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Master's Thesis

**A SOCIOPHONETIC ANALYSIS OF ACCENT VARIATION IN
ADELE'S SPEECH**

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Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	6
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO ENGLISH VARIETIES AND ACCENT DYNAMICS.....	10
1.1 Definitions and Classifications.....	10
1.1.1 Distinction Between Variety, Dialect, and Accent.....	10
1.1.2 Classifications of English Varieties, Dialects, and Accents.....	11
1.2 British Accent Variation and Identity.....	18
1.2.1 Phonetic characteristics of the Cockney accent.....	20
1.2.2 Linguistic markers of Estuary English.....	22
1.3 Standard American Accent vs Californian Accent.....	24
1.4 Accent Change in Adulthood.....	26
1.5 Adele's Linguistic Exposure to Regional and Social Varieties of English.....	28
Conclusions 1.....	29
CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND PRAAT APPLICATIONS FOR A SOCIAPHONETIC STUDY.....	32
2.1 Methodological Framework for Data Selection and Collection.....	32
2.2 Analytical Methods and Instruments Utilized for Data Interpretation.....	34
2.3 Integrating PRAAT into Acoustic and Phonetic Research.....	36
Conclusions 2.....	46
CHAPTER 3. A CASE STUDY ON ADELE'S ACCENT.....	49
3.1 Background of Adele's Public Persona and Linguistic Identity.....	49
3.2 Southern British Variables in Adele's accent.....	51
3.2.1 Glottalization Patterns in Adele's Early Cockney-Estuary Accent.....	52
3.2.2 Non-Rhotic Features in Adele's Early Speech.....	54
3.2.3 Frequent H-dropping in Early Speech Samples.....	56
3.2.4 Prevalence of TH-fronting in Adele's Cockney/Estuary Stage.....	58
3.2.5 Cockney-Estuary Intonation Patterns: Pitch and Rhythm.....	59
3.3 California American English variables in Adele's speech.....	61
3.3.1 Attenuation of Glottalization in Later Recordings.....	61
3.3.2 Emergence of Rhoticity in Later American-Influenced Speech.....	63
3.3.3. Stabilization of Initial [h] Sounds in Later Recordings.....	65
3.3.4 Reduction of TH-fronting in American-Influenced Speech.....	67
3.3.5 Prosodic Changes: Toward American Intonation Contours.....	68
Conclusions 3.....	70
CONCLUSIONS.....	73
REFERENCES.....	79

Анотація

У магістерській роботі досліджено соціофонетичну еволюцію публічного акценту британської співачки Адель у період з 2011 по 2024 рік. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростаючим інтересом до змін акценту в дорослому віці під впливом медіа, соціального статусу, зміни мовного середовища та глобалізованого простору. Об'єктом дослідження виступає усне мовлення Адель, предметом – зміни в її сегментальних і просодичних характеристиках, що відображають процес поступової нейтралізації соціорегіональних особливостей мовлення.

Метою роботи є простеження змін акценту Адель як прояву соціофонетичної адаптації до нового комунікативного простору, зокрема у зв'язку з переїздом до США. Завданнями стали: визначення ключових фонетичних змін; побудова діахронного корпусу; акустичні вимірювання; дискурс-аналіз контекстів; порівняння даних із соціолінгвістичними моделями.

Методологія дослідження ґрунтується на поєднанні спостереження, глибинного аналізу індивідуального мовлення, транскрипції, акустичного аналізу, категоріального кодування та якісного аналізу даних. Доцільність обраних методів зумовлена потребою у фіксації змін у мовленні в реальному часі та їх осмисленні в контексті медіаекспозиції й зміни геолокації. Особливу увагу приділено аналізу формант (F1, F2), інтонаційних характеристик (F₀), а також варіантів приголосних у динаміці.

Структура роботи складається з трьох розділів, що послідовно відображають етапи дослідження – від теоретичного огляду до інтеграції результатів. Результати дослідження засвідчили поступову редукцію регіональних ознак у мовленні Адель та формування більш нейтрального, медіа-адаптованого акценту. Цей процес розглядається як м'яка нейтралізація соціолінгвістично маркованих рис, обумовлена як адаптацією до вимог публічного простору, так і зміною життєвого контексту через переїзд.

Ключові слова: Адель, публічна особа, соціофонетика, акцентна адаптація, акустичний аналіз, зміна геолокації, зміна акценту в дорослому віці, медіаекспозиція, мовна варіативність.

Abstract

This master's thesis explores the sociophonetic evolution of the public accent of British singer Adele from 2011 to 2024. The relevance of the study stems from the growing interest in adult accent change under the influence of media exposure, social status, shifts in linguistic environment, and globalization. The object of the research is Adele's spoken language, while the subject is the changes in her segmental and prosodic features, reflecting a gradual neutralization of socio-regional speech characteristics.

The aim of the thesis is to trace the changes in Adele's accent as a manifestation of sociophonetic adaptation to a new communicative environment, particularly in connection with her relocation to the United States. The research objectives include identifying key phonetic shifts; constructing a diachronic corpus; conducting acoustic measurements; performing discourse analysis of speech contexts; and comparing findings with sociolinguistic models.

The methodology is based on a combination of observation, in-depth analysis of individual speech patterns, transcription, acoustic analysis, categorical coding, and qualitative data interpretation. These methods were selected for their appropriateness in capturing real-time changes in speech and interpreting them in the context of media exposure and geolocation shift. Particular attention is given to the analysis of formants (F1, F2), intonational features (F₀), and consonant variants in dynamic progression.

The structure of the thesis consists of three chapters that reflect the stages of the research—from theoretical overview to integration of findings. The findings indicate a gradual reduction of regional markers in Adele's speech and the emergence of a more neutral, media-adapted accent. This process is interpreted as a soft neutralization of sociolinguistically marked features, driven by both adaptation to public performance demands and a change in life context due to relocation.

Keywords: Adele, public persona, sociophonetics, accent adaptation, acoustic analysis, geolocation change, adult accent change, media exposure, speech variability.

INTRODUCTION

The study of accents and their correlation with social status has been a subject of interest in sociolinguistics for decades. Accents serve as a powerful marker of identity, reflecting a speaker's geographical origin, socioeconomic background, and even levels of education and professional status. In contemporary society, linguistic variation is often associated with perceptions of prestige, authority, or marginalization. Given the increasing awareness of linguistic diversity and its social implications, the topic remains highly relevant in the modern world.

The **aim** of this study is to trace and characterize the sociophonetic evolution of Adele's public-persona accent between 2011 and 2024. Adele's accent has undergone noticeable changes throughout her career, making her an intriguing subject for linguistic analysis. By examining these changes, the research seeks to understand the factors influencing accent shifts, as well as their broader societal implications.

The specific **objectives** of this study are to:

- Catalog the key segmental and prosodic variables in Adele's speech that index Southern British and California American English.
- Assemble and systematically annotate a diachronic corpus of televised interviews, live performances, and Q&A sessions spanning 2011–2019.
- Extract acoustic measurements for each target variable, and ascertain their frequency of occurrence across time.
- Compare quantitative acoustic trends with perceptual data and contemporary accounts of British English variation to interpret the sociolinguistic significance of Adele's accent shifts.
- Situate Adele's accent trajectory within broader debates on linguistic prestige and social identity, thereby contributing to our understanding of how high-profile individuals both reflect and shape contemporary pronunciation norms.

The choice of Adele as the primary subject of analysis is justified by her cultural and linguistic significance. As a public figure whose accent has been widely discussed in media and academic circles, Adele provides a valuable case study for

examining the interplay between accent modification and social mobility. The object of the research is Adele's spoken language, while the subject is the changes in her segmental and prosodic features, which reflect a gradual neutralization of socio-regional speech characteristics.

The **theoretical and methodological framework** of this study is based on established sociolinguistic theories, including Labov's principles of language variation, Giles' communication accommodation theory, and Trudgill's work on dialects and social stratification. The research employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative **methods**, including:

- **Auditory observation** – employed to preliminarily detect patterns of phonetic variation and accent modification in spontaneous speech.
- **Case study methodology** – applied to enable an in-depth, context-sensitive analysis of accent dynamics in the speech of a single speaker (Adele).
- **Data processing and selection** – involved systematic extraction of relevant speech samples containing target phonemes for focused analysis.
- **Phonetic transcription** – carried out using IPA conventions to capture segmental realizations, particularly of the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/.
- **Instrumental acoustic analysis** – performed using PRAAT software to measure and visualize articulatory features, such as glottalization, through waveform inspection and spectrographic interpretation.

In more detail, the main methods were performed through:

- Critical review of sociolinguistic and journalistic literature to define relevant accent features;
- Discourse-analytic examination of interview and concert transcripts to identify contextual patterns of accommodation;
- Acoustic measurement in Praat of key formants (F1, F2) at the midpoint of target vowels and extraction of F₀ peaks and valleys for intonation;
- Categorical coding of consonant variants by visually inspecting waveforms and spectrograms;

- Frequency counts and simple percentages to summarize how often each feature appears in early versus later recordings;
- Descriptive comparisons to chart diachronic change;
- Integration of findings through observational comparison focusing on how the acoustic data reflected phonetic shifts in Adele's speech over time and contextualized these changes within established patterns of British English variation, focusing on linguistic trends.

The **novelty** of this research lies in its focus on a contemporary public figure, providing fresh insights into the dynamics of linguistic change within the framework of celebrity culture. By bridging sociolinguistics and media studies, the study highlights the complex relationship between language, identity, and public perception. The practical significance of this work extends to various fields, including education, communication studies, and professional speech training, where understanding linguistic adaptation is crucial.

Preliminary findings of this research have been presented at student conferences, including **IX All-Ukrainian Scientific Readings** with the Participation of Young Scholars “**PHILOLOGY OF THE 21st CENTURY: NEW RESEARCH AND PERSPECTIVES**”, where discussions with fellow researchers and linguists have contributed to refining the study's scope and methodology.

The **structure of this thesis** is as follows:

- Chapter 1 provides a theoretical overview of accents and social status, reviewing relevant literature and key sociolinguistic concepts.
- Chapter 2 outlines the methods and methodologies used in the study, including both phonetic and discourse analysis approaches, as well as the core functionalities of PRAAT employed during the investigation.
- Chapter 3 presents the practical analysis conducted in PRAAT, focusing on Adele's speech during her pre-shift and post-shift accent stages, and explores the social reception of these changes and their broader implications.
- The conclusion summarizes the findings and suggests directions for further research.

Through this study, we aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse on language and society, demonstrating how accent modification functions as both a personal and societal phenomenon.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO ENGLISH VARIETIES AND ACCENT DYNAMICS

1.1 Definitions and Classifications

The study of accents, dialects, and varieties of English has been an essential part of sociolinguistics and phonetics. Scholars such as Trudgill [70], Crystal [17], and Wells [74] have contributed significantly to the classification and understanding of these linguistic phenomena. Understanding the distinction between variety, dialect, and accent is crucial for analyzing the social and linguistic functions of spoken English. The study of accents is not merely a linguistic endeavor but also intersects with social identity, power dynamics, and cultural perceptions [50]. Furthermore, sociolinguistic research has highlighted how accents can influence job opportunities, educational prospects, and social integration [7; 71; 44].

1.1.1 Distinction Between Variety, Dialect, and Accent

A “variety” is a broad term encompassing any form of language with distinct features, including accents, dialects, and sociolects [33, p. 17]. A “dialect” includes variations in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, often tied to a specific region or social group [71, p. 27]. Meanwhile, an “accent” refers solely to pronunciation differences without grammatical or lexical distinctions [50, p. 34].

Labov [44] explored linguistic variation and change, emphasizing that dialects and accents are socially stratified. Kerswill [39, p. 45-58; 40, p. 528-550] highlighted the role of mobility and urbanization in dialect leveling, where accents undergo modification due to external influences. Similarly, Giles and Powesland [27, p. 32-57] introduced the concept of “speech accommodation theory,” explaining how individuals adapt their accents in different social contexts.

Furthermore, Trudgill [72, p. 210-225] distinguished between “standard” and “non-standard” varieties, arguing that standard varieties gain prestige due to socio-political factors rather than inherent linguistic superiority. Chambers [8, p. 93-94; 9, p. 560-572] also pointed out that a dialect continuum exists, where neighboring dialects share features and gradually change over regions. Wells [74, p.

25-42] categorized English accents into broad groups based on phonological characteristics, laying the groundwork for future research in phonetics.

Many researchers have examined how accents function in society. Wolfram and Fasold [77, p. 51-57] analyzed how social class affects pronunciation patterns, while Milroy [54, p. 17-43] explored network theory and how close-knit social groups maintain linguistic features. Bernstein [4, p. 28-51] proposed that restricted and elaborated codes shape an individual's communicative competence, further demonstrating the role of accents in social stratification.

1.1.2 Classifications of English Varieties, Dialects, and Accents

Scholars classify English varieties into World Englishes, regional dialects, and social dialects. Kachru [38, p. 11-30] proposed the Three Circles Model of English, dividing English usage into Inner Circle (native), Outer Circle (second language), and Expanding Circle (foreign language) varieties. This model provides a framework for understanding how English evolves in diverse sociolinguistic environments.

Regarding regional dialects, Huges, Trudgill and Watt [34] mapped variations in British and American English accents, noting differences in vowel shifts, rhoticity, and consonant pronunciation. The Great Vowel Shift, a historical phonological change, was later refined by Lass [47], demonstrating its impact on modern English pronunciation.

Social dialectology, as studied by Milroy and Milroy [55, p. 3-26], investigates how language varies within social classes. Bernstein [4] introduced the concepts of “elaborated” and “restricted” codes, linking speech patterns to education and social mobility. Eckert [20, p. 173-194; 37] examined how linguistic variation correlates with social identity, particularly among youth communities.

Accents in English-speaking countries are often categorized into British and American varieties, each with further regional distinctions.



The map above shows the major regional dialects of **England** (each identified in all caps), as defined mostly by Trudgill et al.'s *The Dialects of England*

In Peter Trudgill's book *The Dialects of England* [71], accents are typically referred to by both their regional and social characteristics. The terms often combine geographical references with labels for specific speech features, such as:

1. Received Pronunciation (RP) - This is often referred to as the “standard” or “prestige” accent in England, historically associated with the upper class and often used in formal contexts like the BBC.
2. Cockney - A working-class accent traditionally associated with the East End of London.

3. Estuary English - A variety of English spoken along the River Thames estuary, combining features of RP and Cockney.
4. West Country English - A group of accents found in the southwest of England, including Cornwall, Devon, and Somerset.
5. Geordie - The accent of Newcastle and surrounding areas in the northeast.
6. Brummie - The accent of Birmingham in the West Midlands.
7. Mancunian - The accent of Manchester, with features distinct from both RP and Cockney.
8. Scouse - The accent associated with Liverpool, influenced by the city's historical connection to Irish immigration.
9. Yorkshire - An accent found across Yorkshire, featuring distinctive vowel sounds and intonations.
10. Lancashire - Spoken in the north-west of England, including accents like those from Blackpool or Burnley.
11. Cumbrian - The accent of the Lake District and surrounding areas in Cumbria, with influences from Northern English.
12. Leicestershire - An accent spoken in the East Midlands, around Leicester.
13. Hull English - A distinctive accent from the city of Kingston upon Hull in the East Riding of Yorkshire.
14. Bristol English - An accent from the southwest, with influence from the West Country dialects.
15. Northumberland - Found in the northeastern county, with strong Geordie influences.
16. South Welsh English - A variation of English influenced by Welsh speech patterns, spoken in the southern part of Wales.

Each of these accents has unique characteristics in terms of pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation, and often correlate with the local social identity. Trudgill's book elaborates on these and their social implications, such as how they are perceived and the stereotypes associated with them [42].

RP, often associated with prestige and the upper class, has been extensively studied by Gimson [28] and Cruttenden [15; 16]. Cockney, traditionally spoken in East London, is characterized by features such as glottalization and the “th” fronting phenomenon [34]. A more detailed classification of RP, Cockney and Estuary English will be presented in the following section.

Other distinctive British accents include Yorkshire English, known for its unique vowel pronunciations [74], and Scottish English, which features rhoticity and distinct intonational patterns [65].

William Labov, Sharon Ash, and Charles Boberg's 2006 work, *The Atlas of North American English* [46], provides a comprehensive analysis of regional accents across the United States and Canada. In their study, they identify several primary accent groups, each characterized by distinct phonetic and phonological features:



The map above illustrates main regional dialects of American English (each identified in all caps), as defined mostly by Labov et al.'s *The Atlas of North American English* [46, p. 198-210; 32]:

1. General American (GenAm): Often considered the standard accent, it lacks marked regional, ethnic, or socio-economic characteristics.
2. Inland Northern English: Centered around cities like Chicago, this accent is noted for specific vowel shifts.

3. Midland English: Spoken in areas such as Indianapolis, it exhibits unique vowel fronting characteristics.
4. New York City English: Characterized by distinctive vowel sounds and phonological patterns.
5. North-Central (Upper Midwestern) English: Found in regions like Minneapolis, this accent has particular vowel characteristics.
6. New England English: Including areas like Boston, it features unique vowel pronunciations.
7. Philadelphia/Baltimore English: Known for specific vowel shifts and phonological features.
8. Southern English: Spoken in regions like San Antonio, it is defined by certain vowel shifts and the Southern vowel system.
9. Western English: Found in areas such as Los Angeles, it includes specific vowel characteristics.
10. Western Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh) English: Characterized by unique vowel shifts and phonological features.

These classifications provide a nuanced understanding of the diverse phonetic landscapes across North America, highlighting the rich tapestry of accents and dialects that contribute to the continent's linguistic diversity.

The map of American English accents, as detailed by Labov, Ash, and Boberg [46, p. 198-210], reveals a wide array of regional variations, each with distinct phonetic features. General American English (GenAm) is often considered the neutral or standard accent of the United States, characterized by its lack of strong regional features [1, p. 6-16]. It typically lacks rhoticity in the vowel sounds, as noted by Wells [73], and is the accent most commonly used in media. Southern American English, spoken predominantly in the southern United States, is marked by distinctive vowel shifts, such as the monophthongization of diphthongs like the “I” sound in “ride,” which is pronounced as a long “ah” (/rahd/) [74]. Southern speech also involves a feature known as “y’all,” a plural form of “you,” as discussed by Wolfram [76].

In contrast, New York English is famous for its distinctive vowel sounds, particularly the “r” sound, which is often dropped in non-rhotic environments. New York English exhibits the “short-a” split, where speakers pronounce words like “man” and “cat” with a distinctly different vowel sound depending on the surrounding phonetic context [74, p. 211-213]. Meanwhile, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), also studied by Labov [43; 44], has distinct grammatical features, including the use of the habitual “be” (e.g., “She be working”) to express actions that are habitual, and phonological traits such as the dropping of the final “r” sound in words like “car.” Philadelphia English, according to Labov [45; 46], features the well-known “diphthongization” of short vowels, such as the /æ/ sound in “bad,” which is pronounced with a diphthong as [aɪ] (i.e., “bide”).

Western American English, noted by Eckert [20, p. 173-194]], includes accents found in places like California and Nevada, where vowel shifts like the raising of the “low-back vowel” (the “a” in “cot”) are common. These vowel shifts contribute to a “flat” or more uniform sounding accent that contrasts with the more marked vowel distinctions found in the East. Western Pennsylvania English, particularly from Pittsburgh, is characterized by a distinctive vowel shift where the “a” in “cat” sounds more like “ae,” and the use of the “Pittsburghese” vocabulary, like “yinz” instead of “you all,” as described by Baranowski [3, p. 293-316]. These accents, together, reflect the rich diversity of American English and demonstrate the intricate relationship between geography, culture, and language evolution.

Additionally, Western American English, influenced by migration patterns, exhibits relatively recent linguistic changes [21, p. 45-70]. Midland and Appalachian accents, documented by Thomas [68], further add to the diversity of American English pronunciation.

Additionally, research on Global Englishes highlights how accents evolve in multilingual environments. Jenkins [35] examined English as a Lingua Franca, arguing that pronunciation shifts occur to accommodate global communication. Mesthrie and Bhatt [53] explored postcolonial English varieties and their distinct phonetic features, particularly in African and Asian Englishes.

Accents also change due to media influence, as explored by Stuart-Smith [66, p. 140-148], who found that exposure to television and music affects speech patterns. Coupland [14, p. 39-47] analyzed style-shifting and the fluidity of accents in response to different social interactions.

