

The presence of /u/-fronting before /l/ in Manchester: Absence of a blocking r[ɹɫ]?

Danielle Turton¹ and Maciej Baranowski²

¹Newcastle University, UK

danielle.turton@ncl.ac.uk

²University of Manchester, UK

maciej.baranowski@manchester.ac.uk

The process of /u/-fronting, whereby the long high back rounded vowel in words such as *two* and *goose* is articulated towards the front of the mouth, resulting in higher F2 values, is reported for a remarkable number of dialects of English. These include the UK (Haddican et al. 2013, Henton 1983, Cheshire 2011, Jansen 2012, Harrington 2008), the US (Baranowski 2008, Fruehwald 2013, Hall-Lew 2011, Labov 2001, Ohala 1989) as well as the Southern Hemisphere (Harrington 1997, Mesthrie 2010). Many of these studies report blocking of /u/-fronting before /l/, which is unsurprising given that /l/ is darker, i.e. the tongue is backer, in such contexts.

Contrary to this typical pattern, Baranowski (2014) in a study of 74 speakers in the City of Manchester, found considerable fronting of /u/ before /l/. However, not all social classes exhibited fronting in this context: upper-middle-class speakers followed the typical pattern found in other varieties, but working-class speakers did indeed front before /l/. Multiple linear regression analysis confirms that social class is a highly significant factor, showing an inverse monotonic relationship between socio-economic level and the extent of the fronting, i.e. the lower the social class, the more advanced the fronting before /l/. Age turns out not be a significant factor, suggesting that this is not a change in progress in Manchester, but a case of stable sociolinguistic variation, with WC speakers showing advanced fronting of /u/ before /l/. This poses the question as to why speakers may be fronting their /u/s in this phonetically disfavoured position.

This paper presents novel data using ultrasound tongue imaging, examining the realisation of both /u/ and /l/ across different phonological environments. The ultrasound midpoint data show that WC Mancunians (Figure 1) do not exhibit the typical light/dark dichotomy between initial and final /l/s, whereas MC do (Figure 2). The differences between social classes are also confirmed in the F2-F1 measurement of /l/ for 51 speakers. We pose the question as to whether a lack of an allophonic distinction between light and dark variants may result in the blocking rule being unable to apply in these WC speakers. Following Fruehwald (2013) we compare the by-speaker random intercepts from two independent mixed-effects linear regression models (on the F2 of /u/ and the F2-F1 difference of /l/) to investigate whether the link between the two variants is linguistic or social parallelism (Watt 2000). We discuss to what extent the results show that /u/-fronting before /l/ is something intrinsic to the grammar, rather than a social effect i.e. does this provide evidence that /u/-fronting before /l/ is not merely something working class speakers do? Rather, is it the lack of distinction between [l] in initial and final position which results in such speakers treating the two fronting environments identically, and therefore fronting is not inhibited? We consider what such outcomes can tell us about the abstract representation of phonological categories.

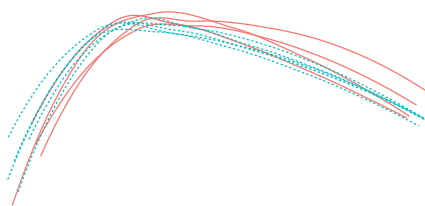


Figure 1: Working class speaker's /l/s

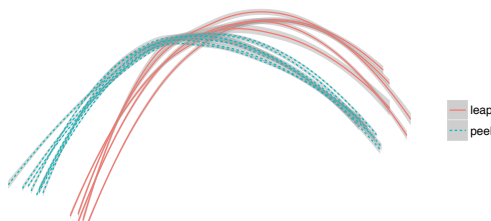


Figure 2: Middle class speaker's /l/s

References

- Baranowski, Maciej 2014. The sociolinguistics of back vowel fronting in Manchester English. Paper presented at Methods in Dialectology XV, University of Groningen, 11-15 Aug. 2014.
- Baranowski, M. 2008. The fronting of the back upgliding vowels in Charleston, South Carolina. *Language Variation and Change* 20: 527-551
- Cheshire J, Kerswill, P., Fox, S., & Torgersen, E. 2011. Contact, the feature pool and the speech community: The emergence of Multicultural London English. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 15(2):151–196.
- Caroline G. Henton. 1983. Changes in the vowels of received pronunciation. *Journal of Phonetics*.
- Fruehwald, J. 2013. The phonological influence on phonetic change. PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania.
- Haddican, B., Foulkes, P., Hughes, V., & Richards, H. Interaction of social and linguistic constraints on two vowel changes in northern England. *Language Variation and Change* 25: 371-403.
- Hall-Lew, L. 2011. The completion of a sound change in California English. 17th International Congress of Phonetic Sciences, Hong Kong.
- Jonathan Harrington, Felicity Cox, and Zoe Evans. 1997. An acoustic phonetic study of broad, general, and cultivated Australian English vowels. *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, 17(2):155–184.
- Jonathan Harrington, Felicitas Kleber, and Ulrich Reubold. 2008. Compensation for coarticulation, /u/-fronting, and sound change in standard southern British: An acoustic and perceptual study. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 123(5):2825–2835.
- Hughes, V., Haddican, B., & Foulkes, P. 2012. The dynamics of variation and change in northern British English back vowels. Paper presented at NWAV41 conference. 25-28 Oct 2012, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- Hughes, Vincent, Haddican, William, Richards, H., & Foulkes, Paul. 2011. Vowel variation in Manchester English: a dynamic approach. Paper presented at UKLVC8 conference, Edge Hill University, 12-14 Sept 2011
- Jansen, S. 2012. 'High back vowel fronting in the north-west of England.' In S. Calamai, C. Celata & L. Ciucci (eds.). *Proceedings of 'Sociophonetics, at the crossroads of speech variation, processing and communication*. Pisa, December 14th-15th, 2010. Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 29-32.
- Labov, W. 2001. *Principles of linguistic change: social factors*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Mesthrie, R. 2010. Socio-phonetics and social change: Deracialisation of the goose vowel in South African English. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 14(1):3–33.
- Ohala, J. 1989. Sound change is drawn from a pool of synchronic variation. In L. E. Breivik and E. H. Jahr, editors, *Language Change: Contributions to the Study of its Causes*, 173–198. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Watt, Dominic. 2000. Phonetic parallels between the close-mid vowels of Tyneside English: Are they internally or externally motivated? *Language Variation and Change*, 12(01), 69-101.