

Network Connectedness of Japanese-Americans in Metropolitan Seattle

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This study examines the social networks and referential communities of two Seattle-born Japanese-American sisters. We are interested in how network features might be studied in a highly-mobile urban community, and in how these might be related to speakers' participation in vowel change. We focus here on so-called prevelar raising: raising /æ/ and /ɛ/ before voiced velar /g/ in words such as "bag" and "beg." We hypothesize that regardless of ethnicity, speakers showing greater integration into regional life than into an ethnic subculture will show higher levels of participation in this regional change (with or without simultaneous use of ethnolect markers). Network data, elicited in a detailed questionnaire, were examined using a set of measures not explicitly used (to our knowledge) in sociolinguistics—the percent homophily score (which registers proportion of same-ethnicity close-tie contacts).

The notion of *speech community* can be quite difficult to apply in large urban networks. Instead, Fishman's notion of the *referential community* was applied because it appears able to make visible those social groupings, meanings and identity information that are salient to respondents. Together with social network analysis, referential community analysis elucidates the frames of reference of the focal respondents. For both sisters, we found expressions of (dis-)connectedness with Japanese, Japanese-American, and Pacific Northwest communities. Within the larger cohort of Japanese-American speakers, integration into regional PNW life correlated with participation in prevelar raising. Second, we found that a high level of ethnic homophily was inversely correlated with participation in prevelar raising—except for Caucasian speakers. Enlarging the homophily analysis to include the larger sample of ethnic group speakers in the PNWE sample, we found that network homophily analysis appears to be quite powerful in capturing key differences in the integration of each ethnic group into the local PNW community.