VOICES OF BROOKLYN

Tom Brown

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Brooklyn is changing. Any film or pop-culture reference conjures up images of tough guys with baseball bats, pizzerias, and elevated subway lines. Today, it is a borough of sidewalk cafes, boutique book stores, and bicycle riding.

Businesses and real estate are not the only things that have been changing in Brooklyn; there has also been linguistic change occurring. When going out with friends to the more trendy neighborhoods in Brooklyn, original Brooklynites stand out like a sore thumb. You can immediately tell who is a native, most likely hailing from one of the southern neighborhoods, and who is a transplant from another part of the country. The Brooklyn accent is highly visible when you go up to the bar and get a few ‘bee-uhs’ (as opposed to the girl from Ohio who orders ‘beers’). When asked whether or not they are heading to Court Street with their friends, you are likely to hear a native-Brooklynite say, “yea, I’m goin’ wit em.” Many people view these dialectal features and the people that use them as less educated and substandard. At the same time, the accent has been a staple of American pop culture. It is always highlighted in any work that tells a story regarding the Mafia, and in other works, it is often the case that the ‘tough guy’ speaks with many of the features that come from the accent. This paper does not distinguish between the Brooklyn accent, Brooklyn dialect, New York Accent, New York dialect and New York City English.

The demographics of Manhattan have changed long ago, but the population to the west side of Flatbush Avenue has more or less remained the same up until the most recent decades. It seems that those features that were most iconically associated with New York City continued to
exist and thrive in Brooklyn well into the 90s and the new millennium. However, you can’t stop change, and the ever changing populations of New York City has set its sights on the borough of Brooklyn.

The change that is occurring in Brooklyn is undoubtedly affecting that accent, that dialect that is so well known. There arise a few questions. How is the accent changing? What aspects are changing more quickly than others? Is it going away? Is it becoming more prominent with younger generations, to let the non-natives know who ‘belongs’ in Brooklyn?

1.2 Roadmap

The first section of this paper will cover the general demographics of Brooklyn, and what prompted the motivation to conduct this study. The second section of this paper will address the methods used in conducting this survey. The third section of this paper will contain the results of the study. The fourth section will be a discussion of the results, and what they mean for Brooklyn, and potential future questions that arise after examining the data set. Finally, the fifth section will be the conclusion.
1.3 Neighborhoods

Figure 1.1 is a map of Brooklyn, broken down into the different neighborhoods that comprise it. Along the northern portion of Brooklyn, the portion that is closest to Manhattan is where the people known as *yuppies* and *hipsters* live. A *yuppie* is a young urban professional, generally someone who moved to the city to have the opportunity to establish a more lucrative career for themselves than wherever they are originally from. They are members of the upper-middle class or upper class and typically in their 20s or 30s. The yuppies started moving into Brooklyn in the late 90s, into neighborhoods like Park Slope, Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, and Brooklyn Heights. These neighborhoods were more or less the safest neighborhoods near the subway lines.
with a short commute into Manhattan. These neighborhoods were comprised of middle and working class families; Park Slope was mostly an Irish neighborhood into the 90s. The yuppies brought with them expensive coffee, organic cream cheese and other things that were too expensive for the original demographic to take part in. Yuppies dine out more frequently than their less affluent neighbors, and the loads of delis, bagel shops, and bars closed and were replaced with trendier, more expensive establishments.

The hipsters only recently started coming to Brooklyn. Hipsters are young and the moniker is more of a cultural one than yuppie is. Hipsters tend to share a common taste in fashion and music, they prefer things natural and independent. Hipsters are “a generation of middle-class youths interested in an alternative art and music scene.” (Fletcher 2009) Hipsters shy away from the mainstream trends and fashions, and they prefer the underground, less well known things. They have migrated to the northern tip of Brooklyn to neighborhoods such as Greenpoint, Williamsburg, Bushwick, Clinton Hill, and Fort Greene. These neighborhoods were of a much lower income than the neighborhoods that the yuppies moved into. Greenpoint had a very large immigrant Polish community, and Bushwick has one of the largest concentrations of Hispanic people in New York City. Clinton Hill and Fort Greene were mostly populated by African-Americans ranging from middle class in their brownstones, to very poor in the projects. These neighborhoods also had higher crimes rates, but still had easy access to Manhattan via the subway. The appearance of hipsters caused the rent prices to rise, and a large portion of the preceding, less affluent population to leave.

