

t-lenition processes in British English: differences in regional and contextual variability

Danielle Turton
Lancaster University

In varieties of British English, variants of the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ span many forms. Glottal stop replacement is the most commonly studied (e.g. Foulkes & Docherty 1999, Harris & Kaye 1990) and is found throughout the British Isles. Accents which exhibit this variable phonological process provide evidence that the rule of glottal stop replacement targets non-initial syllable position primarily (e.g. word final *cat*, *sit*), advancing to non-initial in the phonological foot over time (e.g. intervocalic *water*, *city*). This claim is reflected via lower rates of application in intervocalic words (e.g. Baranowski & Turton 2015) and greater social stigmatisation of glottalling when /t/ occurs between vowels (Fabricius 2000, Foulkes & Docherty 2007).

The present paper focusses on less well-reported variants of t-lenition in British English which target (intervocalic) non-foot-initial position in the first instance. The first of these is t-flapping, more commonly associated with American English, but reported for varieties as distant as London and Lancashire (Wells 1982, Turton 2018). The second, perhaps more commonly recognised, is the glottalisation patterns reported for Newcastle upon Tyne and the North East of England, which typically target voiceless stops in intersonorant position (e.g. *water*, *banter*; Milroy et al. 1994; Docherty & Foulkes 1999, 2005). Both processes do not target canonical coda /t/s, as found for the majority of accents in the British Isles. Thus, we find a range of t-lenition processes which bear some similarities in the phonetics, but different phonological patterns, and vice versa.

The paper presents data from a range of varieties of English in England, including Blackburn in Lancashire, Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne and London, comparing auditory, acoustic and articulatory data of t-lenition processes in these accents. The phonological distribution of t-lenition processes in each variety is compared, demonstrating that the target domain between varieties and between processes is not consistent, but the rates of application found in different contexts reflect the grammatical structure of the predicted rules. Overall, it is argued that the range of patterns makes perfect sense when considering the interaction of phonological structure and variable rules.

References

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