

Vowels in Contact: A case study in Romanian

From a desire to better understand the effect of both external and internal factors on vowel production in immigrant groups, this paper explores the change in vowel quality of two speakers of Romanian in Canada. The focus is on the behaviour of the central high vowel, which lacks a correlate in English, and the implication of age at the time of immigration.

The two speakers that are analyzed, Dio and Cami, were recruited through the larger investigation on Romanian heritage speakers. For baseline comparison, vowel samples were obtained from an online corpus of Romanian (Teodorescu et al., 2010). A socio-linguistic interview, about half an hour long, was also conducted in order to gather data about the background, language knowledge, language use, dialectal influences and language attitudes of the participants. In addition, vowel tokens are gathered from a word list reading.

The Lobanov vowel extrinsic method for normalization of speaker data is used. The raw and normalized means from each participant are compared to the average speaker. The effect of age and linguistic markets are discussed. With respect to the high central vowel, it is the younger participant that has a more stable production. However, there is no loss of distinction for the central vowel in either participant. Factors that could account for the more careful production of /i/ in the younger participant are also discussed, as well as additional observed differences in the vowel inventories of both participants.

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