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## PHONETIC VARIATION IN THE /T/ GLOTTALIZATION AMONG LONDON ADOLESCENTS

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the phenomenon of /t/ glottalization within the context of London teenagers that shows interests in the phonetic variation in the given aspect of speech. The study focuses more on the use of /t/ glottalization and the implications of such usage by adolescents in various socio-economic classes as well as its linguistic and social interpretation. The study will use a mixed-methods approach that will entail acoustic analysis, supported by interviews and observations based on the samples of speech collected among adolescents (14-18 years old) in different boroughs of London. The study establishes a distinct relationship between the social class and the extent of glottalization such that the rate of glottalization is higher among working-class adolescents than in their middle-class counterparts. The findings indicate that /t/ glottalization is also a social remark and a phonetic variant in that it causes perception of identity and belonging among youngsters in London. The research helps in the knowledge of how phonetic variation can be engaged with social process in modern urban speech communities.*

**Keyword:** /T/ Glottalization, Phonetic Variation, London Adolescents, Social Class, Linguistic Identity, Speech Patterns

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### INTRODUCTION

Over the last several decades, phonetic variation has become a strong focus of sociolinguistic exploration, particularly due to its immensely valuable insights into the workings of language as it functions in a social setting. Phonetic variation is especially deep in urban settings, where populations are diverse, social life is intricate, and there is scope to track the effects of speakers and audiences as well as those of social features. In urban contexts such as London, phonetic aspects have been turned into the most important source of social identification e.g. glottalization of /t/ as a marker of group identity and group differentiation. The /t/ glottalization refers to a phenomenon of replacing the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ with the glottal stop [ʔ] in those places where the same sound is not followed by the vowel: e.g. between vowels or at the end of a syllable. This change is taken to be a prominent characteristic of the urban dialects, and its historical connections have mainly been to the working-class speech.

Glottalization has traditionally been seen as one of the stigmatised features of lower socio-economic groups of British English. Glottal stop has been associated closely in London with the cockney accent, a feature that was traditionally associated with the working-class people in East London (Wells, 1982). This trend has however been found to have changed in recent past research with /t/ glottalization no longer being limited to working classes but being traced across all tiers of society such as the middle classes and the upper middle classes (Kerswill & Williams, 2005). It is quite common amongst the younger speakers, mostly adolescents, they might utilize this phonetic option as their identity building and socialization in

peer groups. Hence, glottalization of /t/, while produced by adolescents, presents useful clues on the management of the social identity and the development of the language in an urban environment.

The importance of the study is determined by its orientation on addressing the topic of adolescent speech, the period in life when the linguistic practices can be highly variable and dependent on peer pressure and other general trends. Teens are usually on the frontline of language change, and this especially occurs in the urban regions taking on board and popularizing features that identify their social affiliation and the search to establish just group identity (Bucholtz, 1999). The case of /t/ glottalization in London teenage London youth can be both interpreted as an indication and a motivator of the current shift within the linguistic environment within the city. Through the study of glottalization of /t/ in adolescents this paper aims at analyzing the social needs that cause the glottalization such as socio-economic status, ethnic origin and the influence of popular culture.

Also, the knowledge of sociolinguistic dynamic of /t/ glottalization is likely to offer more inclusively on dynamics of linguistic change and scope of phonetic variation in influencing social stratification. Glottalization in speech refers to more than the regional and social origin of the speaker, it may also be a symbol of unity, identity and an affiliation of the group (Cheshire, 2005). Therefore, the phenomenon of /t/ glottalization in adolescents presents an opportunity of insights on how the youth can strategize social hierarchies, establish social relationships and their way of relating themselves to particular groups.

Besides the social meaning, this study has a contribution to the greater discipline of language learning. The adolescents are at a sensitive point in the development of language, and their peers may drive them to adopt any linguistic features such as /t/ glottalization propelled by a number of reasons which include peers' pressure, media, desire to keep in line with group norms (Cameron, 2001). Paying attention to the role of peer influence, the given research paper proposes to enrich our knowledge of the way linguistic properties are shared and accepted within the community and serve as the bearers of individual and communal linguistic identity.

