

Reanalysis of Tyneside linking /r/: Are younger speakers reversing the trend toward word-level deletion?

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Introduction

In non-rhotic varieties of English, although /r/ is vocalised in coda position, it is usually retained in linking position i.e. before a vowel in the following word:

pou[ɹ] in
unde[ɹ] it

- Process is found to be near-categorical in RP (Cruttenden 2008), Norwich (Trudgill 1974), and Manchester (Turton 2010).
- In Tyneside English, speakers variably realise /r/ in linking positions according to age and socio-economic class (Foulkes 1997).
- Foulkes' (1997) found a trend toward linking /r/ deletion, led by young, working-class speakers.
 - Rule inversion:** younger speakers showed lower rates of linking /r/ as an underlying /r/ was no longer present in the speech community.

Alternative Hypothesis

	terrain	very	pouring	pour a	pour	
American English	[ɹ]	[ɹ]	[ɹ]	[ɹ]	[ɹ]	various
RP	[ɹ]	[ɹ]	[ɹ]	[ɹ]	∅	Cruttenden (2008)
S.African English	[ɹ]	[ɹ]	[ɹ]	∅	∅	Hartman & Zerbian (2010)
Broad non-rhotic	[ɹ]	∅	∅	∅	∅	Harris (2006)

Table 1: /r/ realisation in various contexts across accents of English

Life cycle of phonological processes (Bermúdez-Otero 2015):

- Would predict that phrase level /r/ deletion could advance to the word level
 - E.g. /r/ deletion in *pour it*, despite resyllabification of /r/ into onset
- Tyneside speakers may be advancing to this next stage of /r/ deletion

Table 1 shows a subset of the possible typology of /r/ systems:

- Word-level deletion is represented by South African English, reported as having no r-sandhi (Hartman & Zerbian 2010).
- Foulkes's (1997) results suggest that Tyneside speakers represent a variable stage somewhere between the systems of RP and South African English.

Method

- Auditorily coded interview data obtained from *Diachronic Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English* (DECTE)
- Analysed linking /r/ production of 18 Tyneside natives
- Aimed for a real-time comparison to Foulkes's (1997) study
 - As in Foulkes' (1997), speakers divided into younger (16-30) and older (41-60) age brackets
 - Both working-class and middle-class speakers were investigated