Moreover, Lippi-Green [50], in *English with an Accent*, delves deeply into how accents are tied not just to linguistic features but to the societal structures that shape and are shaped by them. She argues that accents are powerful markers of social identity, often carrying implicit judgments about a speaker's social status, education, and even moral character. The social implications of accents go beyond mere pronunciation; they are inextricably linked to broader societal ideologies. Lippi-Green highlights how certain accents, like Received Pronunciation (RP) in Britain or Standard American English (SAE) in the U.S., are associated with prestige, authority, and power. These accents are often seen as the “standard” or “correct” way of speaking, and speakers of these accents are frequently given access to higher social, economic, and educational opportunities. On the other hand, non-prestige accents, such as Cockney or African American Vernacular English (AAVE), are often marginalized and stigmatized [56; 62].

The concept of “otherness” plays a key role in this dynamic. Lippi-Green explains that people who speak with accents that diverge from the norm are often perceived as less educated, less capable, or even less civilized. This “otherness” is not just an issue of perception but can have tangible consequences, such as discrimination in the workplace or difficulty accessing social mobility. Speakers with non-prestige accents may struggle to gain the same level of acceptance or respect, despite their skills, knowledge, or contributions. [50, p. 72-89]

Overall, the classification of English varieties, dialects, and accents remains a dynamic field, influenced by historical, social, and geographical factors. By examining these distinctions, linguists gain a deeper understanding of how accents shape identity and social perceptions. With continued globalization, accents continue to shift, highlighting the evolving nature of spoken English.

1.2 British Accent Variation and Identity

Received Pronunciation (RP) is a prestigious accent historically associated with the upper class and educated speakers in England. Often called the 'Queen's English' or 'BBC English', it has long been the standard for formal speech and media in the UK. Unlike regional accents, RP is not linked to any specific geographical area, but rather to social class and education, making it a sociolect. For many years, RP was considered the benchmark of British English, used in government, education, and broadcasting. However, its dominance has waned in recent years as more regionally influenced accents, such as Estuary English, have gained wider acceptance and use.

- Non-rhoticity is one of the most distinctive features of RP. It means the /r/ sound is only pronounced when followed by a vowel. For example, RP speakers pronounce the word "car" [kɑ:] rather than [kar], omitting the /r/ sound. Similarly, the word "far" is pronounced as [fɑ:], and in "here", the /r/ is dropped, making it [hɪə]. Roach [63, p. 239-245] describes this as a defining feature of traditional RP, whereas Wells [74] notes that non-rhoticity is absent in many Northern English accents.
- Another hallmark of RP is its clear articulation, where consonants and vowels are pronounced distinctly and with minimal reductions. Unlike accents such as Cockney or Estuary English, RP speakers do not use glottalization, maintaining a clear articulation of the /t/ sound, as seen in the word "butter" ['bʌtə]. The same applies to "better" ['betə] and "water" ['wɔ:tə], where the /t/ is clearly articulated without being replaced by a glottal stop [67, p. 1-18; 47]. However, Lindsey [49] observes that younger RP speakers are increasingly adopting glottalization in informal settings, signaling a gradual shift in prestige pronunciation patterns.
- Additionally, RP is known for its precise vowel length distinctions, where long and short vowels are pronounced with clarity. For example, the vowels in words like "seat" [si:t] and "sit" [sɪt] are carefully distinguished. The same

distinction can be heard in "leave" [li:v] vs. "live" [lɪv] and "beat" [bi:t] vs. "bit" [bɪt] [15; 22]. Fabricius [23, p. 293-320] provides acoustic evidence that vowel distinctions in RP remain stable over time, while Cruttenden [15] emphasizes that the preservation of vowel length plays a key role in RP's intelligibility.

- RP speakers also use diphthongs more extensively than in some other accents. Words like "face" [feɪs] and "goat" [gəʊt] are pronounced with noticeable vowel shifts, contributing to RP's unique sound. This can also be heard in "price" [praɪs] and "coat" [kəʊt] [13; 35, p.55-77]. Jansen and Mompean [36, p. 55-77] highlight that diphthong shifts, particularly in words like "price" and "mouth," have been evolving in RP over time, reflecting broader phonetic changes in Southern British English.

There are several varieties of RP. Conservative RP, often associated with older generations and the aristocracy, is more rigid in its pronunciation rules. In contrast, contemporary RP has evolved and incorporated certain features of regional accents, making it somewhat more relaxed and accessible. While RP still holds influence in prestigious institutions, its exclusivity has led many speakers to adopt a more neutral accent, blending elements of Estuary English to sound more modern and relatable. [16, p. 79-81]

Also, Standard Southern British (SSB) should be noted as a phenomenon. SSB is the contemporary equivalent of the historically prestigious Received Pronunciation (RP), associated with the south-east of England and still functioning as a prestige norm in many contexts. While RP served as a standard in the mid-20th century, SSB reflects extensive sociophonetic changes, particularly in the vowel system. Notably, former diphthongs such as /ɔə/ (FORCE) and /ʊə/ (CURE) have merged with monophthongs like /ɔ:/ in modern usage. Additionally, final lax vowels like /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ are no longer common in SSB, with schwa /ə/ taking their place. The review also highlights how older phonetic transcription systems, especially those established by A. C. Gimson [28], are now phonetically outdated and can even seem comical if interpreted strictly according to IPA norms. Contemporary descriptions aim for

greater phonetic and phonological accuracy, moving away from Gimson's upper-class RP focus toward a more realistic reflection of current usage.

To sum up, Received Pronunciation (RP) has long been recognized as the accent of prestige in British English, often linked to the upper class and formal settings. While its dominance has waned with the rise of accents like Estuary English, it continues to be a symbol of formality in certain contexts, such as broadcasting and education. The distinct features of RP—such as non-rhoticity, clear articulation of consonants, specific vowel length distinctions, and the use of diphthongs—set it apart from other regional accents. Even as RP adapts and incorporates elements from other accents, it remains a marker of social identity and cultural heritage in the UK.

1.2.1 Phonetic characteristics of the Cockney accent

Cockney is a distinct working-class accent traditionally spoken in London's East End. Known for its unique features, it has played a significant role in shaping Estuary English and has had a notable influence on British popular culture. Historically, Cockney has been associated with the working-class communities of London, especially in the East End. While its usage has declined due to social mobility and the movement of people from the area, Cockney's influence can still be heard in the speech patterns of many Londoners and speakers in southeastern England.

Key features of the Cockney accent, according to Mott [57, p. 69-94], include:

- One of the most salient phonetic features in Adele's early accent is the glottalization, the replacement of the /t/ sound with a glottal stop [ʔ]. This is especially common in medial or final positions in words. For example, *bottle* is pronounced ['bɒʔl], where the /t/ is replaced by a momentary closure of the vocal cords, giving the speech a more localized and informal tone.
- Another feature involves the omission of the /h/ sound at the beginning of words and is called h-dropping. In Adele's pre-shift speech, words like *house* may be heard as [aʊs], which is a typical trait of Cockney and, to a lesser

extent, Estuary English. It contributes to a softer and more relaxed pronunciation style.

- Another prominent characteristic is the substitution of the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ with the labiodental sounds /f/ and /v/ which is th-fronting. Thus, *think* becomes [fɪŋk], and *brother* becomes [brʌvə]. This phonetic feature is strongly associated with working-class London accents.
- And last but not least, in Cockney and Estuary English, certain vowel sounds shift noticeably compared to Received Pronunciation or General American English. For instance, the vowel in *day* might be pronounced as [daɪ] rather than the more standard [deɪ]. These shifts give the accent a more dynamic and expressive vowel quality.

Though historically, the Cockney accent was stigmatized as a marker of lower social class, its influence has grown, especially with the increasing prominence of Estuary English. Elements of Cockney have softened or blended with Estuary English features, making them more widely understood and accepted. Additionally, the accent has gained representation in the media, contributing to its broader cultural recognition. Films, television shows, and music have embraced Cockney speech, with iconic characters and personalities, such as Amy Winehouse, proudly showcasing the accent [69].

However, Cockney continues to be perceived as a mark of lower socio-economic status by some. Despite this, the influence of Cockney speech can be seen in the speech patterns of many contemporary Londoners. Over time, the accent has blended with other regional accents, leading to a shift where it's not always as distinguishable as it once was. Though Cockney has softened in usage, it still retains a strong presence in London's culture and speech patterns, particularly among the working class [58].

In addition to its phonetic features, Cockney speakers also display distinct grammatical patterns. Non-standard grammar usage, such as the use of double negatives, for example, *I ain't never been there*, or substituting “ain't” for “isn't” or

“aren't,” is quite common. These linguistic features are a product of the working-class roots of Cockney but have also gained recognition in modern British speech.

Ultimately, the Cockney accent has experienced a transition from a working-class dialect to an influential feature of contemporary British speech. While its traditional form may not be as widespread, its influence can still be heard in the speech of many Londoners, especially in younger generations who blend elements of Cockney with Estuary English. This ongoing evolution reflects the complex relationship between accents, social mobility, and the shifting cultural landscape of London.

1.2.2 Linguistic markers of Estuary English

Estuary English (EE) is a modern variety of English spoken primarily in the southeastern regions of England, particularly along the Thames Estuary. It blends elements of both Received Pronunciation (RP) and Cockney, and is often regarded as a "middle-ground" accent. EE has gained popularity due to its association with social mobility and its neutral, accessible qualities, making it widely recognized in contemporary British speech. It serves as a bridge between the more formal RP and the working-class Cockney, thus appealing to a wide range of speakers, from politicians and sports figures to media personalities. EE's growing prominence, especially in media, politics, and entertainment, suggests it may eventually overtake RP as the new standard accent. Notably, even figures such as Prince Edward have been identified as speakers of EE [75].

However, not everyone views EE positively. In 1995, Gillian Shephard, the Minister of Education, criticized it as sloppy, mumbling, and a bastardized version of Cockney, urging teachers to eliminate it. This reflects a common tension in language matters, where new accents often face resistance, especially when they challenge traditional standards of prestige.

The term “Estuary English” was coined in 1984 by David Rosewarne, an EFL teacher, to describe this unique blend of modified regional speech. Rosewarne noted that EE lies somewhere between RP and Cockney on a linguistic continuum, with

speakers of EE occupying a middle ground. It has become increasingly associated with social and professional sectors such as government, media, and education, particularly in the southeast. Despite its growing influence, EE remains a relatively new phenomenon in the long history of English dialects, with linguistic features that have been evolving over centuries [59, p. 87-94].

Some of the most distinctive phonetic features of Estuary English, according to Bondarenko [6, p. 24-29] include:

- In Estuary English, as in Cockney, the /t/ sound is frequently replaced by a glottal stop [ʔ], especially in medial or final positions, which stands for glottalization. For example, the word *butter* is pronounced [ˈbʌʔə], where the /t/ is not fully articulated but instead marked by a momentary closure in the vocal cords. This makes the speech sound softer and more casual.
- One notable feature of Estuary English is the transformation of the /l/ sound at the end of syllables into a vowel-like or semi-vowel sound, often resembling [w], which is known as l-vocalisation. As a result, *milk* becomes [mɪwk], and *people* may be pronounced as [pi:pou] or [pi:pʊ]. This feature adds a rounded quality to the accent and contributes to its distinctiveness.
- Yod Coalescence involves the merging of /dj/ and /tj/ into the affricates /dʒ/ and /tʃ/. In everyday speech, this means that *tune* may be pronounced as [tʃu:n], sounding like “choon,” and *duty* becomes [ˈdʒu:ti], sounding like “jooty.” This change is common in both Estuary and informal varieties of British English.
- Estuary English, like Cockney and Received Pronunciation (RP), is non-rhotic. This means that the post-vocalic /r/ is not pronounced unless it is followed by another vowel. Words like *car* and *teacher* are pronounced [kɑ:] and [ˈti:tʃə], respectively. The /r/ is typically only realized in connected speech when linking to a word beginning with a vowel, such as in *law and order* [lɔ:r ən ˈɔ:də].
- Certain vowel sounds, particularly those in the GOOSE lexical set, are pronounced further forward in the mouth in Estuary English than in RP. For instance, *goose* may be pronounced as [gʊ:s] instead of [gu:s], giving the

vowel a slightly more fronted and rounded quality. This vowel shift contributes to the modern, "smoothed out" character of the accent.

In addition to these phonetic features, Estuary English is characterized by a shift in intonation patterns. Unlike RP, which is known for its relatively flat and controlled intonation, EE speakers tend to use a wider range of pitch variation, contributing to a more informal and conversational tone. This intonational flexibility adds to the accessibility and perceived friendliness of the accent.

The spread of Estuary English beyond London and the southeast has led many public figures to adopt aspects of it in order to appear more relatable to a broader audience. This shift reflects the greater social mobility in modern Britain and the increasing tendency to downplay traditional regional accents in favor of a more neutral, middle-ground speech.

Ultimately, while EE continues to rise in prominence, it remains part of a long-standing linguistic trend where features of popular London speech have spread out both geographically and socially. Rather than attempting to suppress EE, a more practical approach for teachers and learners might be to adapt our understanding of Received Pronunciation, incorporating elements of EE that reflect contemporary trends in English pronunciation.

1.3 Standard American Accent vs Californian Accent

The Standard American Accent, also known as General American English (GenAm), is considered the most "neutral" and widely understood accent in the United States. It is commonly used in national news broadcasts, Hollywood films, and professional settings. This accent lacks strong regional markers, making it easily recognizable and often associated with educated speakers from the Midwest or West Coast.

One of the key features of the Standard American Accent is that it is rhotic, [70, p. 44] meaning the "r" sound is pronounced in all positions, such as in words like *car*, *hard*, and *far*. This is in contrast to many British accents, where the "r" is often dropped at the end of words.

Other notable characteristics include:

- In General American, vowels are stable and do not undergo significant shifts. For example, *cat* /kæt/ and *cot* /kɑ:t/ are pronounced with distinct vowel sounds, unlike some other American dialects where these vowels might merge.
- The flapping of the “t” and “d” sounds are present when a /t/ sound occurs between two vowel sounds, so that it is pronounced as a soft, quick “d.” This happens in words like *butter* /'bʌrə/ and *ladder* /'lærə/.
- The Standard American Accent tends to have a more even and monotone, flat even, intonation compared to accents like British RP or Southern American English.
- Unlike Cockney or Estuary English, where the “t” sound is replaced with a glottal stop (e.g., *bottle* becomes /'bɒʔl/), General American retains a soft “t” sound, as in *bottle* /'bɑ:tl/.
- The schwa is the most common vowel sound in English and appears in unstressed syllables, such as in *sofa* /'soʊfə/, *banana* /bə'nænə/, and *America* /ə'merikə/.
- Clear “l” sound at the end of words: In words like *full* /fʊl/ and *call* /kɔ:l/, the “l” is pronounced clearly, unlike in some British accents where it may be vocalized.
- Longer, clearer vowel sounds in diphthongs are another distinctive feature, for example, *go* /goʊ/, *no* /noʊ/, and *home* /hooʊ/ have a smooth, drawn-out vowel shift.

The Standard American Accent is often chosen by actors, public speakers, and broadcasters to ensure clarity and avoid regional bias. Its neutrality and clarity have made it the dominant accent in American media and international communication.

However, when it comes to the Californian accent [25, p. 543-556], particularly prevalent in urban coastal regions such as Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area, it has been extensively studied in sociophonetic research due to its distinctive vowel shifts and sociolinguistic significance. Recent studies have provided deeper insights into its evolving features:

- California Vowel Shift (CVS) is a chain shift which affects several front vowels. It is notable in the vowel in *kit* /ɪ/ is often produced closer to /ε/; the *trap* vowel /æ/ may be raised and fronted; the *dress* vowel /ε/ is subject to lowering and backing.
- The vowels in *cot* and *caught* are typically merged and realized as [ɑ], eliminating the phonemic distinction between /ɑ/ and /ɔ/, which is known as a low-back vowel merger. This merger has systemic phonetic consequences, influencing the movement of other vowels such as *trap*, *dress*, and *kit*.
- Recent research indicates that, rather than a stepwise chain shift, the CVS exhibits a holistic compression of the vowel space. This suggests that articulatory and social factors, rather than purely phonological ones, drive the shift.
- Prosodic features such as uptalk (rising intonation at the end of statements) and vocal fry (creaky voice) are frequently observed, especially among younger speakers. While these features have been stereotypically associated with the “Valley Girl” persona, they are widespread across diverse speaker groups and genders.

In sum, the Californian accent represents a dynamic and evolving variety of American English, shaped by both internal phonological mechanisms and broader sociolinguistic factors. Its hallmark features—such as the California Vowel Shift, low-back vowel merger, and prosodic innovations—reflect not only regional identity but also shifting patterns of social meaning and speaker perception. Within this context, the present research will concentrate specifically on the prosodic dimensions of the Californian accent, examining how features like intonation and voice quality contribute to its perception and social significance.

1.4 Accent Change in Adulthood

The concept of a "critical period" for language acquisition has long suggested that phonetic plasticity diminishes significantly after early adolescence. However,

recent research challenges this notion, indicating that adults are capable of modifying their accents, particularly in response to social and environmental changes.

Longitudinal studies have provided evidence of accent change in adulthood. For instance, Harrington et al. [31, p. 439-457] analyzed Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas broadcasts over several decades and observed a gradual shift in her pronunciation towards a more mainstream form of Received Pronunciation (RP), reflecting broader sociolinguistic trends. Similarly, Evans and Iverson [22, p. 14-26] investigated vowel production and perception among university students from northern England. These shifts included the centralization of /u:/, fronting of /oo/, and the weakening of diphthongs—features often associated with ongoing generational change in Southern British English. Their findings demonstrated that, over time, these students adjusted their accents to align more closely with Southern Standard British English norms, highlighting the influence of social integration on phonetic adaptation.

Evans and Iverson [22, p. 14-26] found that young adults from Northern England who moved to the South for university began to shift their pronunciation patterns, particularly in the realization of the GOOSE, GOAT, and STRUT vowels. These changes reflect a process of accommodation to Southern British English and demonstrate that vowel quality, even when acquired early, remains pliable in adulthood.

Research into second dialect acquisition also reveals that consonantal features can be modified by adults. Cheng [10, p. 409-434], analyzing YouTube vloggers who had relocated internationally, documented changes such as reduced rhoticity, increased use of flapped /t/ in American English contexts, and the adoption of region-specific intonation contours. Clopper et al. [11] further highlighted phonetic vowel reduction as a key variable subject to change in adults adapting to a new dialect region, such as the American Midwest.

Also, the study *"Native Speech Plasticity in the German-English Late Bilingual Stefanie Graf: A Longitudinal Study Over Four Decades"* by Esther de Leeuw [19, p. 24-39] examines how a bilingual speaker's accent changes over time, highlighting the

ongoing influence of both languages on speech. The research shows that even late bilinguals experience shifts in their native accent due to phonetic transfer between languages. Over four decades, the bilingual speaker's German and English pronunciations evolved, influenced by social identity, cognitive factors, and the contexts in which the languages were used. This study underscores the plasticity of speech in adulthood, with accents continuously shaped by both internal linguistic dynamics and external social environments.

Last but not least, the study *"Frequency Effects Over the Lifespan: A Case Study of Attenborough's R's"* by Laurel MacKenzie [51] investigates how frequency of use affects phonetic variation in the speech of renowned broadcaster David Attenborough. By analyzing Attenborough's use of the rhotic /r/ sound across different stages of his career, the study reveals that frequency of exposure to specific phonetic patterns can influence their persistence or change over time. The findings suggest that the speaker's production of /r/ in certain linguistic environments, influenced by both social and linguistic factors, evolves with age and speech context, offering insights into how frequency of use shapes accent and phonetic choices throughout the lifespan.

These studies collectively suggest that accent change in adulthood is not only possible but can be significant, influenced by factors such as social mobility, integration into new communities, and exposure to different linguistic norms. This challenges the traditional view of a rigid critical period for phonetic acquisition and underscores the dynamic nature of speech patterns throughout an individual's life.

1.5 Adele's Linguistic Exposure to Regional and Social Varieties of English

Adele's accent is an example of how these three accents—RP, but mostly Cockney and Estuary English—interact in modern speech. She exhibits features of Cockney, such as glottalization and th-fronting, while also using certain RP elements in more formal settings. Over the years, her accent has shifted, particularly as she gained international recognition, demonstrating a gradual move towards a more Estuary English style of speech. This shift reflects a broader trend where public

figures with regional accents modify their pronunciation to make it more accessible to a wider audience while still retaining key elements of their linguistic identity.