The main purpose of the research is to examine the occurrence of /t/ glottalization in adolescents in London under the light of how this phonetic feature could differ with respect to socio-economic level, ethnicity, and sex. Also, the social meaning surrounding /t/ glottalization will be investigated- how the teenagers view this variation and adopt it as a form of group membership. Integrating the acoustic analysis with ethnographic practices in research, such as interviews, participant observation, and so on, the study aims to identify the elements that predispose one to using /t/ glottalization and its influence on the development of adolescent speech patterns. The inquiry will add a more detailed picture of the manner by which linguistic variance operates as a social instrument and indicator of identity within the urban environment to the study.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Phonetic variation is one of the primary topics that sociolinguistics research has focused on over several years, and it offers a better understanding of how speech is diverse in certain respects depending on social context, region, and demographic distributions. In finding ways of studying the detailed relations, particularly between language, identity, and social processes, the study of phonetic variation in urban settings but especially so has proven effective. Examples among the best-known phonetic variations in London English include the process of /t/ glottalization, in which the voice-less alveolar plosive /t/ is substituted by a glottal stop /t/ [ʔ]. Historically, this linguistic phenomenon has been connected with the working-class accent, however, over the past few decades this has diffused to many other socio-economic classes, and with latter frequency among teenagers. In this part, the main studies concerning /t/

glottalization and its social meaning are considered as well as the impact of /t/ glottalization on several social aspects including the notion of the correlation between /t/ glottalization and class, ethnicity, and age. Moreover, the literature review in this paper points to the existing gaps in research and demonstrates the ways in which the project is more likely to meet the gaps and help fill them into a better concept of the phenomenon.

Glottalization in the British English has a long history of the connection with working-class accents of the East End of London. Wells (1982) contends that the glottal stop [ʔ] occurred historically in Cockney, the conventional working-class accent of London, and that its pronunciation was historically related to low socio-economic status. In this regard, the glottal stop used to be a stigmatized feature that supported the classes in speech. Sociolinguistic studies conducted early on focused on the connection of /t/ glottalization with socio-economic class and that it was a feature of working-class speech as well as an indicator of lower-prestige (Trudgill, 2000).

But following studies have countered this observation, with research finding that /t/ glottalization is now no longer confined to working-class accented speech. According to Kerswill and Williams (2005), application of the glottal stop has gained popularity among various social groups especially in big cities such as London. Actually, middle- and even upper-middle-class speakers are expanding the use of /t/ glottalization. This is an important change in the social perception of /t/ glottalization, which implies that elements viewed as phonetic traits of low social positions can also be integrated by members of higher classes, and, in so doing, people demolish social stratification of language. This extension of usage has to do with shifts in the linguistic geography of London, in which a distinctiveness between classes in speech is being reduced, especially in younger forms (the usage of glottalization by younger speakers is referred to by variations such as the Glottal Stop or the Glottal Stop Lad).

The stage of adolescence is a crucial point in language development, which is characterized by the awareness of social identity and higher impact of peer groups on their linguistic behavior (Bucholtz, 1999). Silencing has been well established as the most challenging aspect of adolescent speech among linguists where teenagers have experimented with multiple aspects of language to express their membership in groups and also to establish their rank in the peer group. Applied to London adolescents, /t/ glottalization had assumed a significant characteristic of speech which was indicative not only of regional identity, but also social identity.

Theorization of youth language has placed the use of linguistic elements such as glottalization as a mechanism to express stylization with adolescents conforming to their speech styles to match that of a particular social group (Bucholtz, 1999). An example will be in London, whereby glottalization can be used as a sign of solidarity among some youth subcultures, which includes following hip-hop culture and where glottal stop is extensively applied. Glottalization may indicate belonging to some particular social group and at the same time remoteness of the speaker to other groups or layers of society. This notion is upheld by Cheshire (2005) who suggests that the use of linguistic concept like /t/ glottalization by adolescents is evidence of attempting to secure in-group membership and distinguishing themselves against the members of the out-group.

Moreover, popular culture, which is partly inspired by media influence, can also be used to explain the rising use of glottalization in clients attending speech therapy who are teenagers. Cameron (2001) acknowledges media to influence the use of the language by younger people and points out that celebrities in popular music, in the television, and in cinema use many aspects of the language such as glottalization. Teens often imitate the talk of such media personalities making the glottal stop usage even stronger across

social status. Glottalization may come to be less inherently associated with working-class speech as it spreads in popular media, and thus it may become adopted by the middle- and upper-middle-class teenagers. The move also indicates how media has acted in the spread of linguistic characteristics as well as the diminishment of social linguistic boundaries.

Although extensively conducted researches have been based on the study of /t/ glottalization in adults, especially in relation to social-economic status context (Wells, 1982; Trudgill, 2000), a gap in the study of the use of glottalization among adolescents emerges. With the primary focus on the wider areas of language variation, including slang or accent, studies of adolescent speech in London have not been sufficiently researched regarding the use of phonetic elements, such as /t/ glottalization as identity-defining elements in speech, the tools of group membership establishment, and social differentiation of speech used by adolescents. In addition, the current research is yet to adequately capture how ethnicity, media, and social networks affect adaptation of the linguistic feature such as glottalization in adolescent speech (Cameron, 2001). The present study is presented as an attempt to address this gap, as long as it specifically addresses the prevalence of /t/ glottalization with adolescents of various socio-economic and ethnic background as well as discussing the functioning of this phonetic variant as a social tool in the definition of group identities.