Results

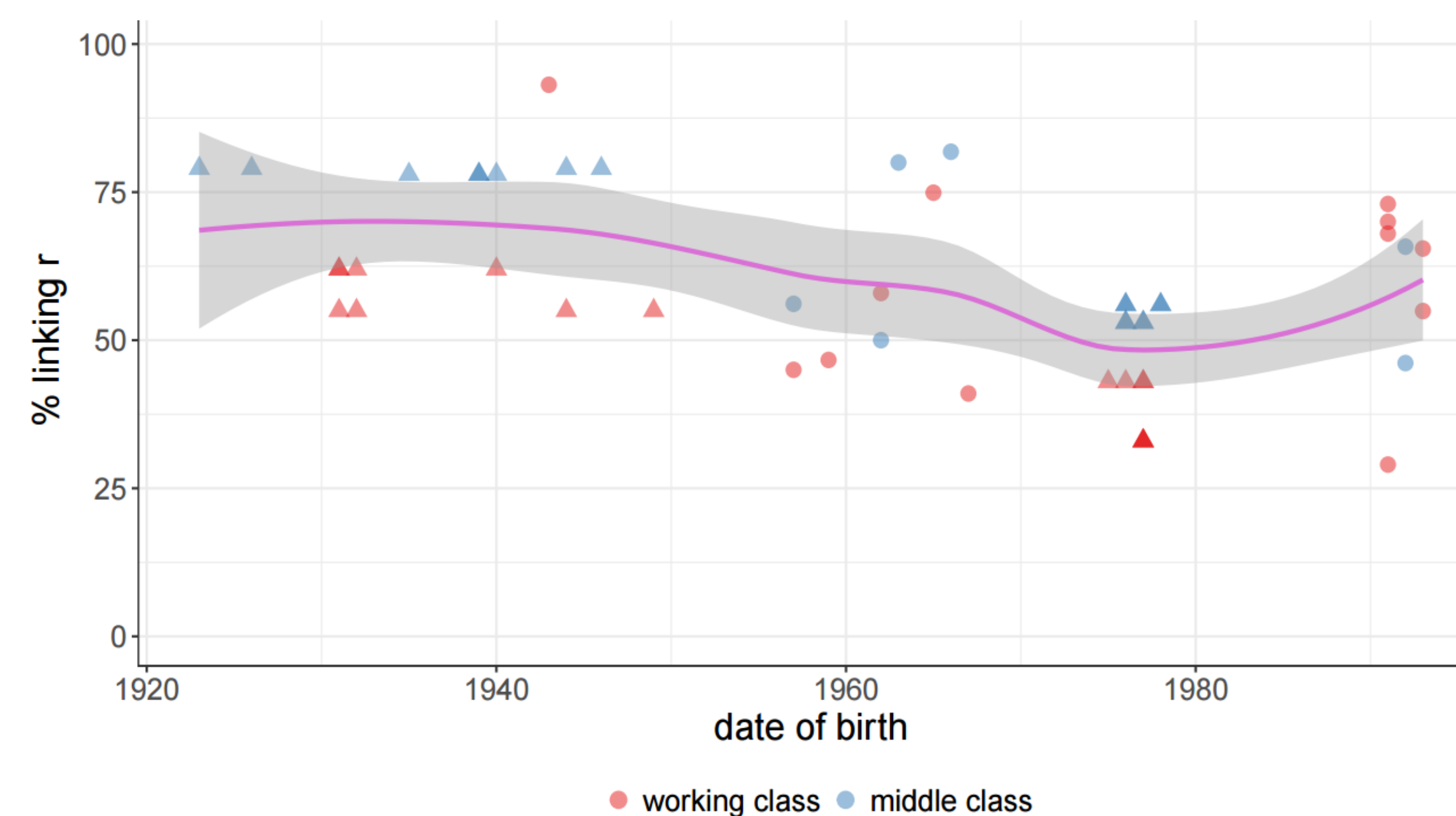


Figure 1: Linking /r/ rates by birth year in Tyneside.

(Triangles represent Foulkes's (1997) data, circles new data from present study)

The present study finds a reversal of Foulkes (1997) trend toward linking /r/ deletion

- Figure 1 illustrates that speakers born in the 1990s typically produce /r/ in 50-75% of linking environments
 - This contrasts with Foulkes's prediction that linking /r/ would soon be eliminated from Tyneside English.

Additionally, Figure 1 indicates that linking /r/ production may no longer be influenced by socio-economic class

- Foulkes found that working-class speakers consistently had lower rates of linking /r/
- However, new data from some young working-class speakers show higher rates of /r/ than their middle-class counterparts

Figure 1 also illustrates that linking /r/ is still very variable in Tyneside

- One young speaker exhibited a linking /r/ rate of only 27%.
 - This rate is lower than any speaker in the previous study of the speech community.

Discussion

Findings suggest that the reversal of Foulkes's trend may be down to a change from above in the region.

- Linking /r/ possibly viewed as a prestigious variable, present in most other English varieties, and used by the middle-classes in the Tyneside speech community.
- Higher rates in more formal styles in Foulkes (1997)

Alternatively, from the perspective of theories of incrementation (Labov 2001: 446), we could hypothesise that the youngest generation have incremented in the "wrong" direction due to reanalysis of a linking rule to an intrusion rule:

- Previous generations had a deletion rule which was on the rise
- The newest generation reanalyse this as an insertion rule
- Thus, their incrementation on the previous generation's rates go in the opposite direction.
 - But not all speakers pick this up (young speaker at 27%)
- This raises questions about community knowledge of sound changes between generations
- How can we address this? Intrusive /r/ - if it truly is a reanalysis, younger speakers should show similarly high rates of intrusive tokens.

Further Research

Intrusive /r/, the realisation of /r/ when it is neither orthographically or etymologically present (*saw[ɹ] it*, *draw[ɹ]ing*), is also found to be mostly absent in Tyneside speech (Foulkes 1997; Watt and Allen 2003).

- The data used in the present study provided too few tokens of intrusive /r/ (an average of 2 tokens per speaker) to conduct a full investigation
- Given our findings, we would expect younger Tyneside speakers to exhibit increased rates of intrusive /r/ alongside linking /r/.
- Further research into intrusive /r/ in the speech community could provide crucial evidence relating to how speakers treat this rule of /r/-insertion.

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