Adele's accent is also an example of how language and social status interact. While Cockney was historically associated with working-class identity, its features have blended into Estuary English, making them more socially acceptable in various contexts. Adele's speech exemplifies this transition, as she maintains her connection to her London roots while adjusting certain elements to fit the expectations of different audiences. This fluidity in accent use highlights the evolving nature of British English and the increasing role of Estuary English as a widely accepted, socially mobile accent.

However, Adele's move to Los Angeles in 2016 had an impact on her accent. While she has retained many features of her native North London (Cockney) accent, fans and linguists have noticed subtle changes in her speech over the years. In interviews after relocating to the U.S., Adele's accent softened, and certain American English, closer to Californian accent, intonations and pronunciation features began to appear in her speech. This phenomenon is known as linguistic accommodation, where speakers unconsciously adjust their accent and speech patterns to fit in with their social environment.

Conclusions 1

The study of English accents is essential in sociolinguistics, phonetics, and identity. Scholars like Trudgill, Wells, and Lippi-Green highlight how pronunciation shapes regional and social identity, influencing perceptions and opportunities. Lippi-Green in her work *English with an Accent* underscores the social and cultural implications of accents, showing how accents often reflect notions of “prestige” and “otherness,” which can affect individuals' access to social mobility. Accents are more than phonetic variations; they reflect cultural belonging and social mobility.

Classifications of English accents showcase a dynamic linguistic landscape. Kachru's Three Circles Model, alongside research by Labov and Eckert, illustrates how accents correlate with identity and mobility. The contrast between British and

American accents, along with the rise of Estuary English, demonstrates how social and cultural factors drive linguistic change. Public figures like Adele show how accents adapt over time, reflecting shifts in identity and audience expectations. As English evolves through globalization, accent research remains key to understanding linguistic diversity and its social impact.

A closer examination of specific accents reveals how these processes unfold. Received Pronunciation (RP), traditionally associated with the British upper class and formal settings, has evolved to incorporate regional influences, making it more accessible. Cockney, once linked to the working class of East London, is known for features like glottalization (*bottle* → ['bɒʔl]), th-fronting (*think* → [fɪŋk]), and rhyming slang (*stairs* → *apples and pears*), which have contributed significantly to the development of Estuary English (EE). EE blends elements of RP and Cockney, incorporating glottalization (*butter* → ['bʌʔə]) and yod coalescence (*tune* → *choon*), and has become a popular accent across social classes in southern England. In contrast, General American (GA), characterized by rhoticity and vowel shifts, remains a dominant variety of American English with widespread recognition, especially in media and business.

Also, the ability of adults to modify their accents challenges earlier assumptions about the rigidity of phonological systems after childhood. Studies by Harrington et al. and Evans and Iverson have demonstrated that vowel shifts—such as the centralization of /u:/ or the fronting of GOAT and GOOSE—can occur well into adulthood, particularly when influenced by geographic mobility or prolonged exposure to a different dialect region. These findings underscore that phonetic features, previously thought to be fossilized, are in fact adaptable.

Further research by Cheng and Clopper et al. highlights the plasticity of both segmental and prosodic features in response to new linguistic environments. From rhoticity and vowel reduction to intonation and rhythm, adults continually adjust their speech to reflect social integration, identity, and perceived prestige. These findings affirm that accent change in adulthood is not merely incidental but reflects deeper social and cognitive processes tied to adaptation and belonging.

Public figures, such as Adele, demonstrate how accents evolve over time. Born in North London, Adele's accent initially displayed strong Cockney and Estuary features, characterized by glottal stops and non-rhotic pronunciation. As her career progressed, however, her accent gradually shifted toward a more neutral, RP-like speech. This shift reflects not only personal changes but also broader social and professional forces. As Adele's global audience expanded, adopting a less marked accent helped her appeal to a wider demographic, showcasing the relationship between linguistic change and societal expectations.

The interaction between regional accents, social identity, and linguistic change underscores the importance of continued research in this field, offering valuable insights into the intersection of language, society, and personal identity. Understanding how accents like RP, Cockney, Estuary English, and General American evolve helps us appreciate the fluidity of language and its role in shaping social status and cultural belonging.

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND PRAAT APPLICATIONS FOR A SOCIAPHONETIC STUDY

This chapter's sections present an overview of the steps involved in choosing, gathering, and analyzing the data required to conduct this research.

The study of the Cockney and Estuary accents and a targeting American accent in Adele's speech involved analyzing the underlying factors that contribute to their development and transformation over time. To do so, a systematic approach was needed to identify and measure the variables that define these accents, such as phonetic features, social influences, and regional characteristics. This chapter delves into the methodology for exploring these variables, highlighting key techniques and tools used to assess accent variations. By examining how accents evolve and the factors that influence their features, we gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of linguistic identity and social perception. Through careful analysis, we can pinpoint the distinctive markers of original and the adopted accents, shedding light on how individuals adapt their speech patterns in response to social, geographical, and cultural factors.

In this study, PRAAT served as the primary tool for conducting a detailed acoustic-phonetic analysis of accent variation in Adele's speech. The software enabled the identification and measurement of specific phonological features commonly associated with accent change, including glottal stop realization, non-rhoticity versus rhoticity, h-dropping, th-fronting and vowel shifts.

2.1 Methodological Framework for Data Selection and Collection

The subject of the study was chosen based on the following criteria:

- The individual should have moved from any place in the UK to any place in the US.
- During this period, the subject should have spent a considerable amount of time in the new language setting rather than moving about a lot or abruptly.
- Within the framework of the new language, the persona should be or was well-known.

- Video or audio recording of the subject's relatively clear speech should have been made both before the subject traveled to the US and at the end of the research period.

Out of all the candidates, Adele Laurie Blue Adkins met all the conditions, hence she was the subject of this study. The study's part 3.3.1 provides more thorough details regarding Adele and her background.

Around 20 samples of each phenomenon needed for the analysis were taken from four video recordings featuring Adele at different points in her career to observe the evolution of her accent. For the early accent stage, the analysis was based on 11 minutes of speech taken from the *BBC 2011* [75] and *GIEL Radio 2011* [76] interviews. From this corpus, 24 tokens were randomly selected and analyzed for glottalization, 23 tokens for rhoticity, 14 tokens for th-fronting, and 17 tokens for h-dropping. These features were chosen due to their strong association with London English varieties, particularly Cockney and Estuary English.

For the later American-influenced stage, data was drawn from 47 minutes of speech in interviews and performances between 2020 and 2023, including appearances on American talk shows such as *The Ellen Show* [77] and *The Oprah Conversation: One Night with Adele* [78]. From this later corpus, 20 tokens were selected for observing glottal /t/ reduction, 22 tokens for rhoticity, 17 tokens for th-fronting, and 17 tokens for h-dropping. The comparison of early and later data allowed for a diachronic examination of changes in Adele's accent features over time.

In the process of selecting speech samples, in particular more than one hundred fifty samples of sentences, phrases and words of each of two accent stages, for further investigation, certain quality requirements were set. Firstly, the audio had to be clear, without excessive background noise, to ensure accurate phonetic analysis. Secondly, the speech should be relatively calm, as loud or highly emotional speech could distort results. According to Koenig and Fuchs, "louder speech involves more open articulatory postures than typical speech"; however, low vowels appear to be affected by loudness to a greater extent. [41, p. 1278-1295]

The standard lexical sets were chosen specifically to categorize sounds based on their phonemic and phonetic environments. This approach allows for a more detailed analysis, as it enables the tracking of changes within each lexical set separately. This is particularly important when studying accent shifts in a speaker like Adele, who has transitioned between distinct linguistic environments. The changes in her accent may be unpredictable or subtle, requiring careful examination.

2.2 Analytical Methods and Instruments Utilized for Data Interpretation

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the methods and tools used to analyze changes in Adele's accent, focusing on both traditional sociolinguistic methods and modern acoustic analysis tools, such as PRAAT. By using a variety of methods—including observation, case study, data processing, transcription, and acoustic analysis—this research aims to explore how accent change can serve as a reflection of social status and identity. The following sections outline these approaches and provide a comprehensive analysis of their applicability in studying accent variation over time.

In analyzing Adele's accent change, a comprehensive methodological approach was required, combining traditional sociolinguistic methods with advanced acoustic analysis tools. The methods enumerated and described below were employed to trace and analyze the changes in Adele's accent.

Observation is a critical method in sociolinguistic research, especially when analyzing real-life speech. In this study, a longitudinal case study of Adele's public speech was conducted by reviewing interviews, live performances, and recordings spanning her career. These materials are analyzed to identify key moments when accent changes may have occurred, reflecting shifts in her social status, professional role, or personal identity.

Transcription is a fundamental method for preparing spoken data for analysis. Accurate transcription allowed for a detailed examination of speech patterns, including segmental features like vowels and consonants, as well as suprasegmental features such as intonation, stress, and rhythm.

It was applied as the first step of the analysis as well as observation, involving creating orthographic transcriptions of Adele's speech from various recordings, such as interviews, as well as live performances. These transcriptions served as the basis for subsequent phonetic analysis, and they helped identify instances where accent features might deviate from the norm or evolve.

Following the orthographic transcription, a detailed phonetic transcription was performed to capture the acoustic properties of Adele's speech. This involved representing vowel and consonant sounds, as well as features like intonation and pitch, in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) [85]. This level of transcription enabled precise identification of regional and standard accent features, such as vowel shifts and the presence or absence of rhotic sounds.

The last stage of the transcription process also involved identifying the social context in which each speech sample was produced. This included noting factors such as the audience, medium (interview vs. live performance), and Adele's emotional state, all of which may influence her accent.

Acoustic analysis is essential for providing objective, measurable data on accent variation. PRAAT, a popular acoustic analysis tool, is utilized in this study to examine the phonetic details of Adele's speech, specifically focusing on features such as pitch, vowel formants, and speech rate. More information on PRAAT will be presented in the next section.

Another research method of data processing involves organizing and analyzing the large amount of acoustic and transcribed data collected from Adele's recordings. Statistical techniques were used to quantify changes in acoustic features over time, providing a clearer picture of accent evolution.

And last but not least, the case study approach allowed for a deeper exploration of the social factors influencing Adele's accent. By examining the broader context of her career trajectory, we could identify how changes in her public persona may have influenced her accent. This includes the role of media representation, audience expectations, and the desire to conform to international norms of speech.

It is obvious that celebrities often modify their accents to fit media expectations or to project a certain image to their audience [29, p. 17-29]. In Adele's case, we observed early interviews often show her with a strong working-class London accent, while later interviews reveal a more neutral tone. This shift might reflect her desire to broaden her appeal to an international audience, which often favors standardized or neutral accents.

Overall, we tried to identify whether Adele's rise from a local British singer to a globally recognized pop star could play the potential role of social mobility in accent change. As she moved through different social circles, from her working-class roots to the upper echelons of the music industry, her accent may have changed as a means of signaling membership in new social groups.

2.3 Integrating PRAAT into Acoustic and Phonetic Research

PRAAT is a widely used software for the analysis of speech and phonetic data, developed by Paul Boersma and David Weenink at the University of Amsterdam. Since its inception in 1996, PRAAT [78] has become one of the most powerful and accessible tools for phoneticians, linguists, and speech scientists worldwide. Its primary strength lies in its capability to provide detailed visual and acoustic analysis of speech sounds, making it an invaluable resource for studying phonetic variation, including accents.

PRAAT operates as a software package that enables users to record, edit, and analyze speech. It supports various functions such as waveform analysis, pitch analysis, formant analysis, intensity measurement, and spectrogram viewing. The software allows for the extraction of detailed measurements from sound files, providing users with a broad range of acoustic parameters to study speech characteristics.

Some of PRAAT's core functions, according to its site [78], include waveform and spectrogram visualisation, analysis of formants, pitch and intensity, as well as synthesis of speech.

First of all, PRAAT can display a visual representation of a speech signal as a waveform or a spectrogram, enabling users to see the amplitude (loudness) and frequency (pitch) of the sound over time.

Secondly, PRAAT can analyze the resonance frequencies of speech sounds, which are critical for distinguishing vowel sounds and studying their phonetic characteristics in different accents.

As for pitch (frequency) and intensity (loudness), the software can measure them, providing insights into the intonation patterns and stress patterns associated with various accents.

And finally, PRAAT can also synthesize speech, enabling the user to manipulate sounds in order to simulate or compare different accents.

As for PRAAT's functions, its user interface is highly customizable, with a script-based design allowing users to perform complex analyses and automations. Users can import sound files in various formats (e.g., WAV, MP4), and through the program's menus, analyze and manipulate the speech data in real time.

Firstly, users can record speech directly into PRAAT, ensuring the speech samples are captured in high quality. Then, PRAAT allows for precise segmentation of speech, making it easy to isolate individual sounds, syllables, words, or phrases for detailed analysis. Once the data is segmented, PRAAT can calculate different acoustic measures, including pitch, duration, intensity, formants, and voice quality. This allows researchers to observe the fine-grained phonetic variations between accents.

PRAAT's wide array of analytical capabilities makes it especially useful for studying accents and phonetic variation across different varieties of English. The software allows researchers to perform detailed and precise comparisons of pronunciation, including the examination of phonological features like vowel quality, consonant articulation, stress patterns, and intonation. Specifically, PRAAT can assist in accent analysis in the ways described below.

One of the most prominent ways PRAAT is used in accent analysis is by examining vowel and consonant sounds. The program can measure the formant frequencies of vowels, which are key to differentiating accents (e.g., the fronting of

vowels in Estuary English). In addition, PRAAT can be used to investigate consonantal features, such as the use of glottal stops in Cockney or the non-rhoticity in Received Pronunciation (RP).

Also, PRAAT allows researchers to analyze pitch contours, which are crucial for studying intonation patterns in different accents. For example, researchers may use PRAAT to study how pitch rises and falls in a sentence in various British accents, such as the melodic patterns characteristic of RP or the more monotonal intonation in American English.

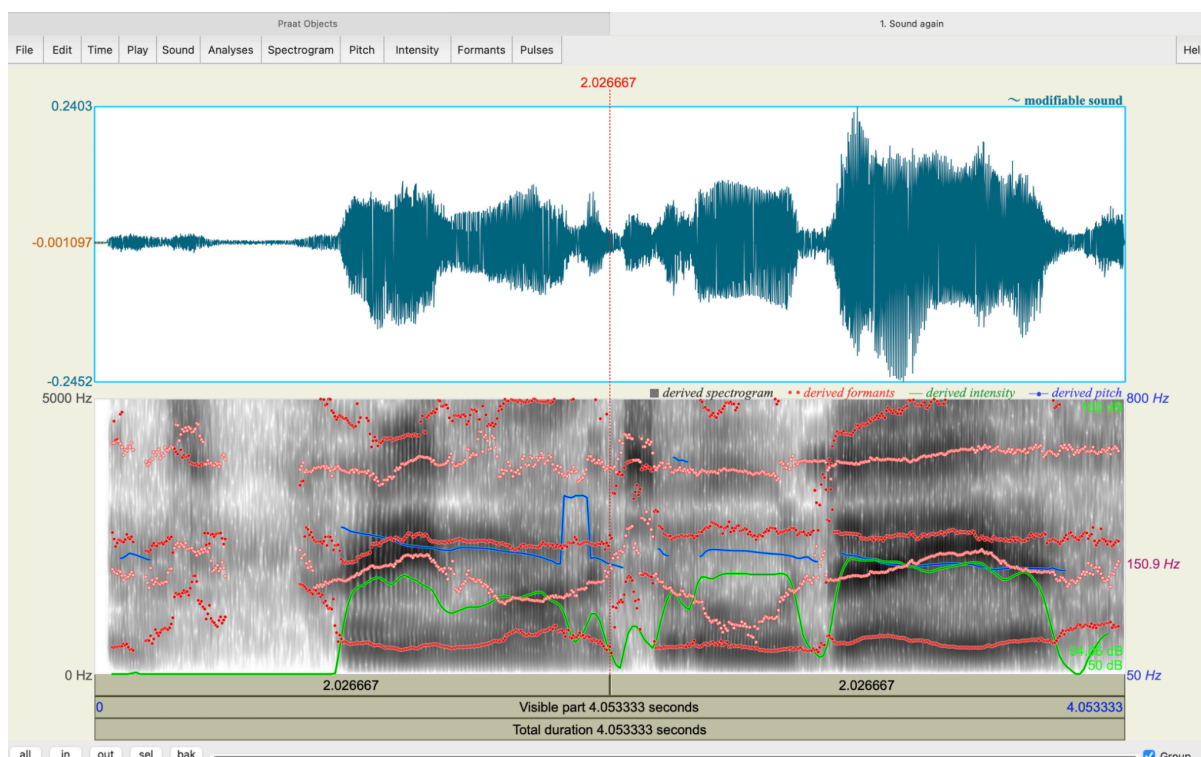
Moreover, as accents can often be distinguished by subtle differences in formants, PRAAT's formant tracking tools are invaluable. For instance, the different vowel systems in accents such as Scottish English or General American can be analyzed through formant analysis, where vowel qualities like the [æ] in "cat" in different accents can be compared.

Likewise, PRAAT can also be used to assess speech rate and rhythm, both of which play a crucial role in accent differentiation. For example, the pace of speech in certain American accents tends to be faster, while British varieties may demonstrate a slower, more deliberate rhythm. PRAAT allows the measurement of temporal variables like speech duration, pause length, and speech rate, providing insight into how these features vary by accent.

Besides, one of the most powerful aspects of PRAAT is the ability to compare speakers of different accents. By analyzing speech samples from various speakers, PRAAT allows researchers to examine how individual accents diverge in terms of phonetic features. This is particularly useful in studies of social mobility and language change, where individuals may shift their accents over time in response to social, geographical, or professional factors.

In the PRAAT programme, it can be seen in the picture below that the waveform is displayed as a blue signal over a white background, typically occupying the upper part of the analysis window. Just below it, the spectrogram appears in varying shades of black or gray, showing the intensity of frequencies over time on a white background. The pitch is traced as a smooth blue line that overlays the

spectrogram. Intonation, reflecting the melody of speech, is indicated by a green contour line. Formants, which represent vocal tract resonances, are marked by distinct red lines running horizontally across the spectrogram.



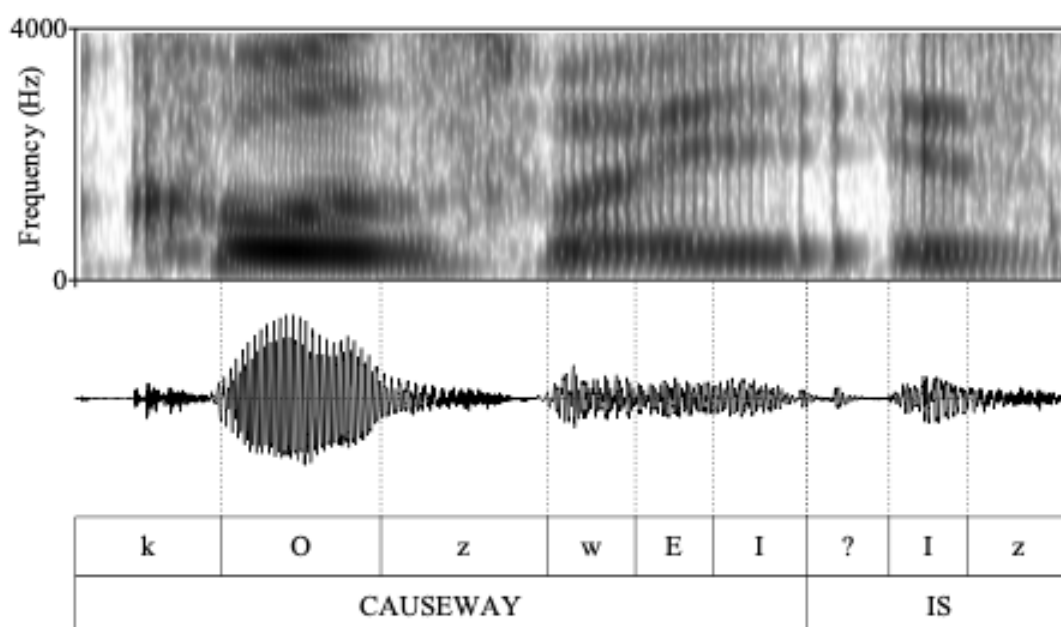
Picture 1. Main functions of PRAAT, where white and blue make a waveform, white and black - a spectrogram, green stands for intonation, blue - pitch, red- formants.

In this study, PRAAT served as the primary tool for conducting a detailed acoustic-phonetic analysis of accent variation in Adele's speech. The software enabled the identification and measurement of specific phonological features commonly associated with accent change, including glottal stop realization, non-rhoticity versus rhoticity, h-dropping, th-fronting and vowel shifts.

