

# 'Hooked on Celebri[r]y': Intervocalic /t/ in the Speech & Song of Nina Nesbitt

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## Introduction

Word-medial, intervocalic /t/ has been identified as a feature that changes in the music of British artists, traditionally from [t] to [r]. This reflects what Trudgill (1997) identifies as a desire to align oneself with the American-dominated pop music industry. Simpson (1999) later quantifies this in his USA-5 features: features employed by British artists to appeal to such standards. Importantly, replacement of intervocalic [t] or [ʔ] with [r] is one of the USA-5 features.

Additional research has indicated that musical genres outwith pop may be more likely to contain local features and adhere less to Americanisation. This is perhaps as a way of establishing opposition to the mainstream musical marketplace (Beal 2009, Krause & Smith 2017). This has not always been found to be consistent, however (Krause & Smith 2017, Herbert 2019).



This project contributes to the line of research examining the relationship between identity and linguistic realisations in music, by examining Scottish singer-songwriter Nina Nesbitt (b. 1994) from Balerno, outside of Edinburgh. This is particularly important as work done in this area has centred primarily on English artists.

## Methods

The present study's data expands on a subset of the larger dataset from Hall-Lew et al. (2019). This data consists of:

- Speech tokens from five publically available interviews: n = 203
- Song tokens from Nesbitt's discography, excluding covers and remixes: n = 80

Tokens were auditorily coded for:

- Mode/style of production
- Syntactic category
- Topic
- Syllable count
- Interlocutor nationality
- Variant

A ternary distinction was made between [t], [ʔ], and [r]. Coding was done by the first author, with intra-rater checks. Disagreements were resolved by a second rater.

