The role of sociolinguistic salience in speech production and perception

Roy Alderton, Lancaster University

SALIENCE
Refers to variables that 'stick out'.
- Labov's markers and stereotypes (1972)
- Silverstein’s indexical order (2003)

Do linguistic factors cause salience?
- Frequency, phonological contrast, phonetic gradience, spelling...
- Or social factors? (Trudgill 1986)

The problem of circularity.
- Noticeable > salient?
- Or salient > noticeable?

Cognitive vs. social salience.
- Surprisal and unexpectedness given the surroundings (Rácz 2013).
- The ability to evoke social meaning (Levon & Fox 2014).

RESEARCH QUESTION
Does social meaning work differently for 'highly salient' and 'less salient' features in speech production and perception?

VARIABLES
/t/-glottalling: phonetically discrete, shown via spelling, etc. > 'highly salient'.
GOOSE-fronting: phonetically continuous, not shown via spelling, etc. > 'less salient'.
Both are increasing in South East England.

PARTICIPANTS
45 young people from Hampshire aged 16-19 from a state school and a private school.
Private school constellations of practice: 'Outgoing room' and 'Reserved room'.

METHODS
Production data: Reading and conversation.
Perception data: Attitude judgement survey task and discussion task. Stimuli: 4 teenagers from the same town reading the same text. Today: discussion task only.

GOOSE PRODUCTION RESULTS
F2~F1 Euclidean distance between FLEECE and GOOSE vowel mid-points using Lobanov normalisation; n = 1,118.

SUMMARY
/t/-glottalling
- Varies according to macro-social categories.
- Has strong and consistent social meanings in perception that are partially linked to its variation in production.

GOOSE-fronting
- Varies according to the micro-social category of room.
- Has weak and variable social meanings in perception that do not reflect micro-level variation in production.

Salience
- We should try to be clear about what kind of salience we’re talking about, e.g. cognitive or social salience.
- It may sometimes be better to use other terminology, e.g. ‘awareness’, ‘noticing’, etc., depending on our aims.

REFERENCES

GOOSE PRODUCTION RESULTS

/t/ PRODUCTION RESULTS
Auditory analysis of /t/ (alveolar vs. glottal); n = 5,313.

PERCEPTION RESULTS
/t/-glottalling

As soon as she said little [liʔæ], I got that chavvy vibe. Someone only needs to say it once and it’ll be in my head.'
‘Some people drop their T’s and it sounds chavvy, but it’s almost like they’re trying to drop them.’
'I have no clue. I think it might be his own little add-on to his speech. I only noticed it when you pointed it out.'
'It’s like a weird mix between chav and posh.'

GOOSE-fronting

Outgoing room
Reserved room

‘Outgoing room’ students use more GOOSE-fronting than ‘reserved room’ students at the private school.

PERCENTAGE OF GLOTTAL /T/

PRODUCTION RESULTS

STATE SCHOOL PRIVATE SCHOOL STATE SCHOOL PRIVATE SCHOOL

PERCENTAGE OF GLOTTAL /T/

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