

Who's in Your L2 Neighborhood? An Examination of Neighborhood Density in Adult L2 Speakers of English

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The purpose of my research was to determine whether the traditional definition of density, namely all the words differing from a given word by one phoneme, was applicable for adults learning English as a second language (L2). The participants consisted of undergraduate students at the University of Kansas, whose first language (L1) was not English. The majority of participants spoke Cantonese, Korean, Japanese, or Mandarin as their L1. Each participant had solid proficiency in L2 English as demonstrated by their scores on a vocabulary test and their college placement. Participants listened to 69 consonant-vowel-consonant nonwords and reported the first English word that came to mind. Responses that were made by two or more participants were classified as neighbors of the nonword. The neighbors were then analyzed to see if they differed from the nonword by one phoneme, the traditional definition of a neighbor. The results showed that density for these non-native speakers was significantly correlated with density from native speakers (see Massey's presentation). In addition, the percent of neighbors matching the one phoneme rule for non-native speakers was significantly correlated with similar data from native speakers. We conclude that the traditional definition of neighborhood density is appropriate for adults learning English as a second language.