Second-dialect performance on TV: Accuracy and acceptability

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Performance in a second dialect (Trudgill, 1983) is thought not to give a realistic view of second-dialect acquisition (Chambers, 1992; Siegel, 2010). An analysis of performance, however, excludes factors as motivation and analytical ability, and allows for an exclusive focus on the extent to which speakers can modify their behaviour.

This paper focuses on the short vowel systems in the American English performance of three Australian actors in the television series Camp (2013). There are clear phonological and phonetic differences between Australian and American English, necessitating an adaptation of accent. Acoustic analysis shows that, for the KIT /ɪ/, DRESS /ɛ/ and TRAP /æ/ vowels, the actors use sufficiently lowered realisations to fit an American model, but at the expense of greater variability in their second dialect compared to their first. This is in line with findings from second-language acquisition (van Dijk et al., 2011). Performance for the STRUT /ʌ/ and LOT /ɑ/ vowels is less on target. As the actors’ American English accents received mixed reviews on internet fora, the acoustic analysis will be contrasted with a foreign-accent rating (underway at the time of abstract submission).

References


