

# Bybee & Scheibman (1999)

*The effect of usage on degrees of constituency:*

*The reduction of don't in English*

# Goal

- Exemplify the effects of frequency in language and how it can impact the phonological level using a corpus-based approach.
- Provide evidence of grammaticalization of certain linguistic forms (*don't*).

# Methods

- 138 tokens of *don't* were taken from a speech corpus of approximately 3 hours and 45 minutes.
- Tape-recorded naturally occurring conversation.
- Speech of 6 participants (4 females, 2 males) from New Mexico.

# Methods

- The tokens were categorized into 4 different groups:
  - Full-stop consonant + Full vowel
    - *We don't see him all winter* [dɔ̃]
  - Reduced consonant + Full vowel
    - *Well they don't know who did it.* [rɔ]
  - Reduced consonant + Reduced vowel
    - *I don't know if I could do that.* [r̃ə]
  - Reduced vowel
    - *I don't know anything about guns.* [~ə]

# Results

Table 1. *don't variants by type of item preceding or by type of construction (n = 138)*

Preceding/Type	stop + o Group 1	flap + o Group 2	flap + ə Group 3	ə Group 4	Total no.	%
I	16	22	38	12	88	63
you	7	7			14	10
we	2	6			8	6
they	1	3			4	3
lexical NP	5				5	4
pause	1				1	1
adverb	2	2			4	3
neg. imper.	6				6	4
interrogative	3	4	1		8	6
Total	43	44	39	12	138	100

# Results

Table 2. don't variants in declarative constructions by following expressions ( $n = 124$ )

Following	stop + o Group 1	flap + o Group 2	flap + ə Group 3	ə Group 4	Total
know	2	8	24	5	39
think	7	6	6	1	20
have	1	7	1		9
have to	1	2	1		4
want	1	1	3		5
see	3	1			4
like		1		1	2
get	1	2			3
mean				1	1
feel				1	1
care			1		1
play		1			1
meet		1			1
believe		2			2
inhale	2				2
work		1			1
support		1			1
give		1			1
need		1			1
intend	1				1
go out	1				1
make contact	1				1
follow through	1				1
do	1				1
code	1				1
eat	1				1
Total					
verb tokens	25	36	36	9	106
verb types	15	15	6	5	26
adverb/disc marker	3	3		1	7
pauses/break	6	1	2	2	11
Total	34	40	38	12	124

# Take-away

- Phonological reduction is more likely to happen when the form “don’t” is used with the pronoun “I” and the verb “know”.
- The direct consequence of the frequent use of this construction is that it acquires new grammatical functions (grammaticalization).
  1. I don’t know what happened.
  2. A: Isn’t this the best pizza you’ve ever had?  
B: I don’t know, it’s alright.
- A corpus analysis can help us observe these patterns in natural language.