The southern neighborhoods of Marine Park, Mill Basin, Bergen Beach, Gerritsen Beach, Sheepshead Bay, Gravesend, Bensonhurst, and Dyker Heights have changed in a different way. In the early 90s a large wave of immigrants from the former Soviet Union settled in Southern
Brooklyn in Brighton Beach, Sheepshead Bay, and Coney Island. A large Chinese population also started moving into Sheepshead Bay, Bensonhurst, and Dyker Heights. Arabs began moving to the west into Fort Hamilton, and Bay Ridge. Sprinkle in Hispanic people among those neighborhoods to get an idea of the diversity. Among all of this change, a majority of the original white non-Hispanic population stayed. Gerritsen Beach, Marine Park, Mill Basin and Bergen Beach are the only neighborhoods that remain relatively untouched in 2013. The core middle class white population has remained. Most of the residents of Marine Park and Gerritsen beach are city workers. These professions include police officers, firefighters, teachers, bus drivers, subway workers and similar positions. These neighborhoods have a strong sense of community and neighbors are mostly friendly and welcoming. Gerritsen Beach has probably changed the least out of all of the neighborhoods in Brooklyn; the population is still mostly Irish-Catholic and the neighborhood has its own volunteer fire department, a rarity in New York City.

1.4 Gentrification

One of the primary motivations to conduct this study was the effects of gentrification in Brooklyn. The white population was decreasing from 1970-1990 (Figures 1.2 – 1.4). The white families that moved away were replaced with a mostly non-white population. Starting in 2000, a ‘revival’ began in Brooklyn. A younger demographic of people began to move to Brooklyn in high numbers. Figure 1.5 shows an increasing white, non-Hispanic population in the north western and northern parts of Brooklyn. These neighborhoods were filled with warehouses and cheap apartments that were converted into luxury condominiums and loft apartments. Their proximity to the subway made the real estate value of these neighborhoods explode. According to CBS Money Watch, the Council for Community and Economic Research has ranked Brooklyn as the second most expensive place to live in the US, with an average home price of $959,907,
and an average monthly rent of $2,411. As prices continue to rise, this new demographic is expanding further south and west into neighborhoods such as Sunset Park, Crown Heights, and Prospect-Lefferts Gardens (Higgins 2013). Bill Sheppard, a real estate broker describes how homes he was selling twenty years ago for $250,000 are now selling for $1.6 million (Higgins 2013). He states this is a bargain compared to similar homes in Park Slope, which are selling for $3 million.

Figure 1.3 – 1.5 show the explosion of the African American and Hispanic communities in the 70s, 80s, and 90s in the northern and eastern neighborhoods of Brooklyn. It was during this time that much of the white, non-Hispanic population started moving to the suburbs of Long Island, Southern Connecticut, and Northern New Jersey. These figures serve to show exactly what the composition of Brooklyn looked like for the older generations, and to show the change that leads to the Brooklyn that the younger generations grew up in.
All of these factors combine to create language change, change that occurs in addition to any natural variance that may be occurring. What it means to be a Brooklynite is changing. The more people move to Brooklyn from other areas, the more standard language is being brought to Brooklyn. This interaction with a more standard version of American English is inevitably going to alter the way native-born Brooklynites will speak.

There are a few possibilities for the Brooklyn accent. It could be disappearing, its contact with more standard varieties of American English brought to Brooklyn by immigrants, yuppies, and hipsters causing it to become closer to the standard. There may be dialect focusing (Kerswill & Trudgill 2005), where certain features of the accent are disappearing, and other features of the accent remain the same. Since there are a few neighborhoods in southern Brooklyn that contain such a large native, white non-Hispanic population, it could be hypothesized that these people are more likely to want to retain their identity as native-Brooklynites. This demographic is facing changes in the neighborhoods surrounding theirs, and their culture and community is not as widespread as it was in previous decades. This could cause a ‘retrenching’ of the accent, where
Speakers of the accent use features more often than they did in the past, in order to let the newer populations of Brooklyn know who was there before they came. This final option would reinforce to everyone that they are native-Brooklynites.

