

Experience and learning in cross-dialect perception: Ambiguous /r/ in Glasgow

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Scottish speech is stereotypically rhotic. However, recent sociophonetic research indicates a trend towards /r/-loss in working class Glaswegian speakers, who realise postvocalic /r/ as a pharyngealised variant. The lack of an accompanying change in vowel quality in words such as 'hurt' results in minimal pairs (e.g. 'hut/hurt') which are virtually indistinguishable by unfamiliar listeners. However, very little difficulty is experienced by native Glaswegian listeners, including middle class Glaswegians, who (contrary to working class speakers) are displaying an increase in rhoticity over time in their own speech.

I will present the results of three experiments I conducted in my PhD. The first two experiments investigated the effect of long-term familiarity with this phonetic feature and listeners' ability to adapt to it after short-term exposure, and the third made use of mouse tracking, which uncovered the fine-grained detail of listeners' online perception. The results of these experiments may be explained by some general principles which underlie exemplar theories.