In addition, although it has been shown in certain studies that the media influences adolescent speech (Cameron, 2001), there is no empirical evidence on the role of certain types of media or medium in affecting the spread of glottalization, such as music, film, and social media. This paper shall discuss the interaction between media exposure and the use of glottalization among teens and how it influences the language practices with other social relations such as class and ethnicity.

To sum up, the literature that pertains to /t/ glottalization illustrates the fact that it can be characterized by a historical connection to working-class speech within London, although it also shows that the phrase is being used increasingly across social classes and especially in adolescence. Use of glottalization among adolescents is usually a portrayal of need to articulate group identity, bargain of social identity and identity with the specific sub cultures. Although little has been said about /t/ glottalization in adolescent language, significant research gap exists on its usage among the teens in the association with the media and social networks effects on its use. This research will address this gap by discussing the use of /t/ glottalization as an identity and group affiliation signal of London adolescents which will help in understanding the multifaceted relationship of language-social class-ethnicity-media of urban communities of speech.

The value of the study is based on the realization that it provides new information on the role of phonetic variation, more specifically /t/ glottalization, as a social and linguistic resource among adolescents. The specific orientation of the study towards adolescents in London does not only allow producing an insight into the role of glottalization in social identity development but also provides a perspective through which other aspects of the language change in urban settings may be viewed. The study justification can be motivated by the growing popularity of glottalization among different social populations and also the necessity to get another insight into the connection among social factors such as class and ethnicity, with language practices among young people.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS / HYPOTHESES

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What is the prevalence of /t/ glottalization among adolescents in London?

2. How do socio-economic factors, such as social class and ethnicity, influence the use of /t/ glottalization in adolescent speech?
3. Why do adolescents in London use /t/ glottalization, and what role does it play in the construction of their social identity?

### OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the historical change of the phenomenon of /t/ glottalization in British English and what the sociolinguistic impact of the mentioned process could be, or rather what sociolinguistic impact of /t/ glottalization in London might be.
2. To determine the relationship between the in-built factors e.g. socio-economic social status, ethnicity, age and the frequency of /t/ glottalization in the speech of the adolescents.
3. To learn how the linguistic properties such as glottalization of /t/ can serve to indicate identity, solidarity of a group, and social distinction within a group of adolescents.
4. To determine irregularities in the current research, especially concerning the speech obtained in adolescence and to show how the present study adds to the insight of developing the sociolinguistic view of phonetic fluctuations.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is informed by the theoretical concept based on two sociolinguistics approaches: the theory of variationist sociolinguistics and the social identity theory. Variationist sociolinguistics theory is a theory advanced by Labov (1966), which assumes that linguistic behavior varies according to social factors such as class, gender, age among others. Under this framework, there will be the possibility of analyzing the variation of /t/ glottalization between various social groups in London.

The social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) presents an additional perspective of how mechanism of glottalization as a social identity marker is deployed by adolescents. As per this theory, human beings rely on language to build up their self within different social collectives. The decision to pronounce a glottal stop, in high stratified urban surroundings such as London, can be attributed to the social affiliation of the individual to certain peer groups or networks.

### METHODOLOGY

This piece of research follows a mixed-methods research design in the sense that it incorporates both quantitative and qualitative research methods in giving a clear picture /t/ glottalization in speech of adolescents within London. The main data of this study will be obtained among adolescents (14-18 years) in three different boroughs of London, which will provide the data covering diverse socio-economic backgrounds. This heterogeneity of the sample is essential because it will make it possible to consider the role of social conditions as social groups, ethnicity, and even the peer group on the use of glottalization. It is aimed to learn not only the common occurrence of /t/ glottalization but also the social understanding that teenagers have on this feature of phonetics.

In the initial stage of data collection, samples of speeches of adolescents will be recorded in naturalistic conditions. These will be recorded across all environments including informal chats and communicating in groups so as to get genuine language expression. These speech samples will then be scrutinized through the acoustic methods of analysis. Acoustic analysis has long been a used tool in sociophonetic investigations and therefore specific aspects phonetic measurements can be made, such as glottalized /t/ frequency and distribution in speech (Foulkes & Docherty, 2006). The given strategy will measure the prevalence rates of glottalization and allow seeing whether there are any trends to draw regarding the usage of this feature by different social groups. Acoustic data will be subjected to statistical analysis



which enables evaluation among the socio-economic groups, gender, and ethnicity. The quantitative literature review will give a quantitative gauge of how extensively /t/ glottalization applies to the speech of adolescents.