1.5 Previous Studies

The first study to analyze the speech of New York City was done by William Labov and published in 1966. The motivations for this study in Brooklyn are the results of Labov 1966, and follow up studies conducted in 2009 by Partick-André Mather, and in 2010 by Kara Becker.

Labov hypothesized that “if any two sub-groups of New York City speakers are ranked on a scale of social stratification, then they will be ranked in the same order by their differential use of (r)” (2006). Labov is implying that any social difference between two groups of people will be reflected in the way that they speak. One demographic would speak more standardly than the other, and a study could be created to show this.

Labov conducted a study in three different department stores in 1962. He went to three different department stores, which cater to different social classes, to gather data. Saks was the highest ranking, Macy’s was the middle ranking, and S. Klein was the lowest ranking. Labov went up to the salesmen and women that worked in these stores and asked them a question in which they would reply ‘fourth floor’. When comparing the employees of the different stores, Labov noticed that as the prestige of working at their store increases, the English spoken becomes more standard. Since working at Saks is more prestigious because people with the highest income shop there, the employees speak more standardly to sound more educated than the employees at S. Klein, who are the most likely to produce postvocalic non-rhotic (r). The
employees from S. Klein wanted to identify with their clientele, mostly working class families that spoke less standardly.

Mather’s follow up study produced different results. Mather’s 2009 study shows that in general, the amount of postvocalic non-rhotic (r) being produced in the same and similar department stores has been reducing. In Saks, speakers produced postvocalic rhotic (r) in all possible environments 29% of the time in 1962, and 54% of the time in 2009. In Macy’s speakers produced postvocalic rhotic (r) in all possible environments 20% of the time in 1962, and 43% of the time in 2009. In S. Klein//Filene’s (S. Klein went out of business, and Filene’s is very similar for the purposes of this study) speakers produced postvocalic rhotic (r) in all possible environments 4% of the time in 1962, and 5% of the time in 2009. This shows the trend across higher income demographics of language change in relation to the variable of postvocalic (r). The rate of r dropping in New York City is decreasing over time.

Labov conducted a large study of New York City English in the Lower East Side which was published in 1966. In 2010, Kara Becker modelled her doctoral dissertation on Labov’s study, and to see what changes have occurred in the almost five decades since the original study. Becker showed that for two variables, the BOUGHT vowel (AW), and the short-a split have undergone changes since Labov 1966. The BOUGHT vowel has been lowering over time, and the short-a split is close to non-existence amongst the younger generations.

All of these studies point to language change in New York City. Specific linguistic variables, such as r dropping reducing in frequency, and (AW) lowering over time. The goal of this Brooklyn study is to see what changes are happening across population groups. These previous studies serve as a direct inspiration and motivation to conduct this study.
2 Methods

2.1 Participants

Twenty-six people were interviewed during the duration of this study. All of informants came from middle class, predominantly white non-Hispanic neighborhoods. Two were Pakistani both of whom had lived their whole lives in Marine Park, and for the purposes of this study, can be considered culturally, and linguistically similar to the majority of their neighborhood.

Of the twenty-six informants interviewed, only nineteen informants’ data were analyzed. The participants ranged from eighteen to fifty nine years of age. The education levels went from only having a high school diploma to one informant being an attorney with a JD, and another informant having a PhD. Most of the informants lived in Southern Brooklyn.

