

Phonological Variation and Audience Design in Adele's Speech

In our research, we have concentrated on one of the most salient features of the Cockney accent in Adele's speech in three different videos: an interview, an acceptance speech and a monologue. Adele is an English singer and songwriter born in the Tottenham district of London, whose accent has become an integral part of her public image. Over the centuries, the Cockney accent has long been associated with the working-class in London, specifically with the East End of the city. One of the most salient features of this accent is (TH)-fronting, defined as the production of the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ as the voiceless labiodental fricative /f/.

During our analysis, we have focused on the phonological variation in Adele's speech when producing the /θ/ sound. The realizations of the variable [th] are the voiceless dental fricative /θ/, which is the standard variant, and the voiceless labiodental fricative /f/, the vernacular variant usually associated with the Cockney accent. The following excerpt demonstrates Adele's metalanguage awareness, considering that she acknowledges her usage of this phonological feature:



<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/ba8ypuU3ZHU>

Sample Description

Sample 1: “Life in Lyrics with Adele”

The first sample analyzed is taken from a video called “Life in Lyrics with Adele”, posted on ELLE magazine’s Youtube channel. In this video, Adele reads pieces of paper

containing lyrics from her songs and she comments on each of them. This is a monologue, since it features a single individual speaking directly to a camera while sharing her thoughts, experiences, or talents without direct interaction with an interviewer.

Sample 2: [Acceptance speech at the Sherry Lansing Leadership Award](#)

The second sample is taken from an acceptance speech at the Sherry Lansing Leadership Award, where Adele expresses gratitude for the award she is receiving and for the women who paved the way for her success. She also reflects on her own journey in the music industry and emphasizes the importance of being oneself and embracing one's unique qualities.

Sample 3: [“73* Questions With Adele”](#)

The third sample is taken from the first 13 minutes of the video “73* Questions With Adele”, posted on the United States Vogue magazine’s YouTube channel. The video is an interview filmed in only one shot where an American host asks Adele 73 brief questions while moving around her house in Los Angeles. In this type of videos, the celebrity is given the questions beforehand; therefore, the interaction is not completely spontaneous.

Sample Analysis

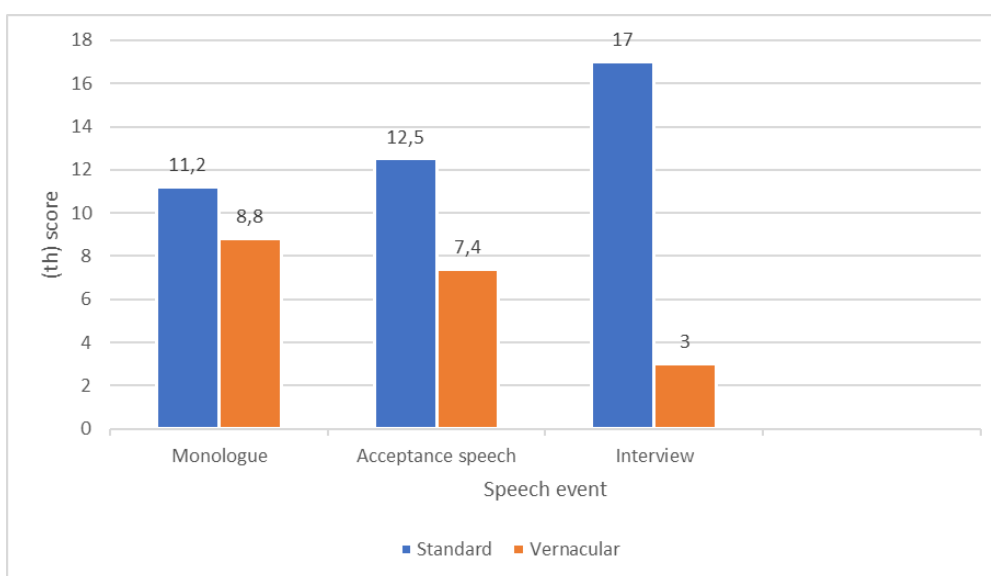


Figure 1: Intraspeaker distribution of the phonological variant (th) across three samples

Adele uses the vernacular variant more frequently in the monologue than she uses that variant in the acceptance speech. At the same time, her use of the vernacular variant in the acceptance speech is higher than its use in the interview.

These patterns support the hypothesis that the speaker accommodates her speech based on the perceived norms of her audience. The degree of attunement appears to correlate with the different types of addressees. In the monologue, the audience is made up of overhearers, since they are known to be part of the speech context, but they are not ratified or addressed by the speaker. On the contrary, in the acceptance speech, her addressee is the audience that is present at the event; they are known, ratified, and addressed by her. Moreover, there are instances in which she expresses gratitude to a particular person who becomes the addressee. Thus, the other members of the audience become the auditors, given that she does not speak directly to them. Finally, during the interview, Adele interacts with her addressee, the American interviewer, who can be heard but who does not appear on camera.

Adele's monologue, delivered without direct interaction with a ratified audience, exhibits a higher frequency of vernacular variant usage than when interacting with a ratified audience. Furthermore, there is also variation when two different types of ratified audiences are involved: addressees and auditors. In the acceptance speech, the vernacular variant is used more often than it is used in the interview. In this case, the opposite could be expected since Adele is reading something written by herself beforehand. However, Adele's spontaneous interactions with the audience and the absence of an interlocutor might be the main factors influencing her phonological choices. Similarly, as it can be noted in the interview, there is a potential influence from the interviewer's usage of the standard form. Given Adele's constant interaction with this individual, who primarily employs the standard form, it is possible that

her own speech has been influenced accordingly, which could account for this sample having a lower frequency of vernacular forms than the other two do.

Adele's intraspeaker variation arises because she is paying attention to who she is addressing or who might be listening to or overhearing her, and modifies her speech correspondingly.

Data: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1EuhASw-O5RxL_6kN6Hae1WKqcxDtaZ849QML8qmYy8c/edit?usp=sharing