

Notes on the r-dropping assignment.

Linguistics 113: Language and Diversity in the US · Fall 2005

"I'm lying in bed. I'm in La-La land. I'm probably on my third REM cycle. Pretty deep sleep. Ah... the phone rings, and my phone in my room doesn't work again— would you please try to use it and fix it again for me? Anyway, it, ah, doesn't work, so I run into the other room and I answer the phone, and it's George – he's loaded – he goes.. he's like ..ah.. 'Paula! Get ready, we're going out.' And I'm like, 'George, it's like three in the morning, ya know, I'm in bed.' And he's going 'Come on, we're going out.' Talked me into it anyway. I said 'All right, what the hell.' I didn't have to work the next day. So.. I went out. It was... we drove around for a little while. We went to this little park that Vicky found behind Burbank's. It's really nice. It's got this little path. Me 'n him 'n his friend Brian.

And his friend Brian has this car, it's ..it was a fifty-five hot rod, and it's, it's MINT. OK, the kid's LIFE. He lives in this little.. he lives in the boonies, out in this little field and stuff. He has a farm, and him and his father and grandfather, that's all, they're into cars, and... this car is mint, ok, the paint is mint, the.... [do you mean color?] The paint, the color? The color's mint? Everything is.. oh no, it's not mint, you ass. No, it's burgundy or something like that, but it's in mint condition. And... the biggest flaw is this paint chip. It's a little scratch, about the size of your finger nail, and.. anyway, it runs awesome...

There were no cars anywhere. On the roads. I don't know why. And... we were driving around. Anyway, we went to that park. And we walked a little while. And like the sun was comin up, and I was.. we were tryin to think of the highest place around that we could get to to watch the sunrise. And so we drove to Centerville, you know, it's all hills, and we went up to the top top top of Centerville, and we went to the top of the reservoir. We could see... It was the best night I've had all summer – in a long time, you know what I mean, it was the best time I've had, I mean, and, like, I didn't even plan on going out. I was just sleepin and stuff. I'm so glad I went out. It was so cool. We had the best conversations, we had the best time. And we just watched the sun rise. I had these awesome sunglasses, and I could see, like everything is red, but you can look right at the sun. It was risin right over these houses. Aw, it was so much fun, it was cool. I'm just glad I went.

The *r* in the word *third* is a syllabic stressed *r*. We've called words with this kind of *r* 'er'-words. There are other 'er'-words in this text to watch out for: *work, Burbank's, or burgundy*.

It is important that the spelling can sometimes deceive us. In many words, for instance, the final letter 'e' is not pronounced. If you listen to your speech, you will hear that the word *are* here ends with an *r* sound, not an *e* sound. The *r* in "*We're going out.*" can drop because it is followed by the initial *g* sound of *going*.

The *r* in *for* does not drop, because it is followed by *a*.

Here the *r* in *car* is deleted despite the following *i* vowel. This is because the words are not run together, but separated by a pause at the sentence boundary (in writing, symbols like the comma or a dash (–) are good indicators of a pause).

The *r* in *father* is followed by the *a* vowel of *and* and does not drop. The *r* of *grandfather* however is not followed by a vowel. It will drop according to our rule.

The *r* in *they're into* will not drop because of the following *i* of *into*.

We didn't count the *r* by the other person [...]. If the other person were an *r*-dropper, we would predict that they would have dropped it. If not, our rule wouldn't apply.

When we are reading our eyes don't focus on every single word. It's easy to miss little function words like *or*.

The final *e* letters in words like *there, were* or *anywhere* are not pronounced. Listen to yourself saying these words – you'll find that they end in an *r* sound.

For those of you who are, or know, *r*-droppers: It's fun to ask yourself whether your pronunciation of this text corresponds to what our rule predicts. That is, did we get the rule right? Does it accurately describe your dialect, or that of other people you know?