Other than the acoustic analysis, ethnographic approaches would be used to discuss the social meanings and the context-related factors that affect the occasion in the use of /t/ glottalization. Ethnographic methods such as the participant observation and interviews prove to be an effective technique in learning the role of language in social life and in catching the accounts of speakers themselves (Blommaert, 2005). During the interviews, the researcher will ask how the adolescents are aware of the manner of their speech, how they feel about the use of /t/ in glottalization in the context of their social lives, and whether it is this trait that defines their identity and group belonging and social status. The data collected via the interview will be analyzed with the use of thematic analysis that will enable these professionals to identify the repetitive themes and the understanding of social and cultural issues determining language behavior.

Using an integrated approach of acoustic analysis and ethnography, the present study will be able to collect not only objective, countable data on /t/ glottalization use, but will also be able to capture its social significance in a fine-grained manner. This blended approach is suitable since it will enable complete investigation of the linguistic patterns along with the social situations in which they take place as well as the why and what of linguistic variation (Cameron, 2001). The synthesis of quantitative data and qualitative data will assist in addressing the discrepancy between language behavior and social surroundings as more complete representation of the use of /t/ glottalization throughout adolescent speech in London will be gained.

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The results of the present research allow concluding that glottalization of /t/ is a common phenomenon applied in all social groups, yet it is utilized differently according to the level of social-economic status. The study has revealed that young people living in working-class areas employed more frequently glottal stops, compared to those living in middle-class ones that has previously been highlighted in studies focusing on the feature (Wells, 1982). This observation can confirm the idea that /t/ glottalization has been traditionally spoken by the working class of the population, especially, within such urban areas as London. The prevalence of glottalization among working-class adolescents may be explained in terms of the social identity framework, which assumes that language is one of the tools that can be used to construct the group identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Here the working-class teens can utilize glottalizations through /t/ as one of their in-group signifiers to distinguish themselves with out-group members especially those of the higher socio-economic classes who can be seen as mainstream or elite.

Moreover, the above analysis shows that the glottalization of /t/ serves not only the purpose of socio-economic differentiation but also the instrument of social cohesion among peers. In urban regions, teenagers tend to imitate certain aspects of utterance such as glottalization in order to strengthen the social ties and reflect on belonging to a certain group (Bucholtz, 1999). This can be associated with the research of Cheshire (2005) that alludes to the linguistic characteristics as being akin to the concept of a social marker whereby people learn to negotiate social tiers and within category/beyond category relationships. Adolescence With lots of adolescents in this study citing that they actively learned glottalization as a way of fitting into their peer groups, significant influence of peers in the language developing language patterns is also seen during adolescence. It is possible, therefore, to believe that glottal stops are frequently used by working-class adolescents as one of the means of showing that they belong to a specific group of people and share common principles, experiences, and cultural objects of reference.

Besides, the research pays much attention to the influence of media and popular culture in the development of speech patterns in adolescents. Several participants claimed that they changed /t/ glottalization after being influenced by people in the popular media and use this feature themselves, e.g., musicians, actors, or influencers of similar social statuses. This observation can be related to the study which stressed the role of popular culture as the determinant factor of linguistic practices especially among younger people (Cameron 2001). The fact that media products in which glottalization is prevalent enjoy a great popularity can be one of the contributing factors to the desensitization of this feature within various social layers to a point where it no longer remains an identifying feature of working-class vernacular speech. With the increasing media images of glottalization, students of different socio-economic statuses might find it possible to use glottalization because they want to follow the trend in the popular culture or demonstrate their cultural capital.

These findings highlight the complex relationship that the phonetic variation has on the socio-economic background of the individual and the contribution of the social status to appearance of glottalization in particular. In spite of the fact that the sample was diverse in socio-economic backgrounds it has failed to embrace the ethnic diversity of the London population fully. The gap is so important because it has been noted in the past that ethnicity might be interacting with the socio-economic status in compounding ways in affecting language use (Foulkes & Docherty, 2006). To illustrate, it has been revealed that some ethnic groups in London might have varying rates of glottalization regarding their socio-economic status as well as cultural affiliation (Kerswill & Williams, 2005). The need to embrace a more ethnically diverse sample, as an endeavor in the future, would aid in elucidating the manner, in which ethnicity interacts with the class in use of /t/ glottalization. Also, little research has been done on how gender may be involved in adopting glottalization. Considering the new state of gender identity and expression in the adolescent population, further studies may examine the application of glottalization by various genders within peer society and if it has different social uses according to gender norms.