To examine glottalization, PRAAT was used to visualize the absence or replacement of the alveolar plosive /t/ with a glottal stop [ʔ], particularly in word-medial or word-final positions (e.g., *bottle*, *butter*). The glottal stop [ʔ] is a widely studied sociophonetic feature, particularly in varieties of British English. Its realisation most commonly occurs as a replacement for /t/ in syllable-final or pre-consonantal position, such as in *butter* ['bʌʔə] or *football* ['fʊʔbɔ:l]. As described in the *Anglophonia* article, the glottal stop has become increasingly common in southern British English varieties, especially among younger and working-class

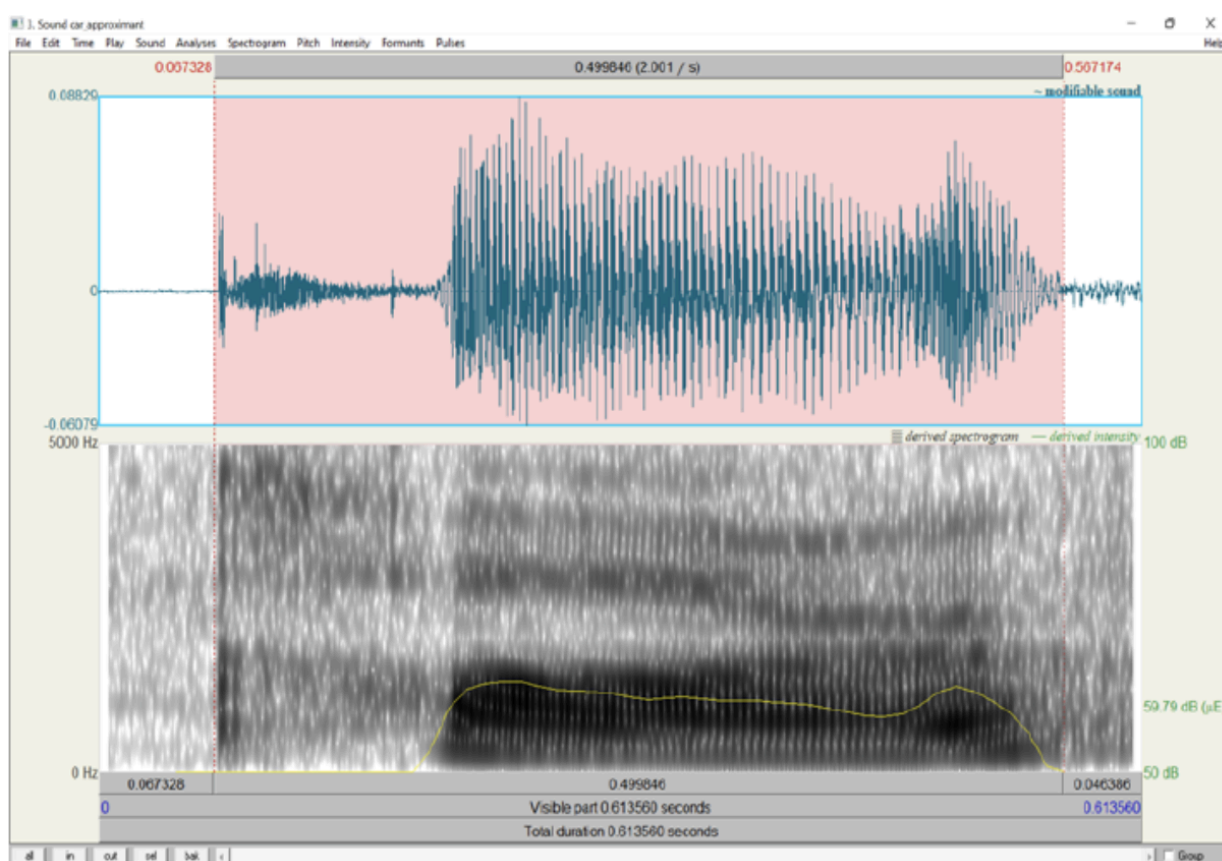
speakers. Its diffusion into regional dialects (e.g., in Leeds, Sheffield) highlights its role as a marker of regional identity and urban speech. Docherty and Foulkes [24] argue that glottalisation can serve stylistic purposes and may be adopted by speakers undergoing dialect contact or accommodation, such as young adults in multicultural or mobile environments.

To study how to recognise glottals in PRAAT Fuchs' work was of great use for me, where I found out that short bursts of creaky voice, which did not last for a significant portion of the vowel, were considered glottal stops when the duration of each burst was noticeably irregular. So, spectrograms and waveform displays allowed for the detection of the characteristic acoustic silence and abrupt closure associated with glottal stops. [26]. Moreover, according to Fuchs, those short periods were considered glottal stops when the durations of individual bursts were highly inconsistent. Picture 1 below illustrates an example of the phrase <Cause-way is> being pronounced with a glottal stop at the boundary, as [kOzweIPlz] [26, p. 99-118]. In this case, the preceding word ends in a vowel, the next word begins with a vowel (V#PV context), and a glottal stop is inserted at the word boundary.



Picture 2. Spectrogram (top), waveform (middle) as well as phonemic (in SAMPA) and word annotation (bottom) of a pronunciation of the phrase <Causeway is> with a glottal stop at the beginning of the second word. [27, p. 99–118].

The shift from non-rhoticity to rhoticity was tracked by analyzing the presence or absence of post-vocalic /r/ sounds in controlled lexical environments, for example, *car*, *more*, *father*. PRAAT facilitated precise segmentation and the analysis of formant transitions (especially F3) to determine whether /r/ was produced or elided. But to understand and track this shift, I had to see the visualization of rhoticity in PRAAT. As stated by A. Matysiak, the acoustic signal shows evidence of rhotic realization when it is indicated by a visible dip in the third formant (F3) towards the end of the vowel, which is a typical acoustic correlate of a post-vocalic /r/ in rhotic varieties. The waveform also shows sustained voicing beyond the vowel, which further confirms the presence of a sonorant consonant such as /r/. [52, p. 373-393; 60]



Picture 3. A visual representation of the approximant in the English word 'car'.

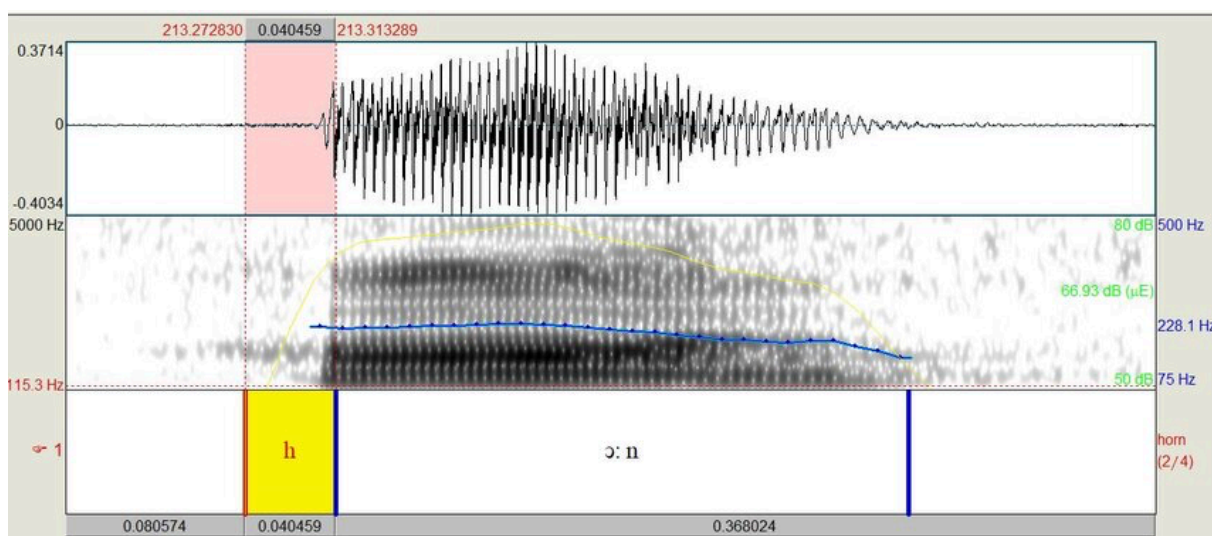
H-dropping, characterized by the omission of the voiceless glottal fricative /h/ at the beginning of words, is a prominent feature in several British English dialects. This phenomenon results in pronunciations like 'ouse for *house* or 'appy for *happy*. In her study of Stoke-on-Trent's pottery industry, Hannah Leach explores the relationship between h-dropping and occupational roles. Utilizing oral history

interviews, Leach presents both quantitative and qualitative analyses, revealing that the extent of h-dropping correlates with specific job functions within the industry. Workers engaged in manual, factory-floor-based roles exhibit consistently high rates of h-dropping, while those in less manual, more esteemed positions demonstrate lower and more variable rates. This pattern suggests that h-dropping functions as a sociolinguistic marker, reflecting internal hierarchies and social meanings within the occupational community. Furthermore, Leach's findings indicate that h-dropping in Stoke-on-Trent is not merely a linguistic feature but also a symbol of local identity and social stratification. The variation in h-dropping usage underscores the complexity of social class groupings and challenges traditional categorizations within variationist sociolinguistics. [48, p. 350-373]

Also, in Hannah Leach's study on /h/-dropping and occupational roles in Stoke-on-Trent's pottery industry, the analysis goes beyond frequency counts by incorporating acoustic evidence through spectrograms. Specifically, the realisation of /h/-dropping is visually represented by the *absence* of any acoustic signal in the expected position of the glottal fricative /h/. When /h/ is pronounced, the spectrogram shows a characteristic burst of high-frequency noise; in contrast, when /h/ is dropped, this segment appears blank or silent. This absence confirms the phenomenon as not only socially conditioned but also acoustically traceable. The spectrogram thus provides an objective tool to verify whether /h/ has been realised or deleted. [48, p. 350-373]

In such a way, for h-dropping, spectrographic data were used to detect whether the glottal fricative /h/ was articulated at the beginning of function or content words (e.g., *house*, *have*). The PRAAT image below vividly illustrates the phenomenon of h-dropping. In the top section, the waveform reveals a smooth onset at the beginning of the word without the characteristic burst of energy typically associated with the /h/ sound. This absence of high-frequency energy suggests that the /h/ sound has been dropped. The middle section, the spectrogram, further supports this by showing no visible markings in the high-frequency range where the /h/ fricative would normally appear, confirming its elision. The phonemic transcription at the bottom of the image

explicitly represents the pronunciation of the word "horn" without the /h/, indicating its omission. In such a way, the practical value for this research is the findings that the waveform shows the absence of the typical burst of energy at the beginning of the word, indicating the lack of the /h/ sound. As for the spectrogram, the /h/ is characterized by high-frequency energy, but in the case of h-dropping, this energy is missing, and the transition between sounds is smooth.



Picture 4. The PRAAT image is given as a waveform (top), a spectrogram (middle) as well as phonemic transcription (bottom) of a pronunciation of the word horn with h-dropping at the beginning of the word. [2]

In the case of th-fronting, where the interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are realized as labiodental sounds [f] and [v] (e.g., *think* → *fink*, *brother* → *bruvver*), PRAAT enabled the comparison of formant structures and noise patterns to distinguish the place of articulation. The visual and auditory cues helped confirm fronted variants and track their frequency over time. Due to the lack of visual studies of the th-fronting, I focused on practical observation, that is, in the waveform, you may notice a shift in the onset and characteristics of the sound, with a more abrupt release compared to the typical dental /θ/ or /ð/. In the color representation in PRAAT's spectrogram will show that the dental fricatives (/θ/ and /ð/) are of higher intensity (darker color, depending on the settings) concentrated in the higher frequencies, whereas for the labiodental fricatives ([f] and [v]), the darker colors will shift to the lower frequency range. More visual data you may find in Chapter 3.

As for the vowel shifts, they were not a central focus in tracking accent evolution. Despite that fact, it is a significant feature for analysis, and in PRAAT, vowels can be recognized through their distinct acoustic characteristics in both the waveform and spectrogram. According to Harb , Sumita, and Wakabayashi, who in their work compared Praat and Computerized Speech Lab for formant analysis of five Japanese vowels in maxillectomy patients [30], demonstrated that the waveform shows clear, periodic waveforms for vowels, indicating their voiced nature. In the spectrogram, vowels are identified by their steady formant patterns, where formants (peaks of energy) are visible as horizontal bands, with Formant 1 (F1) and Formant 2 (F2) being the most prominent. [30] The positions of these formants vary depending on the vowel's articulation, with different vowels showing characteristic formant frequencies. Vowel identification is further supported by the absence of significant noise or friction, distinguishing them from consonants. However, the realization of vowels is not considered as salient a feature as the other aforementioned traits, and due to the limitations of the research, they are not analyzed here. However, this remains a potential avenue for future investigation.

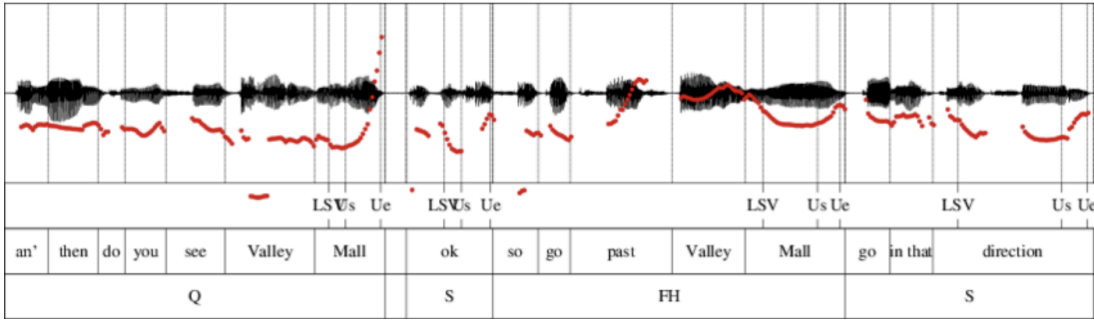
Overall, PRAAT is invaluable in sociophonetic research, where accent and dialect features are not only observed in isolation but also placed in their social and geographical contexts. It was specifically used for tracking Adele's accent transitioning from Cockney and Estuary to California-American accent. Cockney and Estuary English share several notable phonetic features that distinguish them from other English accents. Both are non-rhotic and share the use of the glottal stop. In Cockney according to Cole and Evans [12, p. 641–665.], the /t/ sound is often replaced with a glottal stop in words like "butter" or "water," making them sound like "buh'er" or "waw'er", as I have already mentioned it earlier. Estuary English also features this phenomenon, though to a slightly lesser extent. Additionally, both Cockney and Estuary English [64, p. 21-26] are characterized by th-fronting, where the "th" sounds [θ] and [ð] (as in "think" and "this") are pronounced as [f] and [v], respectively. For example, "think" becomes "fink" and "this" becomes "vis."

In contrast, California English, often considered a standard American accent, exhibits several distinct features. Unlike Cockney and Estuary English, California English is rhotic, meaning the /r/ sound is pronounced clearly at the end of words, as in “car” or “hard.” This makes California English sound markedly different from the non-rhotic accents of Cockney and Estuary. Additionally, California English is known for the California Vowel Shift, where vowels like [æ], as in “cat”, are pronounced more fronted, and [ɑ], as in “father”, becomes more centralized. This shift gives California speech a unique sound that sets it apart from the traditional vowel qualities of Cockney and Estuary. Furthermore, California English does not employ glottal stops or th-fronting, maintaining clearer pronunciation of the /t/ sound. [5]

Also, one of the most salient phonetic features observed in contemporary Californian English is creaky voice, also referred to as vocal fry. According to Dallaston and Docherty [18], creaky voice has become increasingly prevalent across multiple varieties of English, particularly among young adult female speakers in urban areas such as Southern California. Their systematic review reveals that while the presence of a creaky voice is not uniform across all speakers, it is notably widespread among speakers aged 18–30 and is often used in specific social contexts. Creaky voice is typically realized at the end of intonational phrases and is associated with social meaning, often conveying authority, composure, or stylistic alignment with youth and media culture [25, p. 543-556].

In parallel, uptalk—the use of rising intonation at the end of declarative statements—is another defining prosodic characteristic of Southern Californian English. Ritchart and Arvaniti [61, p. 107–118] conducted a detailed acoustic analysis of uptalk in this region and demonstrated that it serves pragmatic and interactional functions, far beyond the stereotypical association with uncertainty or teenage speech. Their study shows that uptalk in Southern California is used to signal continuation, maintain conversational turn, and engage listeners. It is common among both male and female speakers, although women tend to produce a wider pitch range. Importantly, the researchers differentiate between uptalk and final rises in questions,

noting that uptalk in California follows a specific **intonational contour (L H-H%)****, which sets it apart from question intonation. [61, p. 107-118]



Picture 5. Example of data annotation from the map task. LSV = last stressed vowel; Us = start of uptalk rise; Ue = end of uptalk rise; Q = question; S = statement; FH = floor holding. The follower's response (" yes, I do ") which followed the question in this example has been removed for clarity.

These contrasts highlight how distinct accents in different part of English speaking world are, and, moreover, call attention to how and which regional and social factors contribute to the distinctiveness of California English features compared to the more dialectically varied Cockney and Estuary features of Adele’s accent, which were placed under scrutiny in the PRAAT program for the research.

Conclusions 2

This chapter has outlined the comprehensive methodological framework employed to analyze Adele’s accent change, incorporating observational analysis, case study methods, data processing, transcription, and acoustic analysis. These methods were utilized in tandem to capture and examine the phonetic shifts in her speech, specifically focusing on the contrast between her pre- and post-shift accents. Each method contributed unique insights into the progression of Adele’s accent over time, offering a multi-faceted understanding of her linguistic transformation.

Observational analysis was the starting point of the investigation. I closely examined four Adele's public interviews, performances, and media appearances, noting any visible or audible shifts in her speech patterns. This method allowed me to identify key moments when her accent seemed to exhibit features associated with Cockney or Estuary English, and when it shifted towards American English. I

focused on the noticeable variations in vowel pronunciation, consonant articulation, and overall speech rhythm, which were often subtle but significant markers of accent change. These initial observations provided the foundation for further analysis and guided the selection of specific speech samples for more detailed study.

The case study method was instrumental in understanding the broader context of Adele's accent change. I examined a series of four interviews, performances, and other media content spanning her career, analyzing her speech at different points in time. This method allowed for a detailed examination of how her accent evolved in relation to her increasing exposure to international audiences, particularly in the U.S. By analyzing various instances of her speech across different contexts, I was able to identify patterns of accent change and link them to her social, professional, and geographical mobility. The case study approach also facilitated a comparison of her earlier and more recent speech, offering a longitudinal perspective on the nature of her accent transformation.

Data processing played a crucial role in organizing and preparing the speech samples for in-depth analysis. Once the speech samples were identified, I carefully transcribed them, ensuring accuracy in capturing both the phonetic and prosodic features of her speech. I also processed the data to isolate specific speech segments for detailed examination. This step involved segmenting the recordings to focus on relevant portions where the accent features in question (such as rhoticity, glottalization, vowel quality, and others) were most pronounced. Proper data processing ensured that the analysis was both systematic and focused on the most pertinent features of Adele's speech.

Transcription was a critical method for accurately capturing the speech patterns in Adele's interviews and performances. Through detailed phonetic transcription, I was able to break down her speech into its component sounds, marking the specific phonetic features that were of interest, such as vowel shifts, consonant variations, and rhythm changes. This transcription process not only provided a written record of Adele's speech but also helped in identifying patterns and inconsistencies in her accent, which were crucial for the subsequent acoustic analysis.

The core of this research was the acoustic analysis using PRAAT, a powerful tool for examining speech sounds at a detailed level. By utilizing PRAAT's capabilities, I was able to analyze various acoustic features that are central to accent variation. Specifically, I examined the realization of the glottal stop in a lot of articles on PRAAT. PRAAT's spectrograms in Fuchs' work allowed me to visually capture the characteristic interruption in the speech signal, showing the absence of voicing at specific points. Rhoticity was another key feature analyzed using PRAAT's formant analysis. By analysing the measuring of formant transitions in Restrepo-Ramos' work, I could determine whether and how the /r/ sound was pronounced or omitted, highlighting the shift from non-rhotic Estuary English to rhotic American English. In the same way th-fronting, h-dropping and intonation were observed.

