

# Situating the individual in late-stage language change: Evidence from Received Pronunciation

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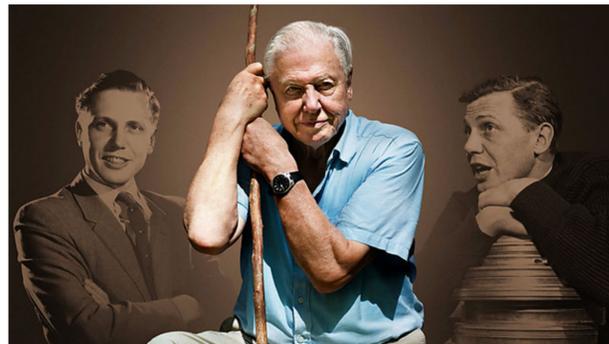
## Research questions

Language change in later life is increasingly well-attested. (Sankoff, 2005, 2013)

**What's going on in speakers' grammars in cases of later-life change?** Do mental representations change? If so, by what mechanism(s)?

## Speaker

Sir David Attenborough



Born in London in 1926, educated at Cambridge. Speaker of RP, 50-year TV narration career.

## Variable

“R-tapping”: [r] ~ [ɹ] intervocally, post-stressed V, in RP.

Word-internally: *squirrel*

Hiatus (‘linking’) position: *our equipment*

Steady loss of [r] over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Fabricius, 2014)

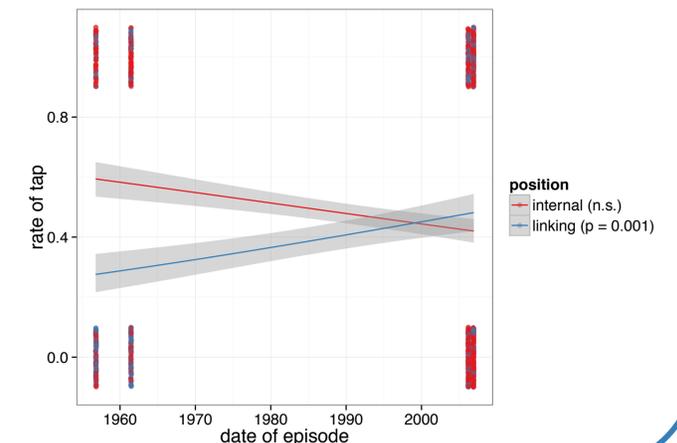
## Data

early	late
<i>Zoo Quest for a Dragon</i> , 1956 (age 30)	<i>Planet Earth</i> , 2006 (age 80)
<i>Zoo Quest to Madagascar</i> , 1961 (age 35)	

Data analysed from off-screen voice-over narration (“careful” speech).

## Results

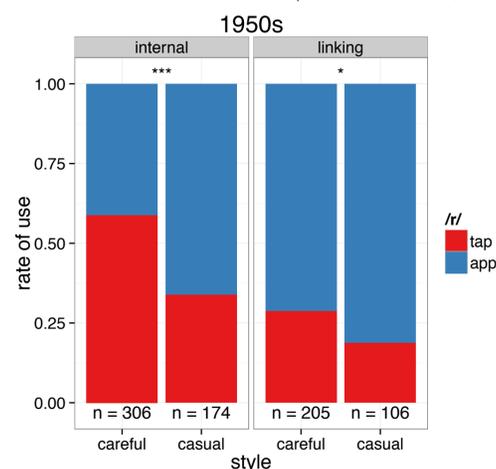
Domain-specific retrograde change:



## Attested mechanisms of intra-speaker change: Can they explain the data?

### Change of dominant register

(Rickford & Price, 2013)

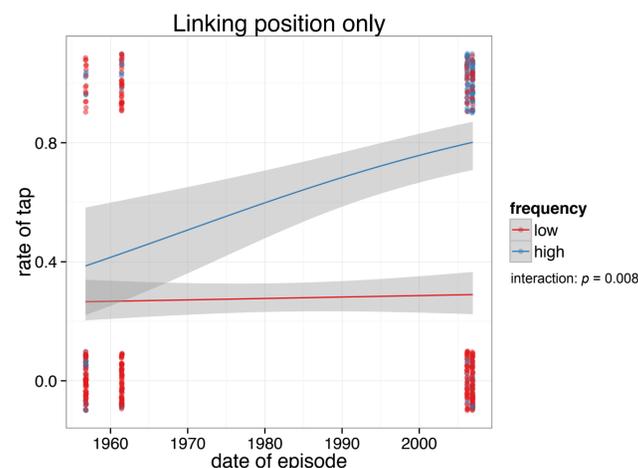


DA does style-shift, but if his change over time were a permanent shift into his careful register, we'd expect to see it occur in both positions.

### Re-weighting of probabilistic rules

(Sankoff & Blondeau, 2013)

Proposing that DA changes the input probability of a variable r-tapping rule could in principle explain the data. But...



...attested effect of frequency is a problem for generative account.

### Lexically-gradual drift

(Nycz, 2013)

Exemplar models predict lexically-gradual drift, driven by frequency.

But retrograde change is unexpected under this view.

## Conclusions & implications

- DA shows retrograde change, but only in high-frequency linking position.
- Retrograde change attested (e.g. Wagner & Sankoff, 2011), but restriction of frequency effect is unexpected.
- Increased tapping in linking contexts “catches them up” to internal position.
- Are we actually seeing a change in DA's mental representation of high-frequency collocations, not his r-tapping rate?

## Acknowledgements & references

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