

The Social Salience of tapped /r/ [ɾ] in Dublin Accents and Linguistic Attitudes Towards it in a Forensic Context

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Dublin English has been researched with different approaches identifying linguistic attitudes and phonetic features (Hickey, 2005; Lonergan, 2013). Studies have found that North Dublin varieties are more stigmatised and associated with a lower social class, whereas South Dublin accents are perceived as higher status (Hickey, 2005). Lonergan (2013) therefore claims that the terms “North” and “South” do not accurately represent geographical locations but are proxies for social class. Research into North Dublin English has identified vowel realisations in detail, but research into consonants falls short, despite claims that realisations of /r/ are quite variable (Lonergan, 2013). The present study is interested in the /r/-sound in North Dublin English and asks the following research question: Is the tapped [ɾ] a linguistic marker of North Dublin English and what social meaning does it carry in forensic contexts?

To answer this, two experiments were conducted through SurveyMonkey with 34 participants (20 females, 13 males, 1 non-binary). To mimic a forensic-realistic scenario, participants were told to imagine that they were hearing people on the witness stand and were primed by a court photo at the beginning of the experiments. Experiment 1 included a verbal-guise study with ten different guises, representing four Dublin accents: North Dublin, South Dublin, New D4 and Old D4 and two filler guises of American and British English. The participants rated these guises on nine traits on a six-point Likert scale. The second experiment was inspired by Labov et al. (2011): a male and a female speaker of North Dublin English read a pre-designed dialogue containing six r-words twice, once pronouncing all the r-words with a tap [ɾ] and once with an alveolar approximant [ɹ]. Then three audio clips were prepared, each of which included 0%, 50% and 100% of the tapped-r. The same group of listeners rated these audio clips on four traits on a semantic differential scale from 0-10: *North Dublin*, *posh*, *trustworthy* and *natural*.

By performing a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) on the data from the first experiment, two dimensions *Status* and *Solidarity* were gained (see Table 1). The results mostly confirmed findings of previous studies (Hickey, 2005), that North Dublin accents are perceived as significantly lower in status ($p < .001$) and slightly higher in solidarity ($p = 0.14$; see Fig. 1). Recordings with a higher percentage of [ɾ] were rated as more *North Dublin* and less *posh* (see Fig. 2). While *trustworthy* was not significant, the 0% tapped version of the female speaker was rated slightly higher than the others ($p = 0.51$).

This study has valuable forensic implications. Firstly, the identification of [ɾ] as a linguistic variable of North Dublin accents is valuable for speaker identification and speaker profiling. Secondly, the forensic-related traits *trustworthy* and *reliable* should be examined separately to more accurately simulate a forensic context. The slightly higher rating of trustworthiness for the 0% version of the female North Dublin speaker might indicate that women are more likely to be affected by their North Dublin accents in a forensic context compared to men. (Words: 500)

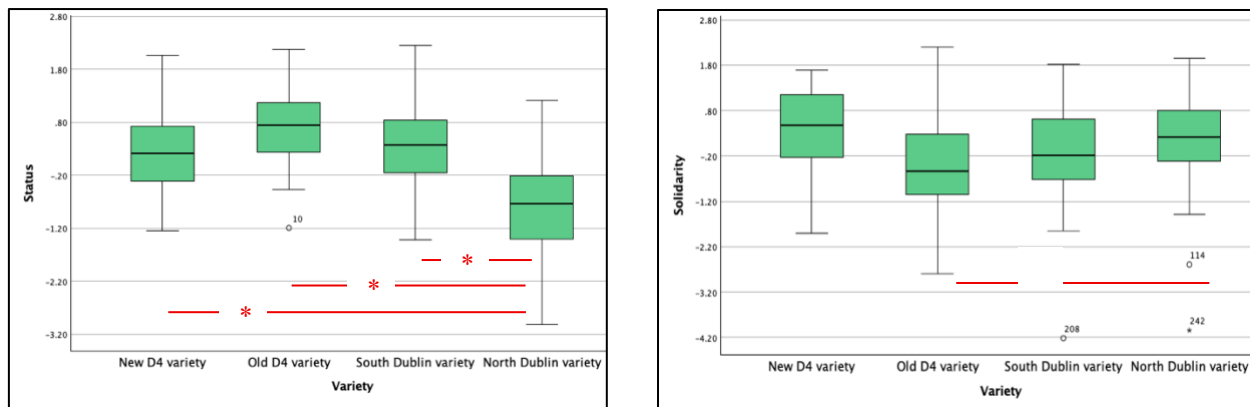


Figure 1: Results from the Verbal-Guise experiment- A higher value indicates a more positive

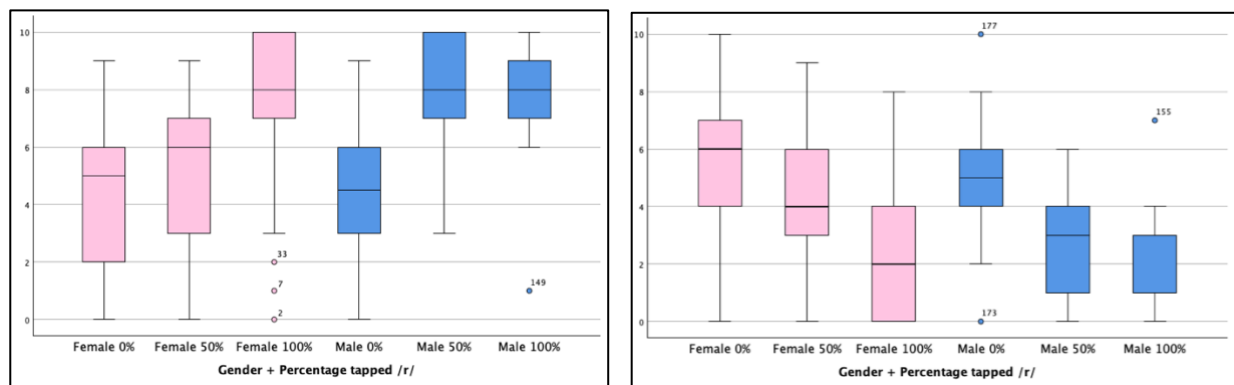


Figure 2. Results from Experiment 2 for traits ‘North Dublin’(left panel) and ‘posh’(right panel). A higher value indicates a stronger attitude toward the trait.

	1 (Solidarity)	2 (Status)
approachable	.845	.002
trustworthy	.816	.190
reliable	.733	.283
friendly	.733	-.109
funny	.644	-.269
posh	-.201	.845
well educated	.166	.842
higher social class	-.163	.840
ambitious	.208	.582

Note: Factor loadings over 0.40 are highlighted

Table 1. Results from the PCA

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