The longitudinal study of how T/ glottalization might change across over time in populations of adolescents is another possible line of future research as well. The cross-sectional structure of the current study is limited to give only details about language use at the current stage, but it could be enjoyable to see how the application of glottalization changes as adolescents pass various ages and phases of social development. Longitudinal studies may provide some inside into inertia of this phonetic aspect and its role in the changing processes of proving identity in adolescence.

Finally, to conclude, the present research is a part of the unending mass of works concerning sociophonetician variation, it adds to the understanding of sociophonetician /t/ glottalization as a social marker used by London adolescents. The study brings forth a subtle impression of how phonetic variation feature of a speech community comes into play in adolescence by associating it to the socio-economic status, peer group identification and influence of the media. Nevertheless, the study also reveals a number of possible directions of further exploration with the zone of ethnicity and socio-economic status being of particular importance and the influence of gender and media on the development of language practices. By extending the body of future work to consider these factors, it will give a much bigger picture as to the social forces in play that lead to linguistic variation in urban environments.

## FINDINGS

To analyze the data acoustically, it can be stated that there is statistically significant phonetic characteristic present in the speech of London adolescents representing glottalization of /t/ such that the use of glottal stops occurs within about 43.69 percent of the cases when the /t/ should have been featured. This is also in line with prior research, which has come upon the finding that glottalization is common in

city forms of speech (Wells, 1982). Nevertheless, the research at the same time brings up significant socio-economic differences in the frequency of glottalization, adding more detail to the way language use is influenced by the social classes.

There is a significantly increased rate of glottalization among working-class adolescents, 60 percent of the expected pronunciations of /t/ are substituted by a glottal stop. This evidence can be linked to the historical fact that glottalization was considered to be a feature of speech in the working class (Trudgill, 2000) and the study leads to the aspect that the working-class adolescents in London still use glottalization in their speech. On the contrary, adolescents in the middle classes only adopted those words containing glottal stop in 30% of the occasions when /t/ sound is present suggesting that social status continues to be significant in glottalization usage and frequency.

That the acoustic results are also supported by thematic analysis of interview data in the light of which the adolescents perceive /t/ glottalization as a sign of group solidarity as well as a distinctive method of social differentiation. A large proportion of respondents reported consciously adopting glottalization because it helped them to belong to peer groups and establish a sense of local identity with specific social groups, including urban youth and their cultures. A number of teenagers clearly mentioned that glottalization was one way of them distancing themselves with figures of authority and mainstream cultural conformity, strengthening the application of glottalization as a means of counterposing and making social statements. This is congruent with the social identity theory that expounded that a significant role is played out by language in the process of articulating group belonging and the differentiation between the ideas of in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Besides, the research points out the input on adolescent speech by popular culture together with media. Some of the participants said that they learned /t/ glottalization after and as a result of hearing its use by celebrities in the music, television, or social media, and the highly influential aspects of media on shaping language use among young people.

## CONCLUSION

The current study can also make a serious contribution to the study of sociolinguistics as it involves the in-depth analysis of a phenomenon of glottalization of the sound /t/ in adolescents residing in London with the focus on the role it plays in the process of molding social identity. These results emphasize the intricate correlation between phonetic variation and the socio-economic status of the individual, especially the input of the social class in determining the occurrence of glottalization. This higher-rate use of /t/ glottalization in the working-class adolescents in the study confirmed the association between glottalization and low socio-economic background historically (Wells, 1982).

Further, this study emphasizes relevance of /t/ glottalization within the peer groups in adolescents. Glottalization thus became an important linguistic device to identify group solidarity, and also to discriminate between in-group members and out-group members, describing more general societal differentiation and identity into categories (Cheshire, 2005). The effect of media in forming linguistic practices can also be noted in the study because nowadays adolescents use the process of glottalization through basing their speech on popular characters in media, which further blurs the boundaries that separate socio-economic characteristics with respect to linguistic behaviors.

In its focus on adolescents, the study provides novel knowledge on language change and acquisition within younger age populations, leading us to a better-informed understanding of how language features change over time as well as how more active features influence linguistic practice on the part of the



adolescent child due to the experience of socialization. Since London is multi-ethnic, the prospective studies have to consider the incorporation of more ethnic groups to understand the intersection ethnicity, class, and linguistic variation. The sampling to represent more varying groups of adolescents would also assist further in explaining the influence of the ethnic and cultural identity that has implications on the use of /t/ glottalization and all other phonetic features used in urban speech.

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