

POLITICS AND PHONETICS: ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP ON PRONUNCIATION AMONG SCOTTISH POLITICIANS

Previous studies have shown that pronunciation can index political identity. Yet, whereas previous investigations predominantly analyzed open vowels, the present study takes a new approach analyzing the production of rhotic sounds among Scottish politicians. Scotland provides a very interesting context due to its current political situation. Whereas the Conservatives and Labour are UK-wide unionist parties, the SNP only represents Scottish constituencies and continuously campaigns for Scottish independence. This study therefore investigates in how far the production of rhotic sounds may be influenced by party membership in Scotland while controlling for other intralinguistic and extralinguistic factors.

Data was retrieved from the Scottish Parliament and following the approach of Hall-Lew et al. 2017, a superficially homogenous speaker sample was selected to account for sociolinguistic factors as well as possible. Data preparation was supported by different ASR and forced aligned tools and /r/ tokens were retrieved applying LaBB-CAT search routines (Fromont and Hay 2012). Auditory and spectrographic analyses were conducted on each token applying the categorization scheme provided by Meer et al. 2021. The data was then further annotated for intralinguistic and extralinguistic factors. The statistical analysis was conducted in R applying the tree-based resampling and prediction method PrInDT (Weihs and Buschfeld 2021) which is designed to handle imbalanced response variables.

The results show that, apart from the regional background and different intralinguistic factors, political party membership has a significant influence on the realization of rhotic sounds among Scottish politicians. Scottish Conservative politicians produce significantly less taps and trills than their SNP and Labour colleagues. Due to the high balanced accuracy of the model (0.7553), the findings show that pronunciation can index political identity in Scotland.

References

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