Regional and Social Variation in Scottish T-glottaling

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Glottal replacement, or T-glottaling, is well-studied in UK English and a known feature of Scottish varieties. Speaker age, gender, social class, and familiarity of talk are typical social predictors in community studies. While glottal replacement is favoured by a following consonant and disfavoured by a following vowel, the effect of a following pause on word-final /t/ varies by study, prompting the “polygenetic hypothesis” (Schlee 2013; Smith & Holmes-Elliott 2017:2). Given Susan Smith’s (1999) finding of variation within Glasgow, more comparisons between Scottish locales are needed.

2. GROUP-LEVEL DIFFERENCES: Study 1

2.1 Methods

Researchers: A class of 36 advanced undergraduate university students.

Speakers: 17 famous Scottish women, regionally and socioeconomically diverse.

Recordings: from 2010-2018, from publicly available sources (e.g., YouTube).

Coding: Groups of coders obtained 10min of continuous speech per speaker, including 2 styles.

Number of syllables following phonological environment (consonant, vowel, pause)

Speakers factors:

Year of Birth (continuous, 1895–1994), and Age (Older, Younger)

Socioeconomic Class (Working, WC; New Middle, NMC; Established Middle, EMC)

Region (greater Edinburgh, greater Glasgow, the Highlands, Angus/Fife, Stirling)

Occupation Type (Entertainment, Journalism, Politics, Writing, Other)

Linguistic factors:

following phonological environment (consonant, vowel, pause)

number of syllables

2.2 Results

For both word-medial and word-final /t/, the only significant predictors were number of syllables, following phonological environment, and speaker profession.

3. INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES: Study 2a & 2b

3.1 Methods

Study 2a: 531 tokens produced by Nicola Sturgeon during three 2018 First Minister’s Questions and 205 tokens produced by Mhairi Black during a speech at the SNP conference (2017) and interviews with journalists Owen Jones (2016) and Emma Barnett (2015)

Study 2b: 283 word medial, intervocalic tokens produced by Nina Nesbitt; 203 taken from a set of five interviews, and 80 from her musical discography; in addition to /t/ and /t/, // was also coded for

3.2 Results

Study 2a: Comparing within one profession we find individual differences apparently depending on age, status and their distinct roles in the Scottish and British political contexts: newly elected, 23-year-old SNP MP Mhairi Black produces higher rates of glottal replacement than the 48-year-old leader of the Scottish government.

Study 2b: Comparing within a single speaker, we find that stylistic differences apparently depending on register and genre. Nesbitt has high rates of T-glottaling in speech, but low rates in singing. Nesbitt has no instances of // in her speech, but high rates in singing, along with /t/. These two variants correlate with song genre; she produces /t/ most frequently on acoustic tracks, whilst // occurs on folk-pop and pop-style tracks.

4. DISCUSSION

Politicians and writers use higher rates of alveolar stops compared to entertainers, possibly to index qualities such as “learnedness” (Benor 2004; Bucholtz 2001) “articulateness” (Podesva et al. 2015) competence and reliability (Kirkham & Moore 2016). Glottal replacement has only recently started to spread into formal styles and varieties such as political speeches (Fabricius 2002; Kirkham & Moore 2016, both in RP) where it has been found to invoke relational themes such as “solidarity” and “familiarity” (Kirkham & Moore 2016). While external social factors such as age and status influence variation among Black and Sturgeon, this dissemination is now also documented in Scottish Standard English, potentially with similar indexical values (see Markl 2018). These indexical meanings are present in intraspeaker variation as well, as seen in Nina Nesbitt’s intervocalic /t/ productions, which are tightly connected to her constructions of coherent musical identities, reflecting apparent associations between supralocal pop // and the careful acoustic style // (see Papineau & Hall-Lew forthcoming). A degree of regional variation is also observed (see Sung 2018), but larger quantities of diachronic and synchronic data are needed to comment confidently with regard to the origin of T-glottaling in Scottish English, especially in the north of Scotland.

References available upon request