The PM's t's: David Cameron's t-glottalling over time
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Background

- Literature evidences individuals exhibiting changes in their native language over their lifespans (Sankoff 2013)
- Catalysts for language change are varied, and include change in dialect region (Chambers, 1992) and social mobility (Sankoff, 2004)
- We use publicly-available longitudinal data to investigate
  - a variable with a distinct, two-stage progression
  - one individual's use of that variable over time, following a change in social status

The variable

- Glottal replacement of /t/ ("t-glottalling") in RP: /t/ → [ʔ]
- Wells (1997) lays out the following diachronic path:

Stage 1: established	(mid 20th c.)
word-final & pre-C	e.g. *abou(t) the*
syllable-final & pre-C	e.g. *par(t)-ly*

Stage 2: recent	(late 20th c.)
word-final & pre-V	e.g. *abou(t) a*
word-final & pre-pause	e.g. *abou(t).*

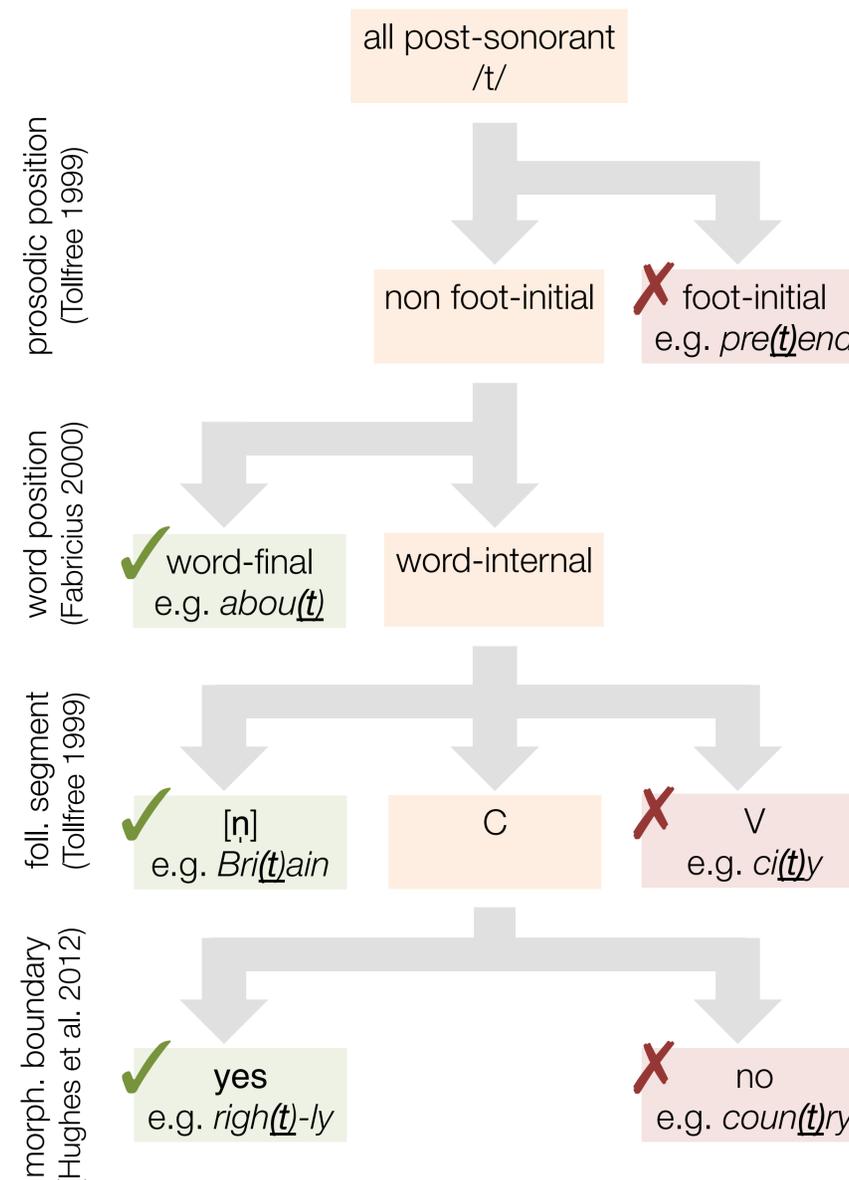| Unattested in RP	(N/A)
stem-final & pre-V	e.g. *crea(t)-ed*
stem-internal & pre-V	e.g. *ci(t)y*

Prediction

- Middle classes frequently outperform their upper-class counterparts in use of prestige-marking variants (Labov, 1966)
- We predict Cameron will use prestige-marking variants more frequently age 40, when aspiring to the office of Prime Minister, than age 48, when occupying this role

The speaker

- Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron
- Two Conservative Party Conference keynote speeches:
  - **2006** (age 40)   **2014** (age 48)
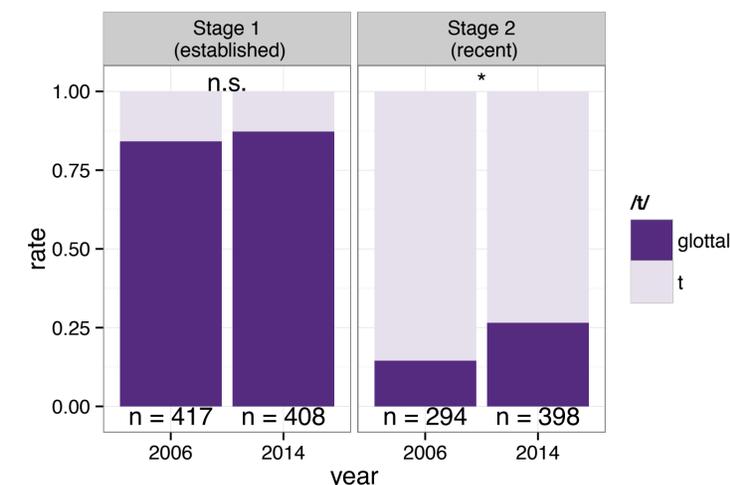 - selected for availability of data & controlled style

Defining the envelope of variation

all post-sonorant /t/

prosodic position (Tollfree 1999)

non foot-initial   ✗ foot-initial e.g. *pre(t)end*

word position (Fabricius 2000)

✓ word-final e.g. *abou(t)*   word-internal

foll. segment (Tollfree 1999)

✓ [n̩] e.g. *Bri(t)ain*   C   ✗ V e.g. *ci(t)y*

morph. boundary (Hughes et al. 2012)

✓ yes e.g. *righ(t)-ly*   ✗ no e.g. *coun(t)ry*

All tokens in green environments coded auditorily as [t]/[ʔ].

Results

An individual-level microcosm of the community:

Outcome of mixed-effects logistic regression (lme4 in R):

Predictor	Estimate	Std. Error	P(>|z|)	
Year	0.324	0.222	0.144	
Stage	-3.934	0.251	<2E-16	***
Year*Stage	0.630	0.310	0.042	*
Log(time in recording)	0.033	0.088	0.710	
Log(word duration)	-0.239	0.196	0.223	

Random effect: Word

Conclusions

- As predicted, Cameron showed significantly increased use of the non-standard variant age 48
- Notably, this change was only in the phonetic environment where community change is recent
- This supports the idea that change in social status can be a catalyst for language change in later life & underscores the community's role in individual change

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