

VARIATION AND CHANGE IN SCOTTISH ENGLISH: RHOTICS AND RHOTICITY IN AYRSHIRE

Scottish English (SE) is typically described as a rhotic variety of English, with taps [ɾ] and approximants [ɹ] as typical rhotic variants [1]. Prevocally, phonological environment and gender have been invoked to account for the variation of /r/ [1; 2]. Non-prevocally, recent findings, especially in the last decade, indicate not only that /r/ is extremely variable, but also that a process of derhoticisation might be ongoing in this accent leading to coda /r/ being vocalized and eventually absent [2; 3; 4; 5; 6]. This study investigates the variation and possible change of both prevocalic and non-prevocalic /r/ in SE in relation to internal and external factors in a corpus of eight Scottish speakers from Ayrshire, Scotland. The hypothesis is that apparent-time sociophonetic investigation and analyses may confirm change in general and derhoticisation more particularly for our Ayrshire speakers' /r/.

The speakers were selected from the PAC-PFC project [7] according to their age and gender: four men and four women, and within each group two young speakers (18 – 28 y.o.) and two older speakers (64 – 82 y.o.). All speakers come from a working- to lower-middle-class background. Results presented here are those for an informal style, consisting in spontaneous speech from casual conversations between native Scots. An acoustic analysis was performed to determine the type of rhotic used. The realisations of the /r/ phoneme were analysed for all possible phonological environments (both pre- and postvocalic) in connected speech, and were separated into six different categories: 'trill [r]', 'tap [ɾ]', 'approximant [ɹ]', 'fricative [h]', 'altered vowel [ə]'; 'zero realisation [Ø]'. The factor of syllable stress was taken into account in non-prevocalic environments, in addition to the factors of age, gender, and phonological environment analysed in both pre- and postvocalic contexts.

The acoustic analysis of eight Ayrshire speakers has revealed a great amount of variability in the realisation of /r/, in both prevocalic and non-prevocalic positions, dependent upon internal and external factors. Prevocally, /r/ realisations are determined by the phonological environment, but also by the social factors of age and gender, young (female) speakers favouring approximant realizations.

In non-prevocalic position, the realisation of /r/ depends on the linguistic factors of syllable stress and phonological environment, as well as on the social factors of age and gender. Derhoticisation is the most frequent for young women, and the least so for old men, age being the primary significant factor, though rhoticity is significantly higher in a linking environment. This could be a change in progress which seems to be led by young women, who also change their favoured type of consonantal rhotic, from taps to approximants.

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