

A New Look at Cassidy (1983)

Hideo Kobayashi

Osaka Prefecture University

kobayashi-h@mrg.biglobe.ne.jp

This study investigates whether Americans differentiate RSL (r-sound lengthening) as in *crrrash!* from SEE (schwa epenthesis for emphasis) as in *carash!*, and also in which situations each of these emphatic forms is used.

From May to July 2012, the author conducted one-on-one interviews with 14 Americans to determine if there is a difference between RSL and SEE. A major finding from this is that the respondents who adopt RSL and SEE as emphatic tactics are aware of the differences in use. This helps the author reach a testable hypothesis about the research question. It seems that RSL helps raise the degree of emphasis of the target situation in life-threatening events that concern the speaker and/or the addressee, whereas SEE is not used for that purpose because SEE gives a disrespectful impression to the addressee. Instead, SEE usually applies to raising the degree of seriousness of the target situation that concerns topics other than life-threatening events. From July to October 2013, the author carried out an anonymous survey with 81 Americans to see whether or not this hypothesis is correct. The results varied idiolectally and dialectally.

Based on this hypothesis about these two forms of emphasis, the author asked the same 14 Americans to recite the B part of carrier sentences three times without emphasis, and then emphatically with the same intonation pattern, rate of speech, and degree of stress. The subjects were instructed to choose either RSL or SEE as an emphatic tactic in each of the carrier sentences. The results were that for the carrier sentences like (1), all of the speakers adopted RSL in the target words for emphasis. This is assumed to be because inserting a schwa in the CC cluster gives a disrespectful impression to the addressee. (The author is Japanese and acted as the addressee in the experiment.) Therefore, this experiment supports the research hypothesis, especially when the carrier sentence addresses real life events, such as a tsunami. (The tsunami referred to in (1) meant the giant tsunami that occurred in Japan on March 11, 2011.) By contrast, for the carrier sentences like (2), all of the speakers adopted SEE as an emphatic tactic in order to highlight the degree of the target situation.

Carrier sentences

(1). A: Did you see the tsunami on TV?

B: Yeah, the giant tsunami was *crashing* the shore.

(2). A: Are you a bungee jumper?

B: Yeah, it's a *crazy* sport.

This study has an original finding that the use of RSL and SEE depends on the social context in American English. This finding was never documented in past studies.

References

Cassidy, F. G. (1983). The intensive prefix *ker*. *American Speech*, 58(4), 291-302.