

The Role of Gender in Linguistic Change

Early studies on the role of sex and gender, in sociolinguistic research, started in 1970s. Some sociolinguists have examined the effects of speaker sex at the phonological level, others have investigated the conversational styles between males and females in discourse.

Giddens (1989: 158) defines *sex* as “biological or anatomical differences between men and women”; whilst *gender* represents “the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females.” Labov (1990) observed the importance of this sociolinguistic variable highlighting that human language behaviour intersects with sex and social class.

This paper examines the crucial role of speaker sex, along with other social factors (e.g. social class and age), to determine whether (t) glottaling is an advanced change nearing completion or whether it still a change in progress. (t) glottaling was explored in both word-final (e.g. *that*) and word-medial (e.g. *little*) environments, which are typically investigated separately – like two different phonological contexts where the rule application is not identical. 4,923 tokens were collected in East Anglia (UK), from 36 participants, by means of sociolinguistic interviews, reading passages and word lists to elicit the degree of formality. The data was coded auditorily, and mixed-effects Rbrul regression analysis was carried out.

Results reveal that males use glottal(ised) variants more than females in both linguistic contexts signalling that this non-standard feature is a male working-class norm in East Anglian English. The statistical analysis did not find any of the social predictors to condition word-final (t) significantly, whereas sex ($p < 0.01$) and age ($p < 0.001$) reached statistical significance for word-medial (t). In other words, the lack of gender effect for word-final (t) glottaling indicates that, in word-final position, it is a change nearing completion (see Labov 2010), whilst word-medial (t) glottaling is still a change in progress.

References

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