Phonological Variation and Sound Change in Yami on Orchid Island

D. Victoria Rau and Hui-Huan Ann Chang

Providence University

This study investigated the sound change in progress in the Yami diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/ (e.g., mangay “go”, araw “day, sun”) on Orchid Island. The interpretation of the direction of change has been centralization and upward movement, thus [ay] and [aw] alternate with [əy] and [əw], respectively. In addition, [əy] moves forward to [iy], whereas [əw] moves backward to [uw]. This paper reports the results of qualitative and quantitative analyses to answer the following two questions: (1) What is the direction of the chain shift of (ay) and (aw)? Does it undergo changes of raising or falling? and (2) To what extent is the variation of (ay) and (aw) influenced by a combination of internal factors and external factors?

Our qualitative analysis revealed that the nucleus raising rule is an innovation in Yami and has progressed faster and longer in (ay) than in (aw). The same rule has also spread to environments such as a-i and a-o across morpheme boundaries. While (ay) is raised to the peripheral high front vowel /i/ in the raising areas, another change, in prefixes with the high front vowel (e.g., mi-/pi-/ni-), is reversing the direction and has begun to lower and diphthongize the nucleus /i/ to /ey/.

Our quantitative analysis tested the raising rule in word final position. The raising rule has been identified as associated with geographical differences. However, the raising and non-raising areas also tend to be associated with language vitality. Thus an interpretation on the relationship between ethnic identity and raising is proposed.

Key words: /ay/, /aw/, sociolinguistic variation, sound change in progress, Yami