The informants were broken up into two cohorts: a younger cohort comprised of informants from the ages of twenty to thirty, and an older cohort comprised of informants aged forty and older. The cohorts both originally were comprised of ten informants each. During the first interview, the first older informant did not have his reading glasses with him, and could not complete the reading portions of the study. This informant was removed from the cohort because his lack of more formal speech from reading could have potentially skewed the results of the study. This left the older cohort with nine informants.
**Older Cohort (>40)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant #</th>
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<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Sheepshead Bay</td>
<td>OSHA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Marine Park</td>
<td>NYC Transit Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Marine Park</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Marine Park</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Park Slope</td>
<td>NYC Transit Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Mill Basin</td>
<td>Store Owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Mill Basin</td>
<td>NYC Office of Emergency Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Mill Basin</td>
<td>Corrections Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Marine Park</td>
<td>NYC Department of Environmental Protection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1

**Younger Cohort (20-30)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant #</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Marine Park</td>
<td>Police Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Marine Park</td>
<td>Firefighter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Gerritsen Beach</td>
<td>Firefighter</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Marine Park</td>
<td>College Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Marine Park</td>
<td>Public Health</td>
</tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>JD</td>
<td>Marine Park</td>
<td>Attorney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Mill Basin</td>
<td>Retail Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Park Slope</td>
<td>College Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Marine Park</td>
<td>College Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Mill Basin</td>
<td>After-School Program Counselor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2
Tables 2.1 and 2.2 show the breakdown of each cohort by age, education level, the neighborhood they lived in at the time of the interview, and their occupation at the time of the interview. For education level, the following abbreviations were used: HS for having no more than a high school education, BA for having earned a bachelor’s degree, MA for having earned a master’s degree, JD for having earned a law degree, and finally PhD for having earned a doctorate.

2.2 Materials

The informants were gathered and interviewed one-on-one. This study can be considered a ‘mini sociolinguistic study’ as the interviews all comprised of standard sociolinguistic parts, but at an overall shorter length. The study was broken up into three main parts. There was the interview portion (attachment A), then there was a reading passage (attachment B), followed by a word list (attachment C), finally a minimal pair word list (attachment D). The interview questions were inspired the interview questions in appendix A from Labov 2006, other questions were added to elicit certain potential linguistic features from the informants. The word list and minimal pair listed were gathered from appendix A from Labov 2006. Parts of the reading passage came from appendix A from Labov 2006, and other passages were added or modified to better suit the present times. There were issues with informants’ literacy level; it was decided that the reading passage would not be used in the analysis of variables. The interviews were recorded with a Sony ICD-AX412 Digital Flash Memory Voice Recorder into an .mp3 file format. Each interview lasted on average eight minutes.

2.3 Procedure

Two variables were analyzed in this study. The first variable studied was postvocalic (r) and the second variable studied was (th). Each token of postvocalic (r) or (th) was recorded into a
spreadsheet and given a value of 0 or 1. The two variables were also categorized by whether they were spoken during the interview portion of the study, where less formal speech is expected, or during the reading portions of the interview, where more formal and standard speech is expected.

All variables were impressionistically coded by the author. The author grew up in Marine Park, and displays features of the Brooklyn accent in daily speech. When transcribing the interviews, the author would pause the playback and repeat what was said aloud in standard speech to check whether or not there were any tokens of postvocalic (r) or (th) produced.

Each token was recorded into a spreadsheet with a timestamp of when the word occurred in the interview, followed by whether or not the speech occurred during the spoken or reading portion of the interview, followed by the word itself, then its r or th index. Words that had more than one instance of postvocalic (r) or (th) were transcribed more than one time. For example FIREFIGHTER has two instances of postvocalic (r). The word was transcribed as ‘fiRefighter’ or ‘firefghteR’ depending on which instance of postvocalic (r) was being analyzed.

For postvocalic (r), there were 1,233 tokens during all of the interviews. Each word was recorded with an r value of 0 or 1, depending on if the informant dropped the (r). It was noted whether the (r) was part of a simple coda of a syllable, or part of a complex coda. Coding procedures also distinguished if the syllable containing the postvocalic (r) was a word medial or word final syllable. Monosyllabic words were treated at word final syllables.

