

Phonological Variation and Sound Change in Yami on Orchid Island

D. Victoria Rau and Hui-Huan Ann Chang
Providence University

This study investigates the sound change in progress in the Yami diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/ (e.g., mangay "go", araw "day, sun") on Orchid Island. Variants such as [ay], [ey], and [iy] for the variable (ay) and [aw], [ew], and [uw] for the variable (aw) have been found in recent preliminary surveys on the island (Li and Ho 1988; Rau 1995). The interpretation of the direction of change has been centralization and upward movement, thus [ay] and [aw] alternate with [ey] and [ew], respectively. In addition, [ey] moves forward to [iy], whereas [ew] moves backward to [uw]. However, this assumed direction of change could be reversed, based on Labov's (1991) three principles of vowel shifting, in which the nuclei of upgliding diphthongs fall. In other words, the predicted direction of change for (ay) and (aw) could be: /iy/ -> /ay/ -> /oy/ and /uw/ -> /aw/ -> /ew/. If the interpretation of raising is correct, the Imowrod dialect with the most frequent /ay/ and /aw/ variants should be taken as the more conservative one and centralization is the innovation. This is the most widely accepted view. On the other hand, if the interpretation of falling is correct, the Izazaley and Izanomilek dialects with the greatest frequency of /ey/ and /ew/ variants and some /iy/ and /uw/ residues should be taken as more conservative, and /ay/ and /aw/ are the innovative sounds.

This puzzling issue of phonological variation and sound change of (ay) and (aw) will be approached from a combination of the sociolinguistic variationist paradigm and an ethnographic method to answer the following three questions: (1) What is the direction of the chain shift of (ay) and (aw)? Does it undergo changes of raising or falling? Which variants are more conservative: /ay/ and /aw/ or /iy/ and /uw/? (2) Is this variation of diphthongs a case of stable stratification, age-grading, or sound change in progress? and (3) What

social meanings can be attributed to the development of variation? To what extent is the variation of (ay) and (aw) influenced by a combination of internal factors and external factors? Finally, in what ways is the centralization of (ay) and (aw) correlated with Yami or Tao identity and orientation?

This study will not only provide evidence of chain shifting to determine the direction of sound change in Yami but also contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between social contexts and linguistic change. Furthermore, the findings of which are conservative versus innovative forms will help materials developers make an informed decision on modification of Yami orthography.