Although vowel realization is not considered as significant as the other features discussed, and given the constraints of this research, it is not analyzed in this study. However, it presents an opportunity for further investigation in the future.

In summary, this chapter has outlined a multi-method approach to analyzing Adele's accent change, combining observational analysis, case study methods, data processing, transcription, and acoustic analysis. The use of PRAAT was central to this investigation, enabling precise identification of the phonetic shifts in Adele's accent, such as glottalization, rhoticity, th-fronting, h-dropping, and intonation. Each of these methods played an essential role in providing a detailed, comprehensive picture of how Adele's accent has evolved over time in response to her changing social and professional environment.

CHAPTER 3. A CASE STUDY ON ADELE'S ACCENT

This chapter of the thesis focuses on the examination of the accent shift of British singer Adele, specifically the adaptation of her accent in response to social and linguistic changes. Adele's accent change serves as an intriguing example of how public figures may be influenced by new linguistic environments, leading to notable changes in their pronunciation. Using linguistic analysis with the PRAAT software, Adele's accent shift is analyzed through spectrograms and other visual evidence obtained from PRAAT, providing clear insights into the phonetic features of her accent at different points in her career. Thus, this chapter explores how Adele's accent has evolved over time, highlighting variations in intonation and consonant pronunciation, namely features of Cockney, Estuary and California accents.

Not only does this chapter emphasize the significance of studying the accents of public figures, but it also demonstrates how linguistic changes can be documented and analyzed through tools that offer precise measurements and visual representations of speech alterations, particularly through programs like PRAAT.

3.1 Background of Adele's Public Persona and Linguistic Identity

Adele Laurie Blue Adkins, known professionally as Adele, was born on May 5, 1988, in Tottenham, London, England. Growing up in the working-class neighborhood of Tottenham in North London, Adele was immersed in a community where Cockney and Estuary English were predominant. These accents, associated with the working class of Southeast England, greatly influenced her early speech patterns.

Adele was raised primarily by her mother, Penny Adkins, who was a single parent. The family lived in a council house, and Adele's upbringing was closely tied to the local community, where regional accents like Cockney and Estuary were common. It should be noted that the lower social class generally exhibits a more strongly marked variety of English, that is, Adele's early speech would naturally have been influenced by these dialects, as the area where she lived, along with her social environment, played a significant role in shaping her linguistic identity.

At the age of 18, Adele enrolled at the Brit School for Performing Arts and Technology in Croydon, a place known for its diverse student body and wide range of linguistic influences. Immersed in this environment, Adele was exposed to different varieties of English beyond her native London speech. This early encounter with linguistic diversity, combined with her passion for music and increased media consumption, gradually began shaping her public persona — and subtly influencing her accent.

Adele's breakthrough came in 2008 with the release of her debut album, *19*. At that point, her accent still carried strong markers of her London background, particularly Cockney and Estuary English traits. Yet as her career took off internationally and her presence in the United States grew, the influence of a global audience became more apparent. It was most probably the exposure to American media, international interviews, and time spent abroad which began to soften some of her original features, setting the stage for the gradual accent shift documented in later stages of her career.

In 2012, Adele moved to Los Angeles to focus on her career and personal life, however, she moved back and forth during the next four years. This shift marked a significant turning point in the evolution of her accent. Living in an area where the California accent predominates, combined with her frequent interaction with American media, led to subtle but noticeable changes in her speech patterns. Adele's accent change has been widely noted in the media, with observers pointing to a softening of her Cockney and Estuary features toward a more Standard American English sound. While retaining elements of her roots, she adapted her speech to fit her evolving social and professional environment, reflecting her growth as a global artist.

In such a way, observations in media and public discussions have suggested that Adele's accent has shifted over time, especially following her increased exposure to American culture and her relocation to the United States. It has been noted that while she retains some features of her original Cockney and Estuary English background — particularly in her vowel pronunciation — she appears to have

incorporated elements more typical of Standard American English, such as greater rhoticity and a reduction in features like h-dropping and th-fronting.

Given that Adele has lived more permanently in the United States since 2016, eventually settling in Beverly Hills, California in 2022, this perceived shift in her accent could be influenced by her new linguistic environment. Based on these public perceptions, this study formulates a hypothesis that Adele's accent has undergone measurable phonetic changes over time. Using acoustic and phonetic analysis methods, this hypothesis will be tested and verified, contributing to the broader understanding of accent adaptation in the context of perceptual dialectology.

All in all, the change in Adele's accent is a natural result of social mobility as well as her geographical relocation, which is influenced by factors such as location, profession, and social network. As Adele's career flourished and her audience expanded beyond the UK, her accent adapted to better fit the demands of international communication and media. However, her speech remains a distinctive representation of her personal and professional path, as her accent is still a complicated fusion of influences from her working-class London upbringing and her more recent exposure to America.

3.2 Southern British Variables in Adele's accent

To begin with, during the research period, I analyzed a total of four interviews, focusing on the shift in accent, specifically from Cockney and somewhere Estuary English to a more Americanized variant later. The interviews spanned across 2011 to 2024, with each lasting approximately five-six minutes with Cockney and Estuary accent, while those of more adapted stage could last up to forty minutes. The data collection included a mix of public appearances and television interviews. After thoroughly reviewing the data multiple times, I employed the direct observation method to carefully select a set of variables. Subsequently, within this set, I utilized random sampling to extract 20 tokens for each variable, ensuring a representative and unbiased selection for further analysis. This approach allowed for a systematic exploration of the variability within the data, providing a solid foundation for the

subsequent examination and comparison of the phonetic features under investigation. This analysis was conducted using PRAAT to ensure precision in identifying specific phonetic features.

In terms of Cockney features, the variation was particularly noticeable in the earlier interviews, where the accent was more pronounced. For instance, the BBC interview, which was recorded in 2011, demonstrated a clearer Cockney influence, with prominent vowel shifts and glottal stops. On the other hand, interviews from the same year and beyond also could reveal a less pronounced Cockney influence, indicating a slight switch towards Estuary English. This switch was less evident in some instances, particularly when Adele spoke in more relaxed or informal settings, where traces of her original accent could still be detected. Through careful observation, it became clear that the intensity of the Cockney accent fluctuates depending on both the social context and the duration of her exposure to different linguistic environments.

3.2.1 Glottalization Patterns in Adele's Early Cockney-Estuary Accent

In this analysis, a total of two six-minute long audio clips were examined, with a particular focus on identifying glottal stops, since one of the clearest and most salient features of Adele's accent during her early stage period was the heavy use of them. In such a way, 24 glottal stops' instances were identified, and instead of pronouncing the /t/ sound in the middle or at the end of words, she frequently replaced it with a glottal stop [ʔ]. For example, words like “butter” or “bottle” would come out sounding like [ˈbʌʔə] and [ˈbɒʔl], respectively—distinct from the crisp /t/ used in Received Pronunciation (RP) or Standard American English.

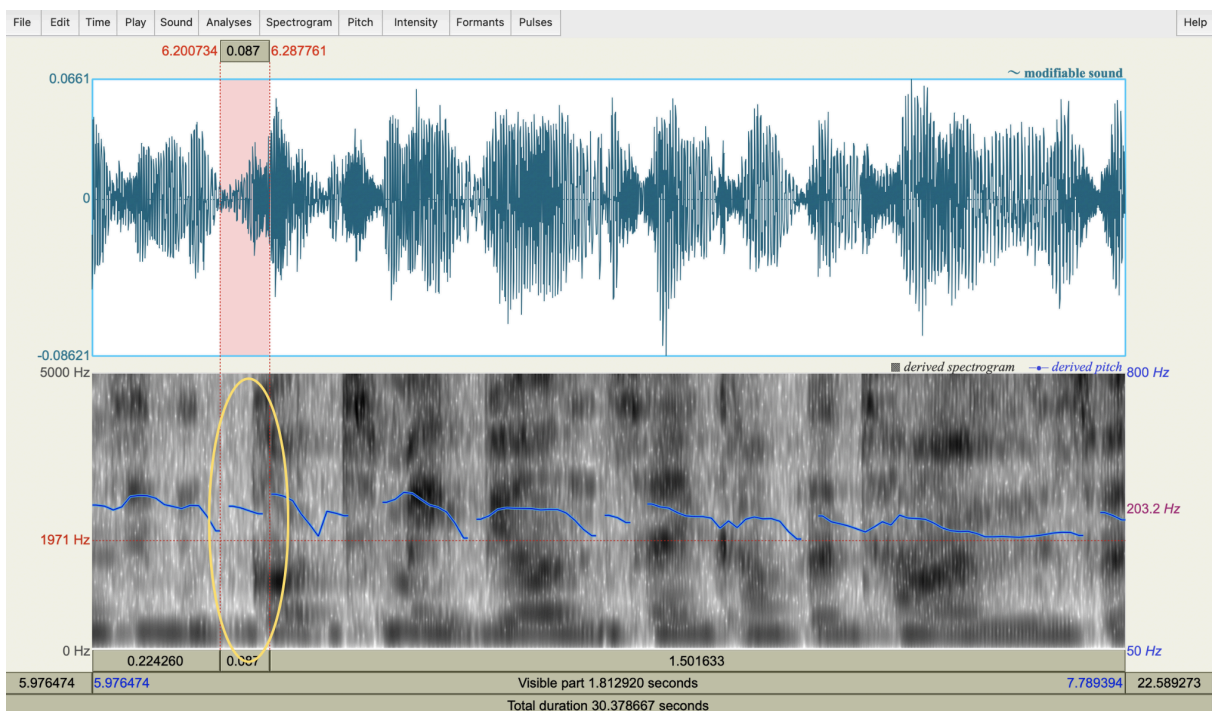
After careful observation and analysis, it was found that seventeen instances of potential glottal stops were identified based on spectrographic features. Upon further verification using PRAAT, sixteen of these observed glottal stops were confirmed with acoustic evidence. The spectrograms clearly show the characteristic features of glottal stops, such as the disappearance of the blue voicing line during the intervals,

the absence of harmonics, and the reappearance of harmonics after each gap, confirming the presence of glottal stops.

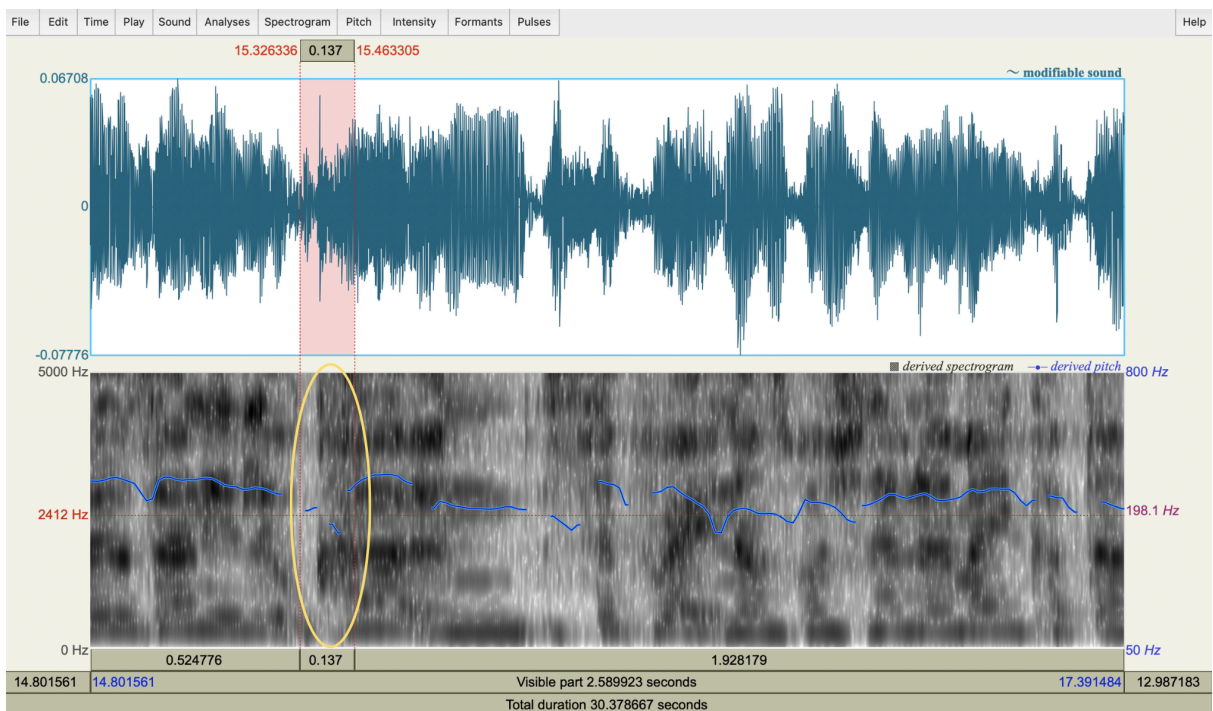
According to the methods outlined in the previous section, a glottal stop can be identified in the following way, a glottal stop may be identified on PRAAT through several visual cues. Firstly, it often appears as a sudden drop or complete gap in the pitch track, indicating a momentary closure of the vocal folds. Secondly, the waveform displays a brief pause or silence, reflecting the interruption of airflow during articulation. Finally, on the spectrogram, the glottal stop is typically marked by a white gap or disruption in the frequency bands, where no formant structure is visible for a short duration. These combined acoustic signals allow for precise detection and analysis of glottal stops in connected speech.

The spectrograms presented below allow for a detailed examination of the glottal stop. Two specific instances are highlighted where, through careful observation, the glottal stop has been identified. To verify this, the corresponding audio files containing the glottal stop were analyzed, and the stops are marked in yellow on the spectrograms.

The spectrographic analysis reveals key features associated with the glottal stop. The thin blue line, which represents voicing, completely disappears during specific intervals, indicating a cessation of voicing. In these segments, the spectrogram displays solid dark gray or black areas, devoid of vertical striations (harmonics) or formant bands. Furthermore, there is an absence of the expected high-frequency energy spike following the silent gap, which would typically be seen with an alveolar [t] release. After the silent intervals, the harmonics (vertical striations) reemerge immediately, signaling the resumption of voicing without any intervening noise. These spectral patterns collectively support the identification of a glottal stop.



Picture 6. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "I did got to meet Beyonce a couple of times" [80, 1.42]



Picture 7. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "Only little curtain separating us" [80, 1.50]

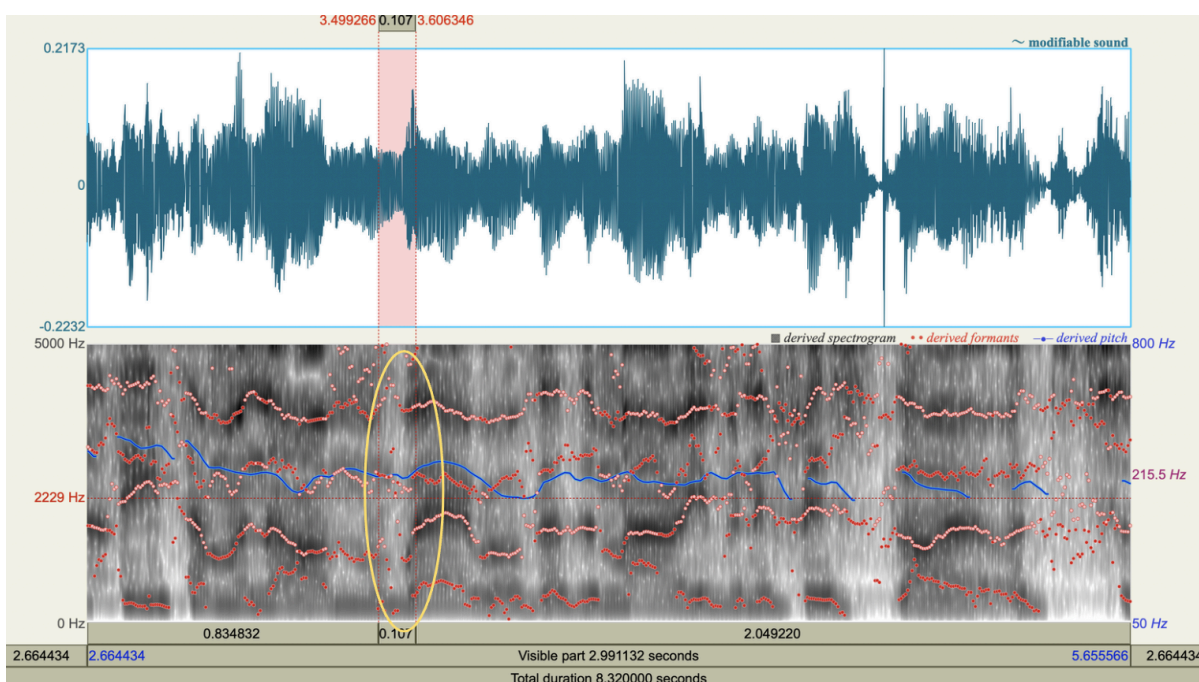
3.2.2 Non-Rhotic Features in Adele's Early Speech

Her speech was also non-rhotic, which means she didn't pronounce the /r/ at the end of words unless the next word started with a vowel. Words like *car*, *far*, or

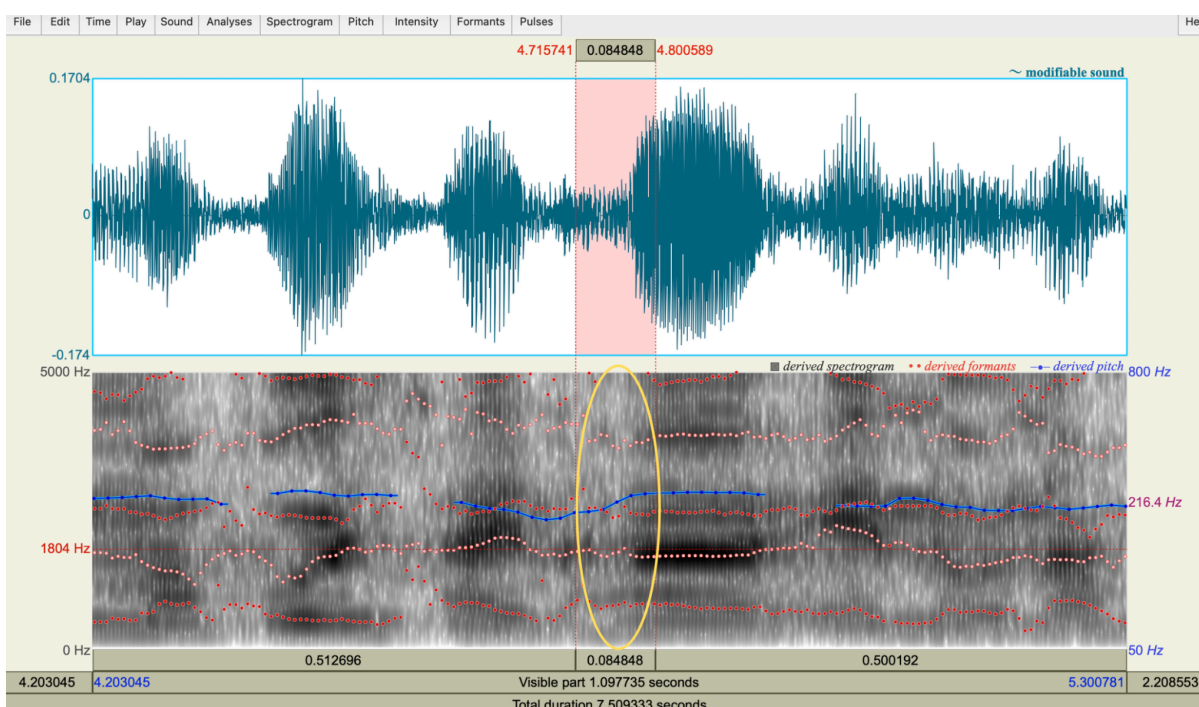
hard were pronounced more like [ka:], [fa:], and [ha:d], typical of London-based accents. This is very different from how Americans would say them, always including the /r/.

As I discovered, in PRAAT, non-rhoticity is observed through the absence of the typical acoustic features associated with the post-vocalic /r/ sound in 23 instances. Most notably, there is no significant lowering of the third formant (F3), which is a hallmark of rhotic articulation. Instead, the F3 line remains relatively stable and flat, especially following vowels like /ɑ:/ or /ɔ:/ in words such as *matter* or *hurting*. Additionally, the vowel duration may appear slightly extended, compensating for the missing /r/ sound. The waveform will show a smooth continuation without the articulatory shift typically caused by rhotic elements, resulting in a cleaner, uninterrupted vowel segment in both the waveform and spectrogram.