For (th), there were 592 tokens during all of the interviews. There was no distinction made between function words (the, this, with…) and content words (south, think, fourth…). For (th) there was no distinction made between sound position in a word, all instances of (th) were analyzed equally whether they occurred word initially, medially, or finally. The linguistic
variable being studied was whether or not (th) was being pronounced as a fricative (/θ,ð/) or as a stop (/t,d/) in words that canonically have a fricative in American English. The word WITH, standardly pronounced as /wɪθ/ or /wɪð/, would be pronounced as /wɪt/ or /wɪd/ if the informant stopped the fricative.

For example the word NORTHERN contains two instances of postvocalic (r), and one instance of (th). Hypothetically there are six possible ways this word can be pronounced, depending on r-dropping and th-stopping. In reality, there were only 3 nonstandard variants heard, the first (r) dropped, both instances of (r) dropped, and both instances of (r) dropped and the (th) stopped. In analyzing the data, there was no clear way to predict which of the variants would be pronounced, and often times the same informant pronounced the words in different ways throughout the interview.

Both of these variables are typical features of the Brooklyn accent, but they both may not be equally stigmatized. It could be hypothesized that these two variables are not changing at the same rate.

3 Results
3.1 r-dropping

The results described below are of three analyses of the (r) variable. Tables 1-3 show the r-indexes for each analysis. The r-index is defined as the rate at which each informant drops post-vocalic (r). The r-index is a scale from lowest to highest, so an r-index of 0 means that the informant dropped all tokens of post-vocalic (r) that were available to drop, and an r-index of 1 means that the informant produced a rhotic (r) in all possible cases. The first analysis (Table 3.1, Figure 3.1) is of the rate of (r) dropping across the entire interview, comparing the older cohort vs. the younger cohort. The second analysis (Table 3.1, Figure 3.2) is an analysis within the older
cohort, of high school educated vs. more than high school educated. The third analysis (Table 3.2, Figure 3.3) is of the rate of (r) dropping across both cohorts combined, comparing the environment of natural interview speech to reading the word lists and minimal pairs. All between-group analyses were conducted as a two tailed independent samples t-tests, and within-group comparisons were conducted as two-tailed paired t-tests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Older Informant #</th>
<th>r-index</th>
<th>Younger Informant #</th>
<th>r-index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1

Figure 3.1
While not statistically significant, there was a trend that younger speakers were less likely to produce non-rhotic tokens of (r) than older speakers were (t(1,18)=1.3, p=.21).

Figure 3.2

Older speakers with more than a high school education were significantly less likely to produce non-rhotic tokens of (r) than older speakers with only a high school education were (t(1,8)=6.1, p=.0005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Interview r-index</th>
<th>Reading r-index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Older 2</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older 3</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older 4</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older 5</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older 6</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older 7</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older 8</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older 9</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older 10</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Speakers speaking during the reading portion of the study were significantly less likely to produce non-rhotic tokens of \( (r) \) than speakers during the interview portion were \( (t(1,18)=3.0 \), \( p=.008 \)\).
3.2 th-stopping

The first set of results contained below (Table 3.3, Figure 3.4) are of rate of th-stopping of the older vs. the younger cohort. The second set of results (Table 3.3. Figure 3.5) is comparing education level within the older cohort. The th-index is a scaled from lowest to highest, a th-index of 0 means that the informant stopped all tokens of (th) that he was available to stop. All analyses were conducted as a two tailed independent samples t-tests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Older Informant #</th>
<th>th-index</th>
<th>Younger Informant #</th>
<th>th-index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.67</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3
Younger speakers were significantly less likely to produce stopped tokens of (th) than older speakers were ($t(1,18)=2.5$, $p=.02$).

Speakers with more education were significantly less likely to produce stopped tokens of (th) than speakers with higher than a high school education were ($t(1,8)=3.5$, $p=.01$).
4 Discussion

r-dropping is reducing amongst the younger population. The data set used in this study did not have enough power, and the p-value wasn’t significant, but it shows a statistical trend. As populations get younger they are less likely to produce postvocalic non-rhotic (r).

The difference of r dropping was significant when comparing the r index of all informants in formal speech versus informal speech. During the reading portion of the interview, all informants produced postvocalic non-rhotic (r) only 35% of the time. The informants were producing more formal speech while they were reading, and education level played a large role in this analysis. Across all informants, postvocalic non-rhotic (r) was produced 50% of the time during the interview portion of the study. Presumably, the informants were more relaxed, and they felt more comfortable in speaking less standardly.

