



Dialect acquisition of glottal variation in /t/: Barbadians in Ipswich

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Abstract

This article considers dialect contact and second-dialect acquisition by adult and child Barbadian English speakers converging towards an East Anglian variety of English. We examine glottal variation in word-final /t/, comparing the local dialect of Anglo ('white') speakers in Ipswich to that of Barbados-born speakers living there, and to British English varieties more generally. We investigate this variable using instrumental analysis and consider (i) whether its use by Ipswich Anglo urban speakers indicates diffusion, (ii) whether its patterning among Barbadian immigrant speakers reflects dialect acquisition and (iii) how methodologically secure the received wisdom is concerning one of Britain's most often-studied sociolinguistic variables of recent years. We briefly consider the social context for the English and Barbadian varieties, review the literature on glottal variants of /t/ in British urban dialects, and examine those environments most commonly studied for the variable, and the usual explanation for its relative frequency across them. We then compare the Ipswich Anglo and Barbadian data and reconcile the two patterns in an interpretation which finds both ethnically-aligned contrasts and agreement on norms local to Ipswich.

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Keywords: Dialect contact; Sociolinguistics; Phonetics; Language variation and change; British dialects; Caribbean English Creoles

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1. Introduction

This paper considers dialect contact and second-dialect acquisition by adult and child Barbadian English speakers converging towards an East Anglian variety of English. We examine glottal variation in word-final /t/, comparing the local dialect of Anglo ('white') speakers in Ipswich to that of Barbados-born speakers living there, and to British English varieties more generally.

Glottal variants have been widely reported as diffusing across Britain. Indeed, Trudgill calls it 'one of the most dramatic, widespread and rapid changes to have occurred in British English in recent times' (1999: 136). Our main descriptive questions are:

- (1) Does its use by Ipswich Anglo urban speakers indicate diffusion? and
- (2) Does its patterning among Barbadian immigrant speakers reflect dialect acquisition?

Methodologically, we respond to the call of Docherty and Foulkes (1999, cf. also Docherty et al. 1997) to conduct instrumental analysis of consonantal variables, and to question the segmental representations that are the norm in sociolinguistic work. To the extent that this paper extends and validates the approach and results of their Tyneside studies of glottal variation – and to the extent that both studies' results conflict with the auditory analyses and phonemic assumptions underpinning nearly all dialectological studies of this feature – it is also necessary to ask:

- (3) How secure is the received wisdom concerning one of Britain's most often-studied sociolinguistic variables of recent years?

We briefly consider social context for the English and Barbadian varieties, review the literature on glottal variants of /t/ in British urban dialects, and examine those environments most commonly studied for the variable, and the usual explanation for its relative frequency across them. Description of our methods precedes comparative analysis of the Ipswich Anglo and Barbadian data. The two patterns are reconciled in an interpretation which finds both ethnically-aligned contrasts and agreement on norms local to Ipswich. We conclude by discussing larger implications for sociolinguistic methodology, British urban dialectology and second-dialect acquisition.

1.1. *The social and historical context*

Ipswich, the largest town in the eastern county of Suffolk, is situated 77 miles north of London and 45 miles south of Norwich. It has good road and rail networks to both. Post-1945 Ipswich saw immigration by Londoners, but not at the level of official government resettlements (Malster, 2000). It was a site for relocation of insurance companies' head offices out of London in the 1970s. Broadly, the Ipswich variety resembles the well-studied Norwich case in having been influenced, but not overwhelmed, by London. However, the study of Suffolk speech has largely been restricted to traditional features, in such works as the *Survey of English Dialects* (Orton and Tilling, 1969).

Barbados, the most easterly Caribbean island, was settled by the English in 1627. Nearly four centuries of uninterrupted colonisation by English speakers, in relatively high proportion to West African slaves (compared to other Caribbean settings), has produced

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