## Results

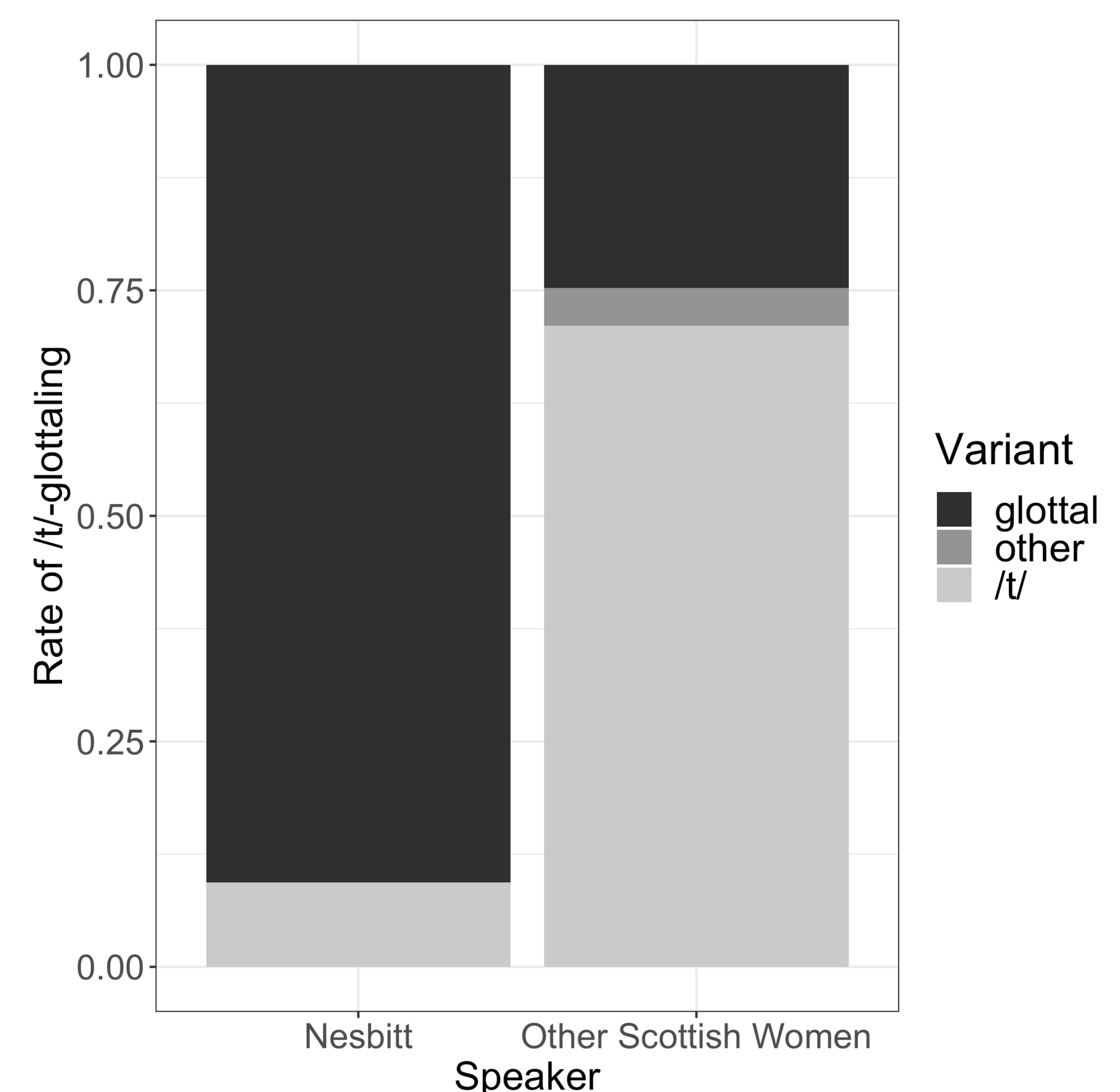


Figure 1: /t/-Realisations: Nesbitt vs. Famous Scottish Women

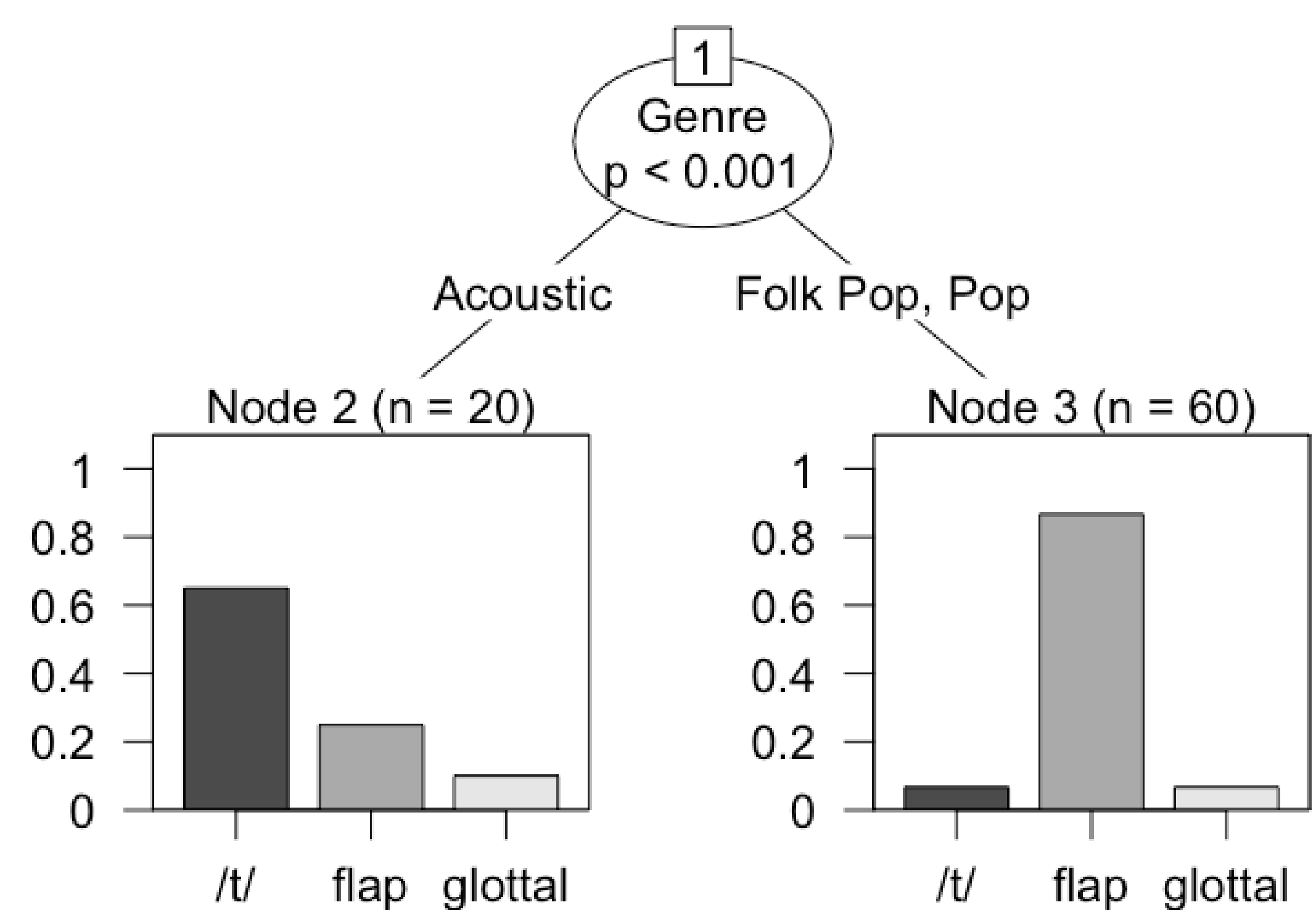


Figure 2: /t/-Realisations: Conditional Inference

## Discussion

The youngest woman in a sample of speech from female Scottish celebrities (Hall-Lew et al. 2019), Nesbitt /t/-glottals 91% of the time, much higher than the average (Fig. 1). This may indicate Nesbitt's participation in an observed shift towards t-glottaling in Scotland. In singing, /t/-realisations appear linked to song genre (Fig. 2). Acoustic singing features mainly [t], while [r] dominates in pop and folk-pop. The former suggests that Nesbitt considers pop music's linguistic marketplace to still be dominated by US English norms (e.g., Trudgill 1983). The latter may be to reject the same norms whilst also avoiding the stigmatised [ʔ] variant.