex (Strassel, 1998). Of the 101 speakers, 52 were male and 49 were female. Sex differences do not seem to play a significant role in the acquisition of flapping. Figure 2 shows that the differences in sex across the four styles are minimal.

**FIGURE 2**
Stylistic Variation of Flapping According to Sex

Males and females pattern alike in all of the styles. On the other hand, there is a slight increase in the rate of flapping along the stylistic continuum in both males and females.

Lastly, style in accordance with age is examined. As will be seen, age shows a different dimension than age of arrival. Age shows a relative effect on the rate of flapping. The results of the analysis are shown in Figure 3.
Figure 3 shows that all groups show an increase along the stylistic continuum. Here, it is interesting to note that the 18-30 group almost identically patterns with the 31-40 group while the remaining groups also pattern in similar ways.

The results found in this study are similar to the stylistic patterns found by Labov’s (1966, p. 222) study on several English variables. In this study, the more formal a speech situation is the less a speaker used word medial /t/ flapping and vice versa. Furthermore, non-native speakers of English showed the same stylistic patterning as native English speakers. While Labov (1966) and other studies have examined social class and its interaction with style, this study examined nativeness of English and ethnicity as social variants that affect the use of flapping.

Overall, the results of the stylistic analysis of flapping show that the rate of flapping decreases as age of arrival of the speakers increases. There are slight differences in sex in that females show a higher rate than males in the formal tasks but not in spontaneous speech. As for the age of the speakers, the younger speakers show a steady decrease across styles but the older speakers do not show a specific pattern. Analyses of each form of speech show similar results as the overall analysis with age of arrival in the US showing the most apparent pattern. It is clear that flapping as well as other features should be acquired because it gives a speaker not only a native-like quality to their speech but identifies them as a North American English speaker.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Style was examined in the use of word medial /t/ flapping by native and non-native English-speaking Korean Americans. The formal style elicitation tasks included the reading of a passage, a word list, and a semantic differential task. These formal styles were compared along
with results obtained from spontaneous speech. As for the initially posed research questions, in general, stylistic variation was indeed evidenced in the speakers. Not all of the social variables showed effects on the stylistic use of flapping. In addition, both the native English speaking Korean Americans and the non-native English speaking Korean Americans displayed similar stylistic patterns. This indicates that all of the speakers in this study are aware of style and how it affects the occurrence of linguistic features.

The presence of stylistic variation shows that the subjects possess patterns of word medial /t/ flapping which are similar to native English speakers. Previous studies of style in second language acquisition where the stylistic shift is “often between a native and non-native variant rather than two native ones” (Beebe, 1988, p. 49) accounted for learners pronouncing words correctly in isolation but mispronouncing them in context. However, the stylistic variation found in the speakers in this study indicates that stylistic shift occurs between two native variants: flapped /t/ and unflapped /t/. Therefore, the results provide a description of both native and non-native speakers who do possess stylistic variation, and show that they understand the stylistic significance of the variants in obeying the same stylistic constraints as native speakers.

The issue of how to teach stylistic variation warrants further investigation. The fact that stylistic variation exists in such features and that speakers embody this variation has not been a central concern in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language. As flapping is a highly noticeable and definitive characteristic of the variety of North American English, non-native speakers must acquire this feature if they choose to speak this certain variety. Flapping, a phonological rule that may be manifested below the level of consciousness, is a feature that cannot be properly acquired in EFL settings without explicit instruction. Native speakers, while not taught flapping through instruction, are exposed to flapping and thus able to capture the subtleties in terms of use vs. misuse. In EFL settings where such exposure is not readily available, instruction can be the remedy. Whether explicit rule learning of flapping is effective and how learners can become aware of flapping needs to be examined. Further avenues of research can delve into the consequences of flapping misuse.

The pedagogical implications of stylistic variation indicate a need to fill a niche in language instruction materials. Such materials should provide a means for the systematic presentation of and exposure to stylistic variation. On a macro-level, stylistic guidelines could be provided for speaking and writing skills, whereas on a micro-level, stylistic variation in particular linguistic features should be specified. Knowledge of stylistic variation could assist advanced learners of English in stepping over the threshold of non-native proficiency to near-native like proficiency. It is not just native speakers of a particular language but all speakers of any language who display stylistic variation in their everyday speech. In this sense, style is a very definitive aspect of using a language. Unfortunately, style is often overlooked in EFL and ESL instruction. This
study has endeavored to suggest that variable speech styles serve an integral function in English language use. While perhaps the basic components of style can be acquired implicitly without instruction, for the non-native English speaker, style should be taught explicitly to achieve native-like proficiency.

REFERENCES

APPENDIX

Formal Speech Elicitation Tasks

* Target word medial /l/ flapping segments are marked in bold type.

1. Word list

1. party
2. shelter
3. liberty
4. identity
5. international
6. water
7. battery
8. computer
9. interested
10. little
11. individuality
12. sentence
13. negative
14. beautiful
15. city
16. salty
17. individuality
18. motel

2. Reading passage

I've lived here for half of my twenty years. My dad wanted me to move right after I graduated. I'm glad I managed to find a local university where I could study classical music. I think the city fits my personality.

In Center City, I like shopping at the computer shop and a pretty little place that sells beautiful clothes. Yesterday, I saw a shirt that I wanted to wear to a party I was planning to attend on Saturday but I didn’t have
enough cash. For entertainment, I like eating at international restaurants and I just began to take dance
lessons. The instructor always looked mad but he laughed a lot. I became pals with him.

The only negative things about the city are the bad tap water and the crime. A man was beaten because he
interrupted a demonstration for equality and liberty. But I'd rather live here than out in the valley.

3. Semantic differential task

1. tap water  
2. computer  
3. identity  

spring water  
typewriter  
personality

Applicable levels: SLA, Methodology
Key words: American English, flapping, stylistic variation

Hikyong Lee
Department of English Language and Literature
Korea University
1, 5 Ga, Anam-dong, Sungbuk-gu
Seoul, 136-701, Korea
Tel: (02) 3290-1995
Fax: (02) 3290-1980
Email: hlecku@korea.ac.kr

Received in October 2003
Reviewed in January 2004
Revised version received in February 2004