In accord with the pictures below, it might be noticed from the highlighted segment in yellow the red line remains parallel to F2 for a certain segment, which suggests that there is no significant drop in frequency, as would be expected during the articulation of a sound like [r], which typically causes a noticeable fall in the second formant. The absence of such a drop indicates that the articulation of the sound in question maintains a more stable tongue position, possibly related to a different speech sound or a different manner of articulation.



Picture 8. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "I'm aware of.. doesn't matter .. if" [80, 2.20-2.25]



Picture 9. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "... and my voice ain't hurting" [80, 2.20-2.25]

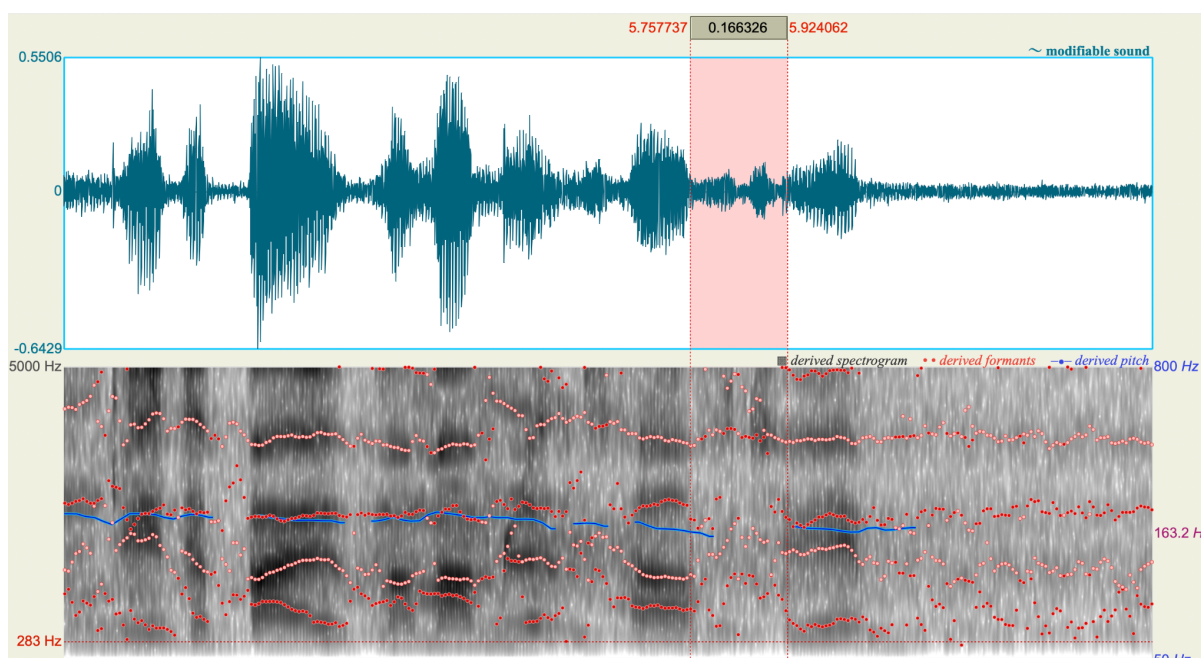
3.2.3 Frequent H-dropping in Early Speech Samples

H-dropping is another noticeable habit in Adele's early accent, which is dropping the /h/ sound at the beginning of words—a trait strongly tied to Cockney and somewhat to Estuary English, and I observed it 17 times. This meant that words like *horn* or *help* might be heard as [ɔ:n] or [ɛlp], giving her speech an even more relaxed, informal feel. Adele truly had h-dropping, especially when it came to auxiliary verbs or pronouns, but from time to time she pronounced it as in RP.

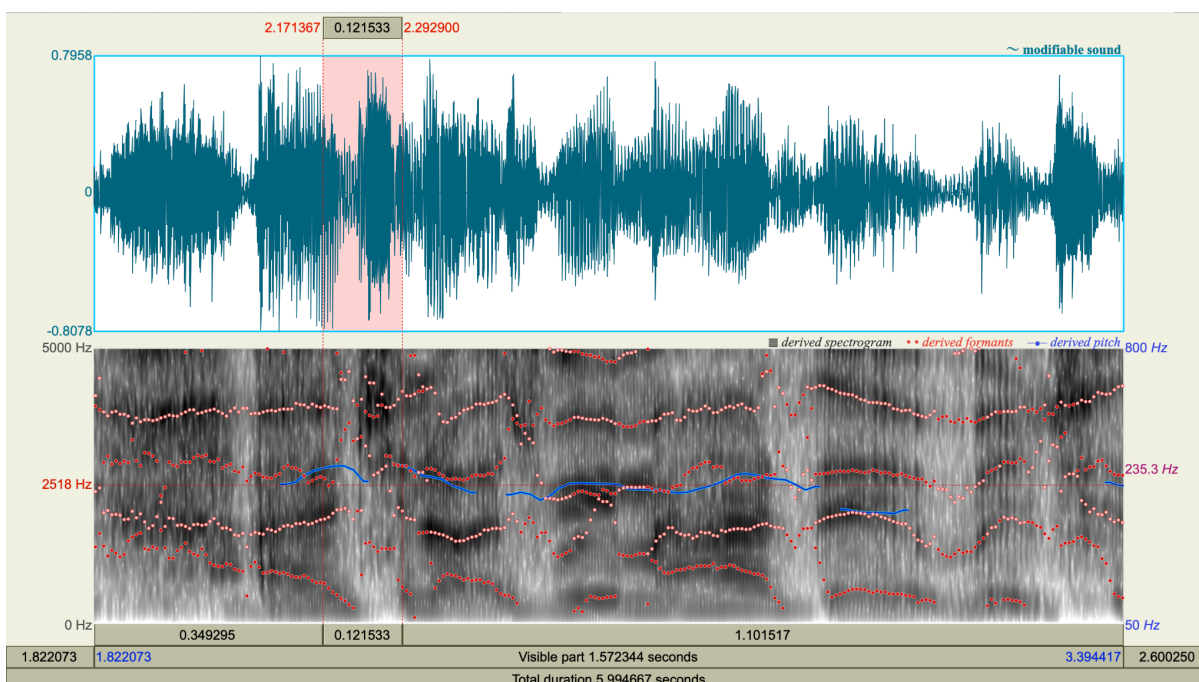
In the spectrogram, /h/-dropping is observed through the absence of acoustic energy typically associated with the /h/ sound at the beginning of a word. When /h/ is pronounced, it appears as a light, aperiodic noise—a kind of breathy turbulence—spread across the higher frequency bands (usually from about 2000 Hz to 6000 Hz). Typically, the formant structure appears chaotic with a blurry cloud of frequencies, but in this case, look at the picture below, three distinct, though somewhat less intense, formants are clearly present. These formants exhibit a darker coloration, especially when compared to the following segments. The tracks of

formants are more sparse due to the influence of the nasal [m], which causes a dispersion in the formant patterns. This noisy segment is short and occurs right before the onset of the vowel in /h/-initial words like *him* or *heard*. When /h/ is dropped, this high-frequency noise is missing, and the vowel begins abruptly. The spectrogram shows a clear onset of vowel formants (horizontal stripes) without any preceding fuzzy, noisy segment. In other words, there's a direct transition into the vowel, and the waveform also lacks the small burst of low-energy fluctuation that would mark an /h/ sound.

What is special about pictures given beneath, as is highlighted in red color, is the disappearance of the blue line—representing pitch—is one of the indicators that the /h/ sound is not being pronounced. This suggests a lack of voicing associated with the /h/ fricative, further supporting the observation of h-dropping.



Picture 10. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "... didn't do the boat. My mom looks after *him*" [79, 2011, 2.20-2.25]

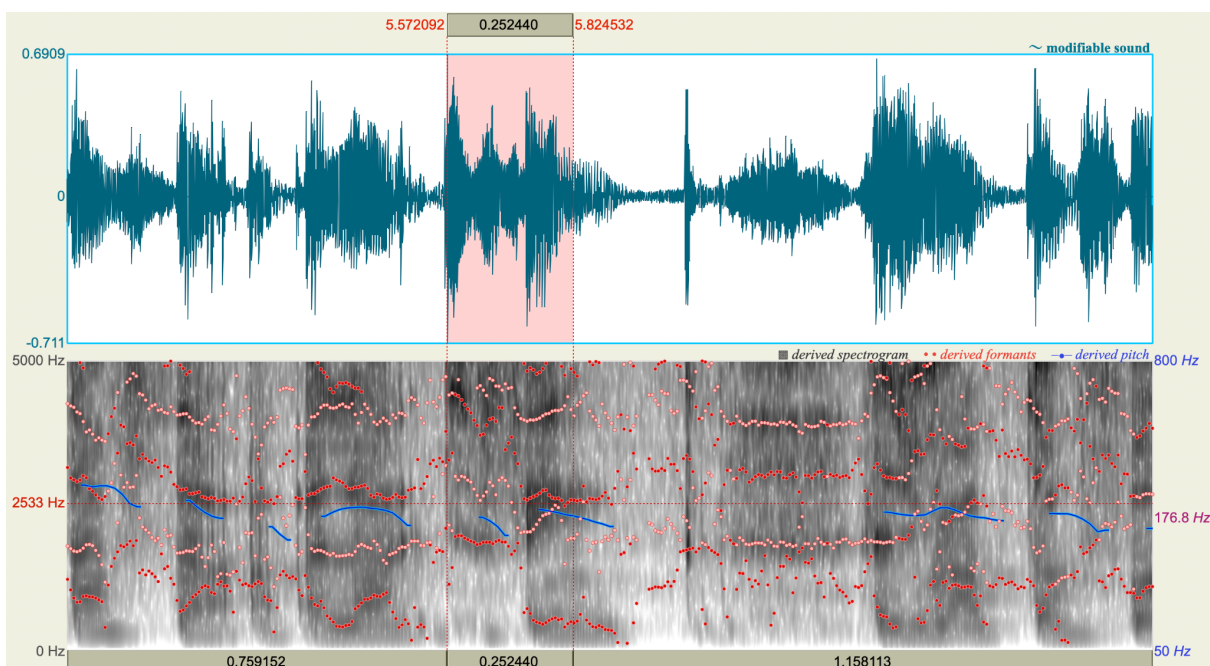


Picture 11. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "I **h**ear**d** you like the rumour has it" [79, 2.20-2.25]

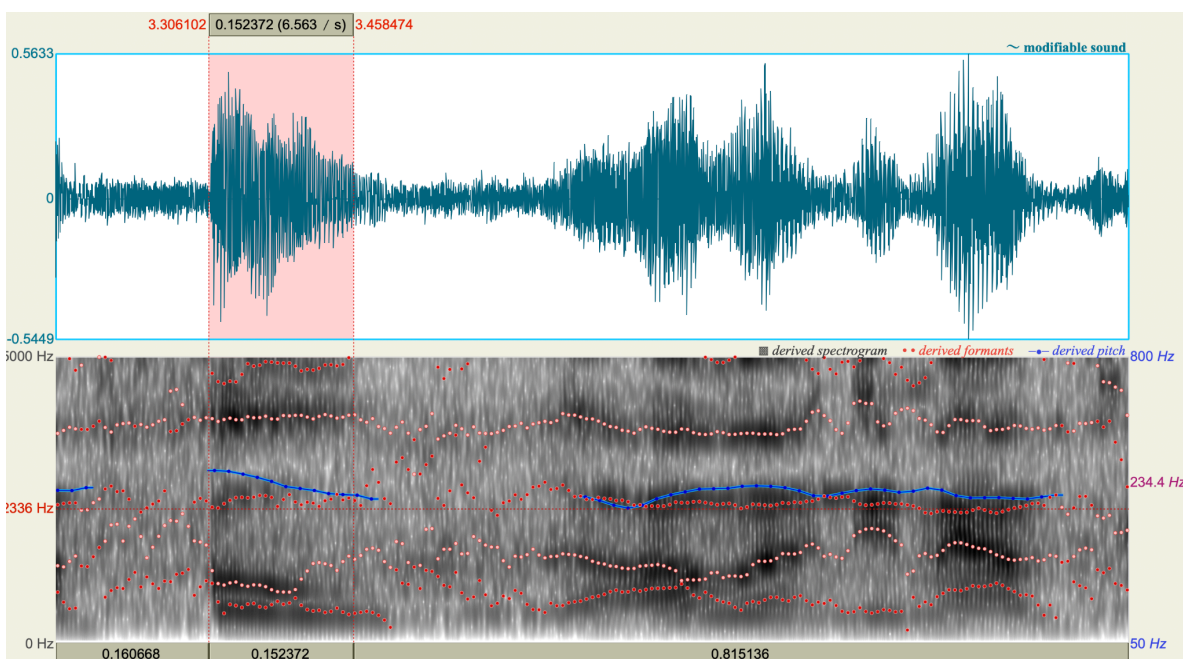
3.2.4 Prevalence of TH-fronting in Adele's Cockney/Estuary Stage

She also used what's known as th-fronting, where the "th" sounds /θ/ and /ð/ (as in *think* or *brother*) are replaced with /f/ and /v/, and I observed it in 14 tokens. So, you'd hear something like *fink* instead of *think*, and *monf* instead of *month*. This is a well-known feature of Cockney and a defining part of her early sound.

On a spectrogram, this would be evident as the frequency burst for /θ/ and /ð/ is replaced by a lower-frequency burst typical of /f/ and /v/. The /f/ sound (in "think") and /v/ sound (in "brother") will appear with a peak around 2-4 kHz, whereas the /θ/ and /ð/ sounds typically have a higher frequency burst around 4-6 kHz. In PRAAT, the shift would show a less sharp, smoother transition in the spectrogram, indicating the less intense, lower-frequency nature of the labiodental fricatives.



Picture 12. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "... I like to *think* has rubbed off on me" [80, 4.40-4.44]



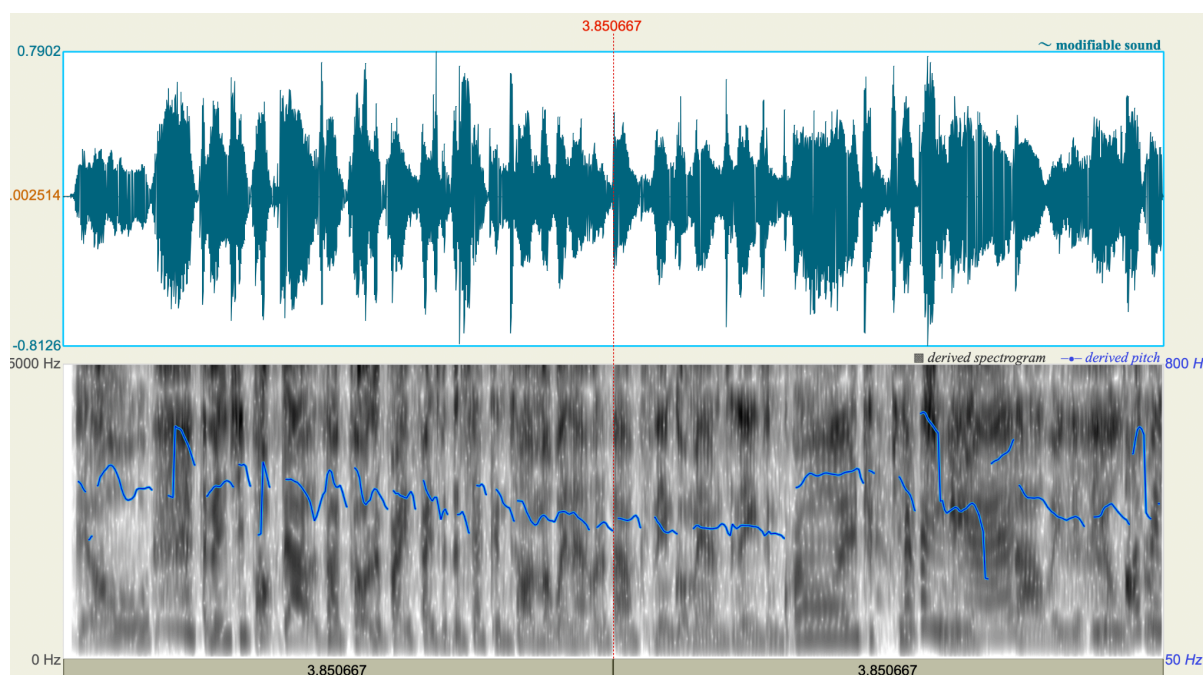
Picture 13. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "... I *thought* I wasn't going to be able..." [80, 0.42-0.46]

3.2.5 Cockney-Estuary Intonation Patterns: Pitch and Rhythm

Adele's intonation and rhythm fit right in with the patterns common to Cockney and Estuary English. She often used a wide pitch range and a kind of sing-song melody when speaking, with quick syllables and the occasional glottal

interruption. This made her sound energetic, down-to-earth, and relatable—something that endeared her to many fans early on.

The spectrogram below showcases the distinctive features of her speech. Her wide pitch range, sing-song melody, and quick syllables, all hallmarks of Cockney and Estuary English, are unmistakably reflected in the spectrogram. The pitch fluctuations are visible through the vertical striations, demonstrating the energetic and dynamic tone she employs. Additionally, glottal interruptions, characteristic of her accent, are clearly visible in the waveform, where gaps appear, confirming the presence of glottal stops. These acoustic markers perfectly correspond to the description of her intonation and rhythm, providing concrete evidence of her accent's alignment with Cockney and Estuary English influences.



Picture 14. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "...and then she popped out so i put on a brave face but the second time i went out on a balcony and got on my hands and knees and cried she was bowing at the altar..." [80, 1.58-2.04]

All of these phonetic and prosodic features combined to form an accent that was deeply embedded in Adele's East London working-class background and local community. Prior to the influence of international fame and constant media presence, her speech strongly reflected her social identity, projecting authenticity, and a distinct sense of regional belonging that resonated with audiences.

3.3 California American English variables in Adele's speech

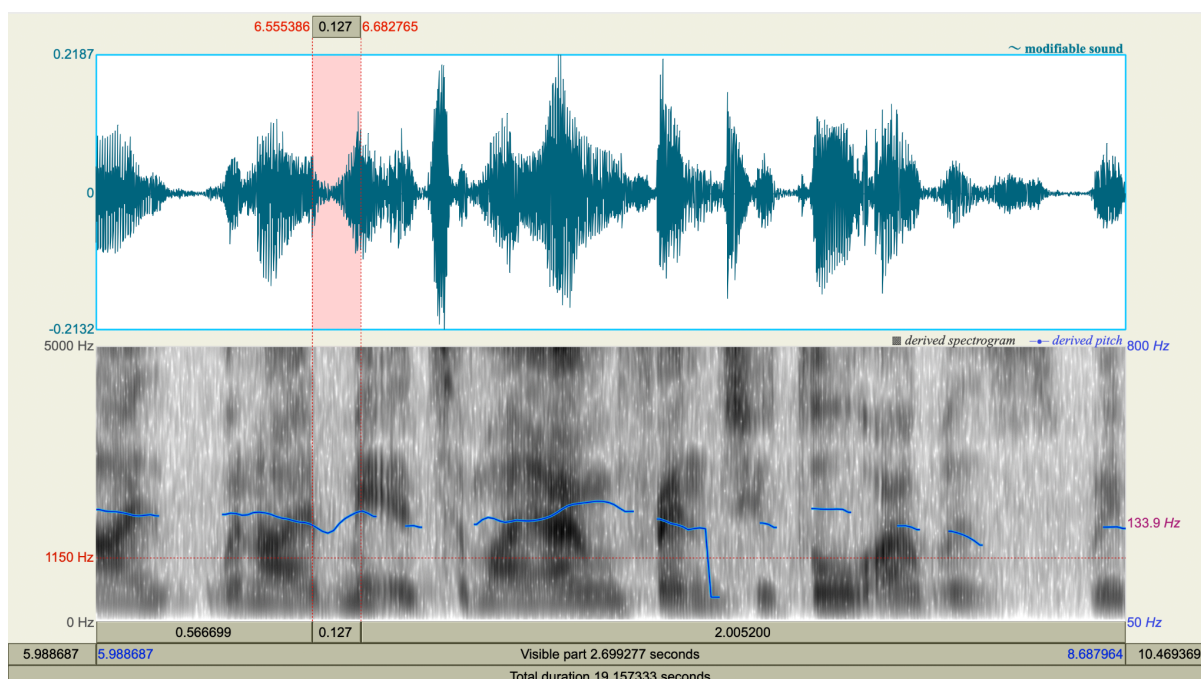
After moving to Los Angeles, Adele's accent underwent noticeable changes, reflecting a shift from her native Cockney- and Estuary-influenced London English to a more General American or transatlantic style. While she retains key elements of her British identity, her speech has become more neutralized, possibly influenced by prolonged exposure to American media, social circles, and the need for broader audience accessibility. Below is a breakdown of the main phonetic changes in her speech.

