

Extra final consonants in the English of Hong Kong and Singapore

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the appearance of additional final consonants in the English of speakers from Hong Kong and Singapore. In the data examined, three types of sound added word finally are identified: alveolar fricative, which we label /s/, alveolar plosive, labelled /t/, and velar plosive, labelled /k/. Some of the occurrences of these sounds could be explained either as problems with plurals or spurious –ed suffixes. However, it was harder to account for some of the extra sounds. Two explanations were considered: the extra consonant may arise for articulatory reasons; or it may involve a kind of hypercorrection.

1. INTRODUCTION

Previous research has described patterns of consonant deletion in the new varieties of English emerging in Hong Kong and Singapore, including final consonant cluster simplification and the use of glottal stops in place of final plosives (Peng & Setter [6]; Deterding & Poedjosoedarmo [4]:ch 17), but less work has been done on the possibility that consonants may be added rather than deleted.

Of course, sometimes an extra consonant might be found for grammatical reasons, for example when a plural –s suffix occurs on a noun that is noncount in Standard English such as *informations* and *clothings* (Tongue [8]:50), or when an unexpected –ed suffix occurs. However, there are some instances of extra final consonants that cannot be explained grammatically, and this paper considers these. We will further consider whether there may be an articulatory explanation for the instances, or whether they should be analysed in terms of hypercorrection.

Previous work on extra consonants in the pronunciation of English has concentrated on epenthetic consonants, particularly between a nasal and a fricative so that *tense* and *tents* may become homophones, with a debate about whether this is related to language-specific phoneme insertion rules or more universal rules governing the timing of the articulators (Fourakis & Port [5]; Clements [2]; Blakenship [1]; Warner & Weber [9]). However, the

data described here involve word-final extra consonants rather than the insertion of consonants between nasals and fricatives within a word.

2. DATA

The data for Hong Kong consist of recordings of 29 speakers giving presentations of up to 15 minutes. The data were originally collected for a doctoral study (Setter [7]) which looked at speech rhythm. The speakers are final year undergraduate university students, and the presentations are part of their degree assessment. A total of 35 instances of final extra consonants were found: 25 /s/ or /z/ and 10 /t/ or /d/.

The data for Singapore consist of 36 interviews from the NIECSSE corpus (Deterding & Low [3]). These interviews each involve a young Singaporean talking to an expatriate British university lecturer for 5 minutes. From the Singapore data, a total of 40 instances of extra final consonants were found: 26 /s/ or /z/, 13 /t/ or /d/, and 1 /k/.

Although some of the extra consonants found in this study were clearly voiceless (eg *yes/t*, *fun/t*), in other cases it was hard to be certain if the consonant should best be represented as voiced or voiceless. For the purpose of this paper, all inserted final consonants will henceforth be shown as voiceless, either /s/, /t/, or /k/.

In the examples below, the identifying tags for the Hong Kong data are preceded by ‘HK’ while those from the Singapore are preceded by ‘Sg’.

3. ANALYSIS

The patterns of the inserted consonants found were quite similar for the two sets of data. Many of those with /s/ involved pluralized noncount nouns or other problems with plurals. Some examples are:

1. in order to make them participate more actively in their work/s/ (HK:04m07:12)
2. the aim of the dissertation is to find out the impact/s/

of ... (HK:04m06:03)

3. I liked er fixing up furniture/s/ (Sg:F10-e:20)
4. to some of the countryside/s/ also (Sg:F13-g:36)

Some of the instances of extra /t/ can be analysed as spurious past tense suffixes:

5. otherwise, no subordinate will listen/t/ to you (HK:12f01:14)
6. the respondents in the subcontractor will re ...will receive/t/ (HK:06m04:08)
7. when I fast, because I abstain/t/ from food (Sg:F4-d:-7)

These can all be regarded as grammatical errors, and so will not be analysed further here.

However, there were a number of instances in both sets of data that are harder to explain. The full list of these enigmatic extra consonants is given here.

8. so it's fun/t/ being with them (Sg:F9-f:40)
9. indeed, I mean fun as in/t/ (Sg:F9-f:33)
10. but two days in erm Brisbane/t/ ... then we went (Sg:M2-d:06)
11. er have one/t/ ... my dad bought one bike (Sg:F13-d:26)
12. yah the trekking is ... was fun/t/ (Sg:F13-e:36)
13. whatever that has been done/t/ in er Germany (Sg:F17-f:08)
14. cycling, hiking, um sailing/t/, and some kayaking (HK:05f15:08)
15. I think you may be doubtful/t/ about the reason (HK:02f01:06)
16. they brought us/t/ for farm stay as well (Sg:M11-e:28)
17. in order to achieve this/t/, enough intelligence is needed (HK:10f01:01)
18. and renovate my house/t/ (Sg:F10-a:10)
19. but in in the old campus yes/t/ ... yeah (Sg:F10-g:10)
20. went down there twice/t/ ... yeah, twice (Sg:F13-d:05)

21. this is/t/ time ... (HK:04m13:01)

22. because/t/ there are unavoidable changes (HK:09f01:00)
23. so the train is quite new/t/ (HK:01f19:13)
24. and so/t/ um ... when you travel by train (HK:06f19:00)
25. er yah, to me/t/ I feel that the knowledge would help (Sg:F24-d:44)
26. but for today/s/, I think I can only show you ... (HK:03f06:08)
27. looking at farms ... and/s/ ... shopping (Sg:M5-c:25)
28. the last night out/s/ ... er on the way back (Sg:M12-c:20)
29. so it's fun being/k/ with them (Sg:F9-f:41)

All but the last four of these involve an extra /t/. In the first six examples (8 to 13), this extra consonant follows /n/, while in example 14 it follows /?/, and in 15 it follows /l/. In examples 16 to 22, it follows an alveolar fricative, either /s/ or /z/, while in examples 23 to 25 it follows a vowel.

For the final four examples, numbers 26 to 28 involve an extra /s/, and number 29 involves /k/ after a final /?/.

4. DISCUSSION

A possible articulatory explanation might be provided for the instances of an extra /t/ after final /n/: if the tip of the tongue stays in place after the velum is raised at the end of the nasal, there could be a build-up of air behind the tongue, and then this air might be released as a plosive when the tongue tip subsequently moves away from the roof of the mouth. This explanation is less straightforward than the mistiming of the articulators that can explain an epenthetic /t/ between /n/ and /s/ (Clements [2]), but it is just about plausible.

However, it is harder to devise an articulatory explanation for the occurrence of /t/ after a final /s/: it is difficult to see why the tongue would move to a position firmly against the alveolar ridge at the end of the fricative before moving away again for the release of a plosive. Furthermore, it is not easy to provide an articulatory explanation for the occurrence of /t/ after a vowel in examples 23 to 25.

An alternative explanation for the extra /t/ is that it is a spurious *-ed* suffix, introduced as a kind of hypercorrection: the speakers are so concerned about the omission of an *-ed* suffix that they introduce it even in instances where it is totally unexpected, such as after *yes*

and *twice*.

It is also possible that the occurrences of an extra /s/ can be regarded as spurious –s suffixes, even though this is rather unexpected after *and* and *out*.

The only example that cannot be explained in terms of this kind of hypercorrection is the final /k/ at the end of *being*. Further research is required to establish how frequent an insertion of an extra /k/ might be, and to see if other consonants might occasionally be inserted.

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