

**“We would say ‘a bit Gretnarish’ and we’d put an *r* in”:
rhoticity and *r*-sandhi in East Lancashire speech**

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Speakers of rhotic accents realise surface forms of /r/ in syllable rhymes as well as in syllable onsets. Non-rhotic speakers realise surface forms of /r/ only in syllable onsets. *R*-sandhi involves the production of a surface [r] where otherwise there would be a hiatus between vowels in consecutive syllables. Sometimes this is given two labels: “linking-*r*” for cases where historically there was a rhyme /r/ (and where, of course, rhotic speakers would still have rhyme /r/) and “intrusive-*r*” in cases where there was no rhyme-*r* historically. In RP, *tuner is* [tju:nə.ɪz] contains linking-*r* and *tuna is* [tju:nə.ɪz] contains intrusive-*r*. In many accounts of the phonology of English, it is assumed that rhoticity and *r*-sandhi are in complementary distribution. Giegerich states that *r*-sandhi is “systematically confined to non-rhotic varieties of English ... in rhotic varieties, intrusive [r] is absent” (1999: 168).

Hay and Sudbury (2005) investigated the distribution of rhoticity and *r*-sandhi for speakers in the ONZE corpus of New Zealand English. This corpus consists of archive recordings made in the 1940s of speakers covering the period of the loss of rhoticity in New Zealand speech. Hay and Sudbury found that apparently rhotic speakers did produce instances of intrusive-*r*. The fact that rhoticity was lost in New Zealand speakers born after 1900 means that the only evidence for this unusual distribution of rhoticity and *r*-sandhi is the relatively constrained set of data available in the ONZE corpus.

Lancashire is one of the few areas of England where rhoticity is at least variably still present (Shorrocks, 1998:388). Present day Lancashire speakers, therefore, present an opportunity to investigate whether Hay and Sudbury’s findings for New Zealand speech acquired in the late 19th century apply to other speech communities where rhoticity is in decline.

This paper presents some preliminary empirical evidence gathered from recordings of four members of the same family from Rossendale in Lancashire. These recordings of conversational data, together with data from a reading task and a suffixation task, suggest that some present day Lancashire speakers can variably realise /r/ in the rhyme of a syllable, and also variably produce intrusive *r*. This paper will explore various potential explanations of why these speakers have a distribution of surface [r] which seems to be at odds with standard assumptions made in the literature about rhoticity and *r*-sandhi.

References

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