

T-glottaling in American English: Shadowing as an elicitation technique

Sociolinguistic research has shown that reading tasks tend to elicit more formal speech than open-ended interviews (Labov 1972; Trudgill 1974). The difficulty with interviews is the possibility of encountering few or no tokens of the variation being studied. Recently, shadowing techniques used in psychological research have been applied to sociolinguistic questions (Rohena-Madrado et al. 2006; van der Veer and van Heuven 2003), and may provide a key for eliciting less formal speech, but in a more controlled environment allowing for the collection of more tokens. Shadowing involves auditorily presenting sentences that participants are then asked to repeat several times in succession. The pronunciation in question is masked so that the task is not one of mere imitation. The present study uses shadowing in order to investigate t-glottaling in American English.

Glottal stops are common realizations of 't' in most varieties of English, especially before another consonant. Many British varieties also allow [ʔ] intervocallically (e.g., bu[ʔ]er, go[ʔ] a lot) where North Americans typically pronounce flaps (e.g., bu[r]er, go[r] a lot). However, anecdotal evidence suggests that intervocalic glottal stops between words are not uncommon in the speech of North Americans, for example "shu[ʔ]up," "table[ʔ]in," and "helme[ʔ]on." A paucity of information on this alternation in American English motivates the present study.

The goal of this study, then, is to explore the social and linguistic factors that are associated with t-glottaling across word boundaries, while at the same time, demonstrating the utility of shadowing as an elicitation tool. In this presentation we report on our first shadowing experiment with 58 participants: 20 from Utah, 22 from other Western U.S. states, and 16 from non-Western states. States were classified as Western or non-Western in accordance with dialect-feature boundaries delimited in Labov, Ash, & Boberg (2005).

Our preliminary findings are suggestive of an apparent-time change in progress toward t-glottaling—lead by younger females living in the Western United States (see Figure 1).

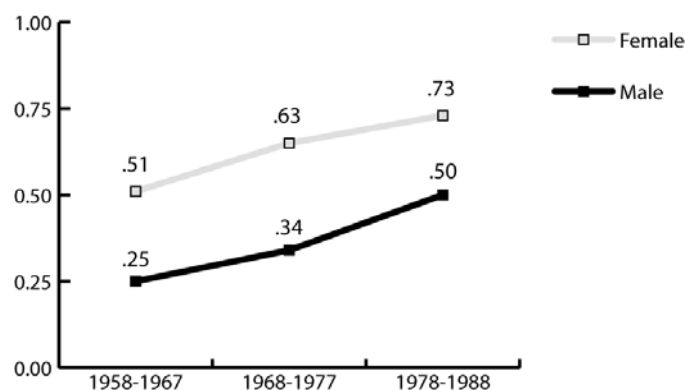


Figure 1: Factor weights for t-glottaling by sex and age

Citations

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