

The Social Stratification of the Voiced Interdental in the Battery Dialect of Newfoundland

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The social structure of a community has a significant influence on one's social network and identity. For instance, cohorts with multiple similarities in their social structure, especially those in low-status communities that are socially isolated, tend to have similar dialectal features (e.g., Chambers, 2003; Lippi-Green, 1989; Milroy, 1982). This paper investigates the social and linguistic factors that contribute to the stratification of the voiced interdental /ð/ (a *marker* in Labovian terms) in the Battery, a small community outside of St. John's, Newfoundland (Canada). Once a small out-port fishing community known to be socially marginalized and segregated, the Battery is today a highly sought after area characterized by rampant development and expensive real estate, while still retaining some of its fishing village charm.

This study adopts a variationist methodology for data collection and analysis, employing standard sociolinguistic interview protocols across a stylistic hierarchy to investigate the variable production of [ð] and its less prestigious variant [d]. The results of a multivariate analysis (via Goldvarb X) show that there was a significant intergenerational dialect shift to an increase in the use of the more prestigious variant [ð] from the older to the younger Battery natives. In addition, the results indicate a social stratification of /ð/ between members of the younger generation: Those still residing in the Battery patterned similarly to the older Battery natives in their use of the low-status identity marker [d] whereas those living outside of the community use the [d] significantly less. The results also reveal that there is significant variation in the use of /ð/ based on gender and style. The linguistic constraints that affected the stratification of /ð/ included word-internal position and word type, also found to be significant in other studies of interdental stopping (e.g., Dubois & Horvath, 2003).

Selected References

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