

Sociophonetic variation in the South Fly: Evidence from Ende

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This paper explores sociophonetic variation in Ende, a Pahoturi River (Papuan) language spoken by the Ende *tān* in southern New Guinea. While there is a growing body of variationist research taking place in the region, we know little about variation and change in these languages. Here, we examine variable affrication of Ende retroflex obstruents ($\widehat{ʃ}$ ~(t) and ($\widehat{dʒ}$ ~(d) and consider what linguistic and social factors are linked with this variation. Specifically, we highlight the locally relevant social factor of community orator, a group of individuals who perform a prestigious daily oration practice called *kawa* (Lindsey, 2019b). This ethnographic approach (following Eckert, 2012) not only supports the study of pattern-driven variation in Ende – i.e., how this social factor may be linked with multiple variables – but also provides much-needed contrast and comparison with dominant sociolinguistic theories. This is an important consideration given the underrepresented nature of the southern New Guinea context (Evans, 2012) and the potential for differences in social structure (Stanford & Preston, 2009).

To analyze the variable affrication, we used auditory analysis to examine the speech of 16 Ende speakers. This sample is balanced for gender, age, and orator status. Within a corpus of monolingual interviews (archived in Lindsey, 2017), we treated the retroflex obstruent variable (N=1,542) as a binary category (64% *affricate*, n=981; 36% *stop*, n=561). The likelihood of affrication is linked with the two linguistic factors of voice and syllable position, as well as a combination of social factors including speaker age, gender, and orator status. Statistical analysis, using mixed-effects logistic regression models, reveals a significant effect of orator status: retroflex obstruents are more likely to be realized as stops when produced by orators. Among the orators, there are also effects of age and gender, where older speakers and women are more likely to produce tokens as stops compared with younger speakers and men. In contrast, no age- or gender-based differences are observed among the non-orators. Acoustic analysis that takes into account gradience of the acoustic signal, and identifies fine-grained similarities and differences within and between social groups, is a critical next step for this study.

Our results are consistent with an interpretation of the stop variants as prestige forms and suggest that their use in Ende is linked with the speaker’s societal position: orators, who hold positions of high status in the community, use language to assert symbolic power. These findings build on Lindsey’s previous analysis of word-final /n/-elision in Ende (2019a), where the variation was also found to be strongly associated with orator position, and points to extant dynamics of power and prestige operating in the community that map onto linguistic variation. These results may further indicate a nuanced relationship between speech style and social categorization in Ende.

This particular example of sociophonetic variation is not limited to Ende. For example in Idi, retroflex consonants are also variably realized as stops and affricates (Schokkin, p.c). Variable affrication of alveolar fricatives (e.g., [\widehat{z} ~ $\widehat{dʒ}$ ~ $\widehat{ʒ}$ ~ $\widehat{dʒ}$]) is also a well-attested areal feature of the South Fly and can be found in other Pahoturi River languages as well as unrelated families such as Trans-New Guinea. It is likely that these variables, among others in the region, are also linked with a range of social factors, and the present study contributes to the foundational research in this understudied area. Future work that continues to draw on ethnographic documentation and explore broader patterns of variation in the Papuan context will enhance, and likely challenge, our understanding of dominant sociolinguistic trends.

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