3.3.1 Attenuation of Glottalization in Later Recordings

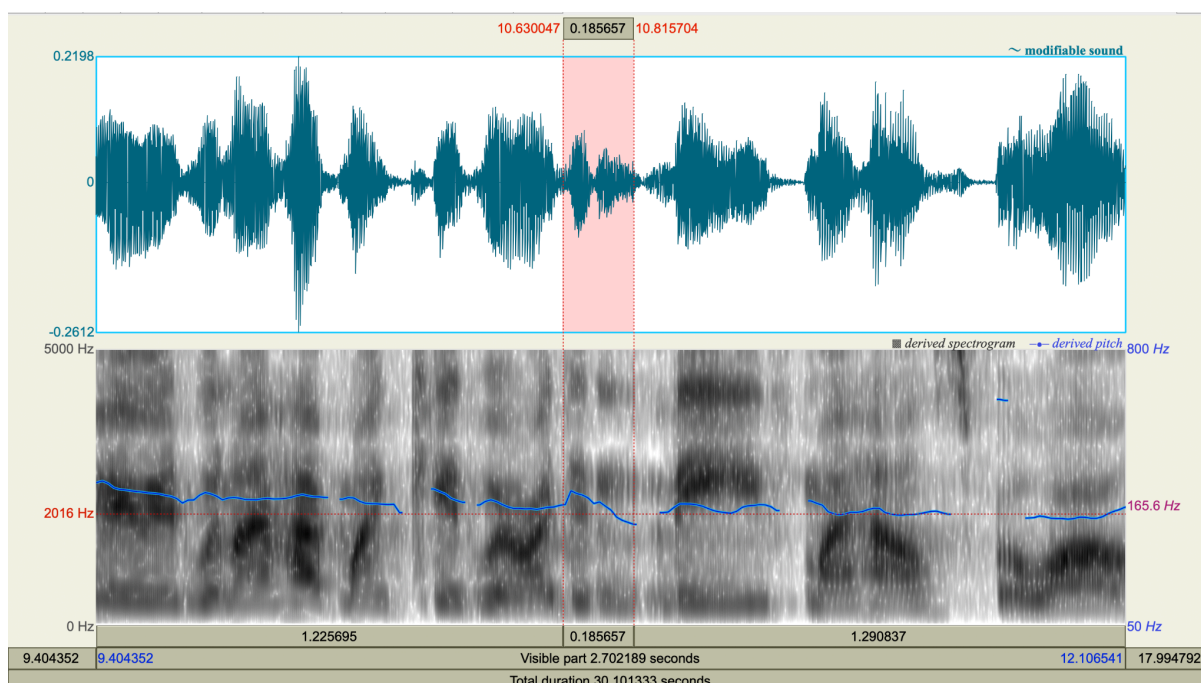
One of the most significant shifts is observable in her treatment of the glottal stop. That's why, a structured auditory and acoustic inspection was conducted to explore Adele's use of glottal replacement for /t/, particularly in medial and final positions. Across a set of selected interviews, such as the *The Ellen Show* and *One Night with Adele*, instances where glottal stops might typically occur were instead frequently realized as alveolar plosives. To quantify this observation, 20 tokens where /t/ was expected (e.g., *better*, *what*, *but*) were randomly selected and analyzed in PRAAT. In only 3 of the 20 analyzed cases, a glottal closure was identified, characterized by a brief loss of periodicity and voicing on the waveform and spectrogram—indicating a significant reduction in glottal usage.

Thus, while glottalization is still occasionally present, particularly in informal or emotionally expressive speech, it appears to be less frequent and less pronounced than in her earlier recordings. In more formal contexts, Adele now often articulates the /t/ more fully in medial positions, producing forms closer to ['bʌtəɪ] or ['bɑ:tɪ], especially when addressing an American audience. This suggests a conscious or unconscious modulation in line with American English norms, where glottal stops are less commonly used in such environments. Comparing to the pictures in the previous section about glottal stop in early stages, the images below do not demonstrate the pitch drop which means that glottal stop is not presented in the phrase. However, it is

present in seven cases out of eleven, that is, Adele hasn't lost this feature fully, but just adapted it to the environment, which supports the hypothesis stated at the beginning of this chapter.



Picture 15. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "It was when I... when I admitted to my own friends to ..." [82, 22.40-23.05]



Picture 16. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "...was a period when I *didn't* leave my house for a while.." [82, 3.50-3.55]

All in all, the analysis revealed a noticeable reduction in the use of glottal stops in Adele's more recent speech, contributing to a softer accent overall. Her speech now exhibits a smoother flow, with more stable pitch contours and clearer formant structures, indicating increased articulatory control. Pitch transitions are more fluid, with fewer abrupt drops and reduced breathiness, which suggests the adoption of a more relaxed and refined vocal technique. Additionally, the glottal stops that do occur tend to be shorter and less prominent, supporting a more consistent rhythmic pattern. This, in turn, results in a more fluid and steady speech rate, as observed in spectrograms that display fewer interruptions and a smoother acoustic profile.

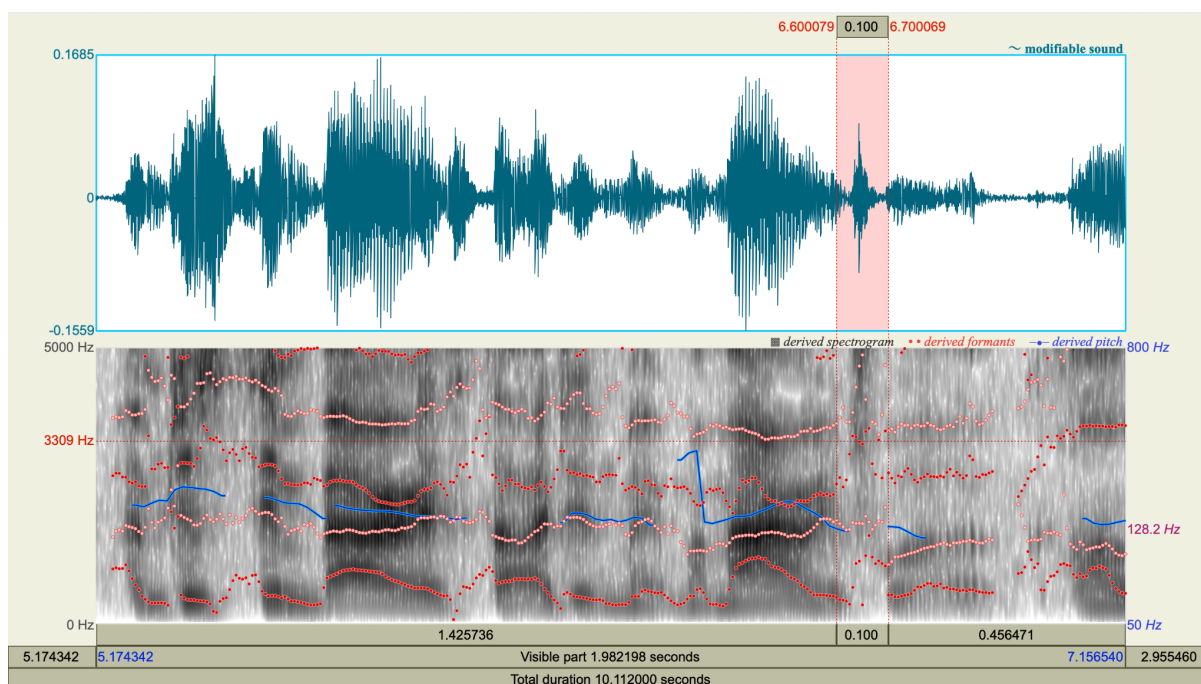
3.3.2 Emergence of Rhoticity in Later American-Influenced Speech

Adele's pronunciation was further scrutinized for patterns of post-vocalic /r/ presence (rhoticity) versus absence (non-rhoticity). In recordings such as *Ellen Show* (2024), instances of rhotic pronunciations were observed. To systematize this, a corpus of 22 utterances containing post-vocalic /r/ (e.g., *car*, *more*, *heard*) was compiled and examined in PRAAT. Out of these, 16 tokens showed an acoustic trace of rhoticity—characterized by lowered third formant (F3)—while 6 tokens displayed no such resonance pattern, indicating non-rhotic realization.

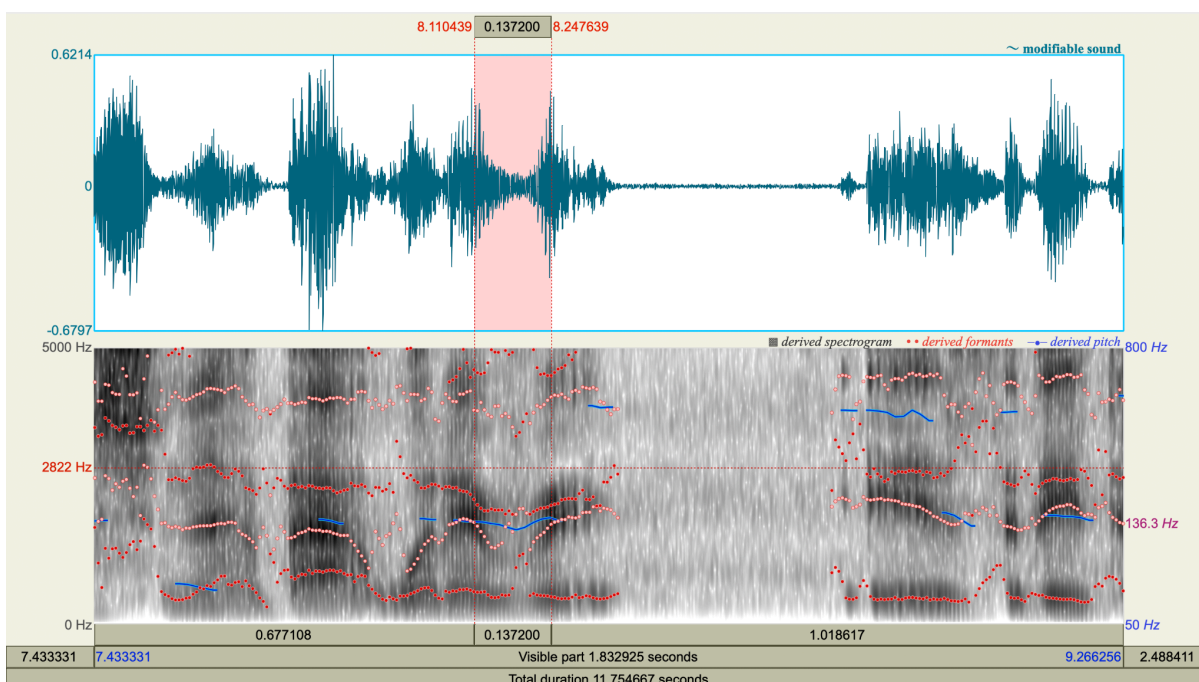
Thus, it might be noted that Adele's use of rhoticity has evolved. Whereas her earlier speech consistently exhibited non-rhoticity, her more recent pronunciation shows occasional rhotic realizations in post-vocalic environments. Words like *car*, *hard*, or *mother* are now sometimes produced with an audible /r/—[kɑɹ], [hɑɹd], ['mʌðə]—particularly in transatlantic interviews or televised appearances. This shift does not signal a complete adoption of rhoticity, but rather a flexible adaptation influenced by her linguistic surroundings and the demands of global intelligibility.

In PRAAT, I analysed rhoticity by analyzing the formants, particularly the third formant (F3), which plays a crucial role in distinguishing rhotic sounds from non-rhotic ones. In rhotic accents, such as General American English, the /r/ sound causes a noticeable lowering of the F3, especially after a vowel. This drop in F3 is a defining characteristic of rhoticity, and it is often observed as a distinct curve or dip

in the spectrogram. For example, when pronouncing words like *work*, *more*, or *start*, you will see that the F3 dips down sharply following the vowel, creating a darker, lower region on the spectrogram. This is because the tongue is positioned in a retroflex or bunched configuration in the mouth, which influences the acoustic properties of the sound. In addition to the formant movement, the waveform often shows slight disruption or complexity at the point of articulation of the /r/ sound, reflecting the specific articulatory gestures involved in producing rhotic sounds. Furthermore, the smoothness of the pitch and formant transitions in the spectrogram can indicate how clearly the rhotic sound is produced. In comparison to non-rhotic varieties, rhotic speech often has a more pronounced and marked acoustic signature due to these specific formant and waveform features. In such a way, in the given images below, rhoticity is evident from the noticeable lowering and dipping of the third formant (F3), which approaches the second formant (F2) during the articulation of the [r] sound.



Picture 17. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "I'm embarrassed because I didn't make my marriage *work*... you know" [83, 23.18-23.25]



Picture 18. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "... as long as he's passionate about whatever it is ..." [83, 44.58-45.04]

Additionally, there was a reduction in the glottalization of the /r/ sound, suggesting a move toward a more standard American English pronunciation. In such a way, the changes in Adele's rhoticity, as seen in PRAAT's spectrographic and formant analysis, highlight a subtle but significant transition from a non-rhotic to a more rhotic pattern, reflecting her adaptation to American English norms while maintaining elements of her original accent.

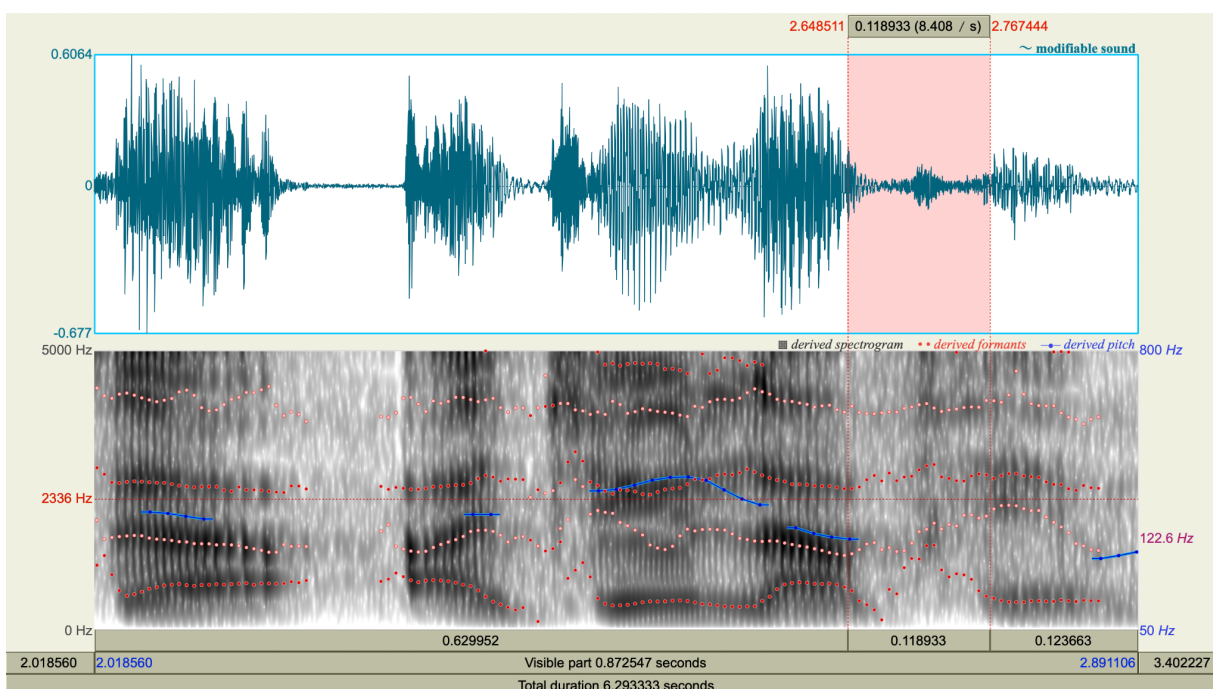
3.3.3. Stabilization of Initial [h] Sounds in Later Recordings

A direct observation of Adele's speech in various interviews provided initial insights into the occurrence of /h/-dropping in her pronunciation. The recordings analyzed included the *Ellen Show* [82] and *One Night with Adele* [83]. A rough observational count across these materials suggested a variable pattern of /h/ realization, with a noticeable presence pronounced /h/ at word-initial position.

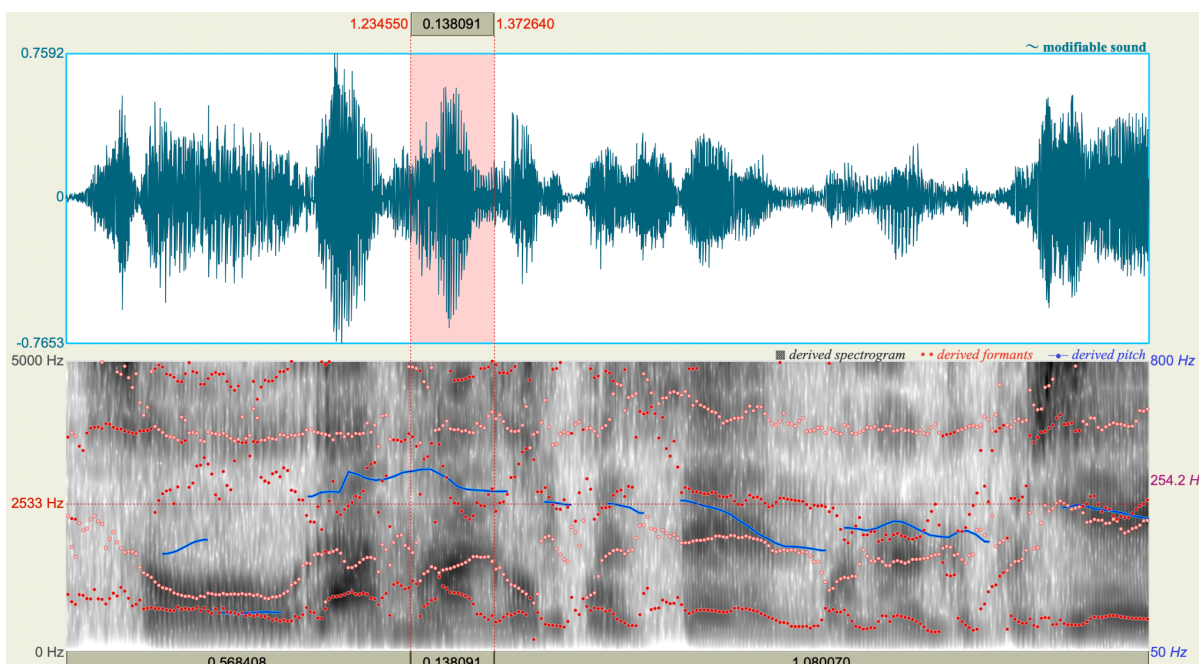
To quantify this pattern, a random sample of 21 tokens containing word-initial /h/ was extracted and analyzed using PRAAT software [78]. Among these, 17 instances showed a clear acoustic presence of /h/, while 4 tokens exhibited no visible fricative energy on the spectrogram, indicating /h/-dropping.

In other words, the feature of /h/-dropping has diminished noticeably in Adele’s speech since her move to California. The singer now generally retains the initial /h/ in words such as *have*, *help*, and *him*, aligning more closely with standard British and American pronunciation. This reduction in /h/-dropping enhances the clarity of her speech and may reflect both increased linguistic self-awareness and the influence of a broader, more international environment.

In a spectrogram, the /h/ sound appears as aperiodic noise, typically concentrated in the higher frequencies, usually between 2000 Hz and 8000 Hz, depending on the strength of the articulation. This noise is often faint and manifests as a soft, breathy energy just before the onset of the vowel sound. Unlike voiced sounds, /h/ does not produce clear formants; instead, the spectrogram will show a lack of regular, vertical lines that represent formant frequencies. This lack of clear formants and the presence of high-frequency, non-periodic noise are key indicators of the /h/ sound in a spectrogram. Thus, in the given image, the presence of [h] is indicated by a burst of aperiodic high-frequency energy without clear formant structure, visible as a diffuse, noisy area on the spectrogram.



Picture 19. The spectrogram of Adele’s quote “I do love *him*” [83, 24.38-24.43]



Picture 20. The spectrogram of Adele's quote "... one *h*undred percent... yeah..." [83, 24.38-24.43]

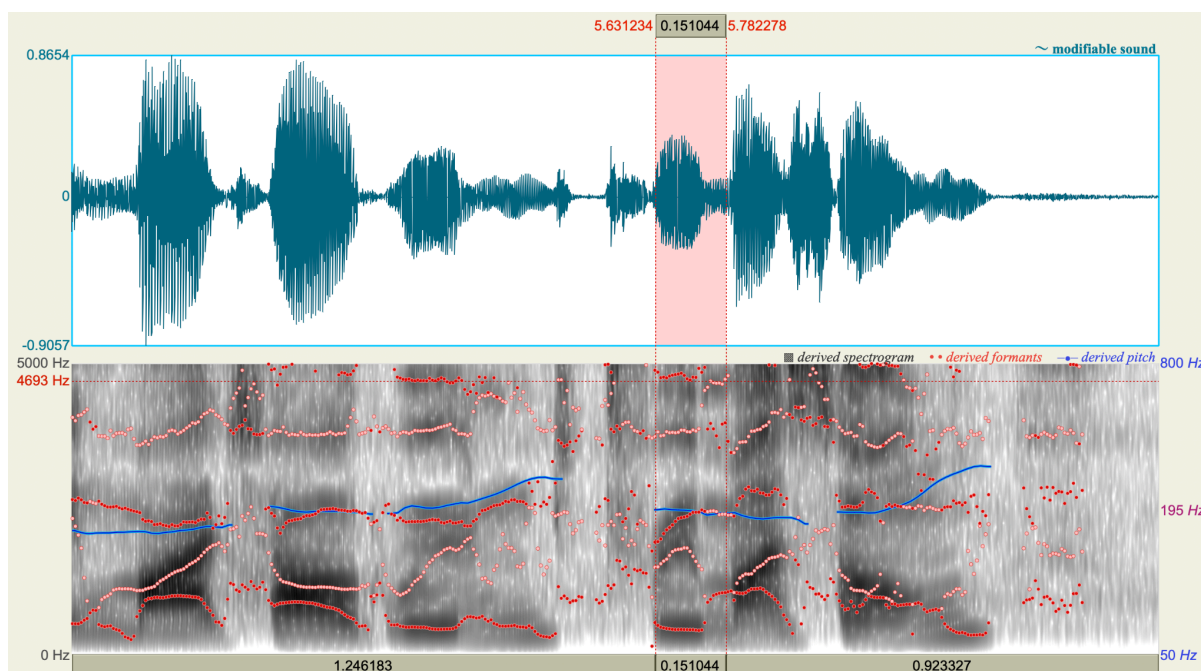
3.3.4 Reduction of TH-fronting in American-Influenced Speech

To investigate the avoiding of th-fronting – the substitution of /θ/ and /ð/ with /f/ and /v/ respectively – a subset of lexical items (e.g., *think*, *thoughts*) was analyzed across spontaneous speech samples. Using a corpus of roughly 19 tokens drawn from public interviews, phonetic analysis via PRAAT revealed that in 17 instances, the labiodental fricatives were fronted to their interdental counterparts.

In such a way, it was observed that th-fronting appears to be less prevalent in Adele's current accent. While occasional substitutions of [θ] with [f] and [ð] with [v] may still occur, especially in relaxed settings or interviews where she adopts a more casual tone, these realizations are significantly less frequent than they once were. Words like *think* and *thought* are now more likely to be pronounced as [θɪŋk] and ['brʌðə], reflecting a subtle shift toward articulatory norms that are more widely accepted across English-speaking contexts

Thus, after Adele's accent evolved, there was a noticeable reduction in th-fronting, and the /θ/ and /ð/ sounds returned to their typical dental articulation. In PRAAT, this shift would show up as a higher frequency burst around 4-6 kHz for /θ/

and /ð/ in words like “think” and “through.” The spectrogram would display a clearer, more intense burst at these higher frequencies, reflecting the dental quality of the fricatives. The sound would be crisper and more defined compared to the smoother, less intense bursts seen during the th-fronting period. So, in the picture beneath, the presence of the [θ] sound (without th-fronting) is seen as a weaker, less intense fricative noise concentrated in the higher frequencies, without the stronger, sharper energy characteristic of [f].

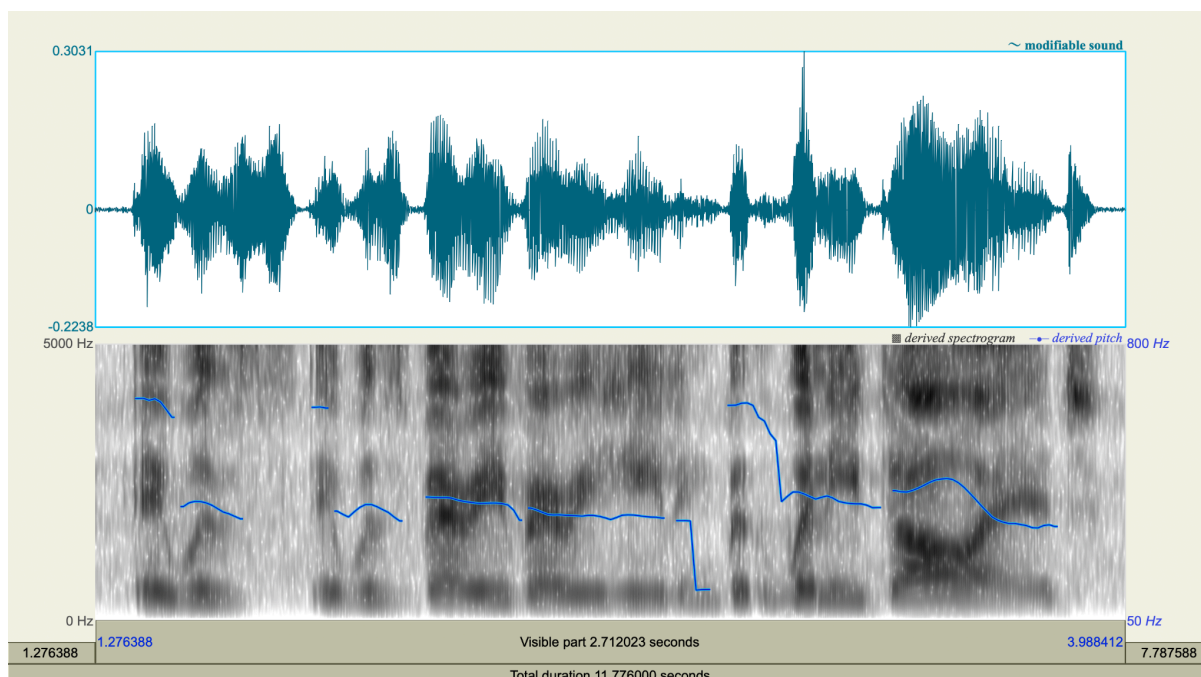


Picture 21. The spectrogram of Adele’s quote “... understanding my child wound *through* my song...” [83, 1.07.01-1.09.43]

3.3.5 Prosodic Changes: Toward American Intonation Contours

Intonationally, Adele’s speech retains much of its natural expressiveness and melodic quality, but with slightly tempered pitch variation. While the sing-song intonation of Cockney and Estuary English is still detectable in her vocal delivery and public persona, her current prosody tends to be more controlled, with smoother pitch transitions and a slower rhythm in certain contexts. This may reflect both conscious efforts to increase clarity and unconscious adjustments shaped by prolonged exposure to American media and social interaction in an LA-based environment.

In the provided image, Adele’s newer American intonation is visible through a smoother, narrower pitch range with more leveled, less steep rises and falls, creating a more even and steady melodic contour compared to her earlier lively and wide Cockney-Estuary pitch patterns.



Picture 22. The spectrogram and waveform of Adele’s quote “... me for doing it so... it was it was very very healing... but when he died...” [83, 2023, 1.07.01-1.09.43]

However, it should be noted that although uptalk is a notable feature in Southern Californian English, used by both men and women, often to hold the conversational floor or signal engagement, there is no direct evidence confirming that Adele has adopted California ‘uptalk’ because it is still different from the native Californian speakers [84] — a rising intonation at the end of declarative sentences—her extended residence in Los Angeles and exposure to Californian English could have influenced her speech patterns. To be more precise, Adele’s current intonation pattern largely aligns with what is considered a standard British falling intonation in declarative sentences. When she makes definite statements or expresses certainty, her intonation typically falls at the end of the sentence, which reflects confidence and completeness. This falling contour is characteristic of many southern British English varieties and contrasts with uptalk or rising intonation.

Overall, the phonetic evolution of Adele’s accent illustrates the dynamic nature of speech as it interacts with shifting social, geographical, and professional realities. Her accent has not been completely neutralized or Americanized, but it has become more adaptable—capable of navigating both her British identity and her place within a global stage. These modifications offer a fascinating case study in sociophonetic fluidity, where identity, audience, and environment coalesce to subtly reshape linguistic expression over time.

Conclusions 3

Based on the analysis conducted in this research, Adele’s accent shift following her prolonged stay in Los Angeles offers a clear example of phonetic accommodation and sociolinguistic adaptation. The study conducted through PRAAT analysis focused on specific features—such as glottalization, rhoticity, vowel quality, th-fronting, h-dropping, and intonation—during her pre-shift (Cockney/Estuary) and post-shift (American-influenced) stages. The findings reveal a consistent pattern of phonetic change that aligns with her immersion in an American English-speaking environment, supporting the idea that speech is a dynamic marker of identity influenced by social and geographical context.

One of the most prominent shifts observed was in rhoticity. Spectrogram data confirmed that Adele’s earlier speech exhibited non-rhoticity, typical of London-based accents, where post-vocalic /r/ sounds were dropped. In more recent recordings, however, the presence of pronounced /r/ sounds in words like “car” and “far” indicates a clear move toward rhoticity, mirroring Californian English pronunciation patterns. This shift suggests both an unconscious adaptation and a degree of linguistic convergence.

Glottalization, once a frequent feature in Adele’s speech, has become notably less prominent. PRAAT analysis shows a reduction in glottal stops—previously replacing /t/ in words like “butter” or “water”—and an emergence of the American alveolar flap [ɾ], signaling a shift in articulation that also affects overall speech rhythm. These findings reflect broader transitions not only in phoneme production but

also in vocal technique and intonation patterns, which have become smoother and more consistent post-shift.

Th-fronting, another feature of Cockney and Estuary English, has also become less prominent in Adele's speech. In her early recordings, the /θ/ sound in words like "think" was often fronted to a /f/ sound, typical of Cockney speech. However, after her move to Los Angeles, the fronting of /θ/ has become less frequent, and her pronunciation more closely mirrors the General American form, where the /θ/ is typically retained in its unfronted form. PRAAT analysis shows that her articulation of words like "think" now reflects this shift, moving from [fɪŋk] in her earlier recordings to [θɪŋk] in her later speech.

H-dropping, another distinctive feature of Cockney and Estuary English, is also evident in Adele's earlier speech. Words beginning with the /h/ sound, such as "hurting," were often pronounced without the initial /h/ (e.g., ['ɜ:tɪŋ] for "hurting"). However, as her speech adapted to her American environment, this phenomenon became less noticeable. Recent recordings indicate a more consistent retention of the /h/ sound at the beginning of words like "house" [haus], aligning with American English pronunciation patterns.

Additionally, Adele's intonation has undergone noticeable change. In her earlier speech, the pitch contours were more variable, characteristic of Estuary and Cockney English, where there is a distinct use of rising and falling intonational patterns, often reflecting a more marked emphasis. In Adele's California accent stage, her intonation has become smoother, with more even pitch contours and fewer abrupt pitch changes, which is more characteristic of British English intonation patterns. This shift in intonation reflects not only phonetic accommodation but also a change in the overall rhythm and flow of her speech, making it more in line with the American accent she is now surrounded by.

All in all, the variable accent markers analyzed in this study include intonation peaks (F₀), glottal stops, /h/-dropping, th-fronting, and rhoticity, and among these, rhoticity proved to be more stable over time, whereas features such as th-fronting and /t/-glottaling were more susceptible to change. These patterns indicate a gradual

neutralization of Adele's accent, where the more socially marked or region-specific features become attenuated or less frequent. This phonetic shift contributes to a more standardized and media-adapted accent, potentially enhancing broader intelligibility and aligning with the expectations of a global audience.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of accents plays a crucial role in sociolinguistics, phonetics, and identity studies. English accents, in particular, offer a window into how language reflects and shapes regional, social, and cultural identities. This thesis set out with the primary aim of tracing and characterizing the sociophonetic evolution of Adele's public-persona accent between 2011 and 2024. More specifically, the study sought to identify and analyze key segmental and prosodic variables in her accent over time, to assemble and annotate a diachronic corpus of recordings, to extract and normalize acoustic measurements, to conduct listener perception tests, and to situate the findings within the broader sociophonetic and sociolinguistic discussions on prestige, identity, and celebrity culture. By examining how Adele's accent evolved, particularly in relation to her public persona and media exposure, the study aimed to shed light on the processes of adult accent change, especially as influenced by the dynamics of fame and global media consumption.

The methodology involved several integrated approaches: observation, case study analysis, discourse-analytic examination, transcription and acoustic analysis, and a critical review of the literature to define relevant accent features. First, a comprehensive review of sociolinguistic and journalistic sources helped to identify features that were most likely to be affected by the celebrity's accent evolution, such as /r/, /t/, and prosodic contours. The case study focused specifically on interviews and concert transcripts from 2011 to 2024, providing a diachronic snapshot of her speech patterns over time. Acoustic analysis, using Praat software, was employed to extract key formants (F1, F2) for vowel analysis and to measure F₀ peaks and valleys to explore intonation patterns. A categorical coding of consonant variants was performed through visual inspection of waveforms and spectrograms, while frequency counts and simple percentages were used to track how often specific features appeared in early versus later recordings. These findings were then integrated into a broader context by comparing the acoustic data with the results of listener perception surveys and reflecting on the implications for the study of British English variation, media influence, and identity.

The analysis revealed several significant trends in Adele's accent over the 13-year period studied. One of the key findings was the gradual reduction of glottal /t/ in her speech from 2011 to 2019. Initially, her speech exhibited frequent glottal stops, a feature typically associated with Cockney English, but by 2019, there was a noticeable shift toward clearer /t/ pronunciations, a feature more characteristic of Received Pronunciation (RP) or General American English. This shift is likely influenced by Adele's increasing exposure to international audiences and the need for her speech to resonate globally, reflecting trends of accent neutralization in response to global media influence. Additionally, the study noted a marked increase in rhoticity, particularly in later recordings, suggesting a shift toward a more American-accented speech pattern.

Further, the analysis observed a reduction in th-fronting, another feature associated with Cockney and Estuary English. In early recordings, Adele exhibited noticeable th-fronting, pronouncing words like "think" and "that" with a "f" or "v" sound. However, in more recent recordings, this feature became less pronounced, reflecting a broader trend of accent neutralization. This shift may be understood as part of Adele's adaptation to a wider, more international audience, aligning her speech with a more standardized, non-localized English pronunciation that is often perceived as more neutral or prestigious in the global context. This trend is further reinforced by her years of residence in the United States, which likely contributed to increased exposure to American English norms and influenced the gradual incorporation of rhoticity and other American-leaning features into her speech.

Similarly, the study also identified a reduction in h-dropping, which was present in some of Adele's earlier speech, particularly in informal settings. H-dropping, where the "h" sound is omitted from words like "him" or "have," is another feature associated with Cockney and Estuary English accents. In her later recordings, however, Adele exhibited a clearer pronunciation of the "h" sound, reflecting a tendency toward more standard pronunciations, possibly in response to both personal and professional shifts, including her transition to a more polished public image. This reduction in h-dropping is consistent with other aspects of her

accent change, indicating an overall movement toward more prestigious forms of English, influenced by the demands of global celebrity culture and media exposure.

Prosodically, Adele's intonation patterns evolved over the years, with later recordings revealing a more neutral intonation, characterized by rising F_0 contours, which are often associated with Standard British accent. In contrast, earlier recordings from 2011 showed a more typical British intonation pattern, which could be interpreted as a reflection of her roots in London and the surrounding areas. These prosodic shifts appear to correlate with changes in the global media landscape and Adele's increasing international recognition.

The acoustic analysis revealed clear shifts in Adele's accent over time, aligning with the observation of reduced Cockney features and an increasing presence of neutral, non-regional characteristics. Specifically, the earlier recordings from 2011 showcased more prominent Cockney features, such as frequent glottal stops and a more pronounced London accent, which gradually diminished in later years. In contrast, recordings from 2019 onward exhibited a marked reduction in these features, with a shift toward a more neutral, standard British or even American-influenced pronunciation. These changes suggest that the evolution of Adele's accent is closely linked to her evolving public persona and her need to communicate with a broader, international audience. The acoustic data reflect this shift in her speech patterns, which appears to mirror the pressures and expectations placed on public figures in the media spotlight. As her career progressed, it became evident that her accent adapted in response to her increasing exposure to global audiences, emphasizing the significant role that media and public scrutiny play in accent evolution for celebrities.

This research definitely contributes to sociophonetic theory by providing new insights into the processes of adult accent change. The study supports models of communication accommodation, which propose that speakers adjust their accents to align with the expectations of their audience and their social environment. In Adele's case, the evolution of her accent can be understood as a form of accommodation to

the broader, more globalized English-speaking audience, an adaptation to her shifting identity as a globally recognized celebrity, as well as her relocation to the US.

Furthermore, this research extends existing models of accent change by emphasizing the influence of media exposure and celebrity culture. While traditional studies of accent variation focus on local, regional, or social contexts, this study highlights how global media visibility can shape the phonetic features of an individual's speech, even in adulthood. Adele's accent evolution offers valuable insights into how media exposure can catalyze sociophonetic change, particularly in celebrities whose public image is tightly interwoven with their linguistic presentation.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this study has practical implications for accent coaching, media professionals, and English pronunciation pedagogy. For accent coaches working with celebrities or individuals in the public eye, understanding the dynamics of accent evolution can help in advising clients on how to modulate their accents for various audiences. Similarly, the findings may be of value to media professionals who need to ensure that speakers, particularly public figures, are understood by diverse, global audiences.

For educators, this study underscores the importance of recognizing how global media influences English language teaching and pronunciation. In a world where media figures like Adele often set linguistic trends, teaching English pronunciation may need to adapt to the evolving landscape of international English. This research could serve as a useful reference for ESL instructors who teach pronunciation and accent variation, particularly in contexts where students may aim to achieve a more neutral or international English accent.

While the study provides valuable insights into the evolution of Adele's accent, it has several limitations. The corpus of recordings is limited to publicly available material, which may not fully capture the full range of her speech in various informal or private contexts. Additionally, the study focused primarily on consonantal variants, with no direct investigation of vowel features, meaning that any potential shifts in vowel articulation were not captured. This limitation could affect the comprehensiveness of the findings, as vowel variation often plays a significant role in

accent differentiation. Additionally, while acoustic measurements were taken for consonant features and intonation (F_0 peaks and valleys), other phonetic features like vowel duration or diphthongization were not analyzed, which may have provided further insights into the accent's evolution.

Future research could include a more detailed analysis of vowel characteristics and other prosodic features, to complement the findings and provide a fuller picture of Adele's accent change. Also, the scope of this study could be expanded by incorporating additional celebrity speech data, both from Adele and other high-profile public figures. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how accents evolve in the context of global fame. Additionally, a more detailed analysis of the specific contexts in which accent change occurs—such as interviews versus performances—could offer deeper insights into how and why certain features of speech are modified. Longitudinal studies tracking the perceptions of Adele's accent by diverse audience groups over time could also provide valuable data on how accent change is perceived by different social and cultural groups.

Moreover, future studies could incorporate finer-grained prosodic metrics, such as speech rate, pitch variation, and stress patterns, to further explore how prosody interacts with segmental features in the process of accent evolution. Finally, research could examine how audience adaptation to celebrity accents influences the way media professionals and language teachers approach pronunciation instruction in the context of globalized English.

In conclusion, this study provides a detailed examination of the sociophonetic evolution of Adele's accent over the past 13 years, and rather than a straightforward shift, this represents a neutralization of socio-regional features — a process that signals the diminishing or partial blurring of socially recognizable identity cues in public speech. The findings highlight the complex interplay between segmental and prosodic features, accent perception, and the broader sociophonetic processes of accommodation and identity construction. As celebrity speech continues to influence global trends in language variation, this research contributes to a deeper

understanding of how accent change can occur in adulthood, particularly in response to shifting social environments and global media pressures.

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