When comparing the older cohort split up by education level, the effect of education on speech can be seen. The higher the education level, the more likely that the informant was to speak standardly, both in regards to the postvocalic (r), and (th) variable. People are exposed to a more standard form of English in higher education situations/institutions, and it is no surprise that people with more education tend to speak more standardly.

Across all of the United States, younger generations are more educated (on average) than older generations. This is reflected in the younger cohort. Nine out of the ten informants either graduated college with at least a bachelor’s degree, or were currently studying for their bachelor’s degree. This makes it difficult to distinguish between language change as caused by an increase in education, or by the effects of the changing demographics around them.
There is more of a change between cohorts in the (th) variable than the postvocalic (r) variable. This shows that the rate of change is not the same across all aspects of the Brooklyn accent. This could potentially mean that th-stopping is viewed as less standard than r-dropping, and the rate of th-stopping is reducing to bring that facet of the accent closer to the standard.

A simple observation would be that people that interact with the standard language market more, speak more standardly in regards to these two variables. This can be seen in two informants of the older cohort. The teacher and architect both have jobs that force them towards standard language. The teacher stands in front of the classroom, and educates their students using a version of English that adheres to prescriptivist rules, and is viewed as more standard. The architect in this study is often traveling around the United States to meet clients and to plan future projects. His interaction with other varieties of American English could be coercing him to speak more toward the standard. He needs to be well understood in any location, and speaking standardly is one way to accomplish that. Both the teacher and the architect dropped their r’s 40% less than the older informant with the next highest r index. The teacher and the architect only dropped their r’s 13% and 11% of the time respectively. The teacher stopped his th’s 0% of the time and the architect 3% of the time.

All of the results of this study were in line with the previous studies conducted in New York City. Language changes over time, and it appears that New York City English is converging towards the standard. The same could be said in Brooklyn, as people get younger, you are less likely to hear those features that were iconic to the Brooklyn accent.
5 Conclusion

Interviewing and listening to the stories of a demographic of people that made Brooklyn what it is today was an honor and a privilege. Recording a small piece of what makes Brooklyn ‘Brooklyn’ is an experience that will not be forgotten. Brooklyn has had its own charm and culture separate from the rest of New York City ever since Brooklyn joined New York City in 1898. The original people that rooted for the Brooklyn Dodgers are mostly gone, and the linguistic features that accompanied them are also reducing. Brooklyn has retained a separate charm from the rest of New York City in recent years, albeit a different one than the charm of old. Today’s Brooklyn has a new team, the Brooklyn Nets, and the New York Islanders are moving to Brooklyn in 2015. Coffee shops, cafes, green spaces, and locally grown organic food are the new Brooklyn. To quote one of the informants of this study, “the more things change, the more they stay the same”, meaning Brooklyn will always have its own culture and charm separate from the rest of New York City, the past was stickball and pizza, and the present is coffee and bicycle riding.

There is the possibility of further study on other variables involving the Brooklyn accent. Through listening to the interviews, the (AW) vowel in words like COFFEE and DOG seem to be occurring at similar rates across both cohorts. Anecdotally, immigrant non-native English speakers in Brooklyn appear to be acquiring (AW) as part of their vowel inventory as they acquire English. Investigating the trajectories of additional variables may help to determine whether speech in Brooklyn is moving toward the standard in all respects, or maintaining its local flavor through dialect focusing.
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References


Voices of Brooklyn

Interviewer’s Sheet

1. Go over the consent form, and receive verbal confirmation that the informant understands it.

2. The interview starts with the following questions:
   a. How old are you?
   b. Where do you live now?
   c. Do any of your extended family members live in Brooklyn? Which neighborhoods do they live in?
   d. Where did you grow up?
   e. What was it like growing up in your neighborhood? What kinds of games did you play as a child?
   f. How long have you been at your current job?
   g. Would you please be able to describe a typical week at your job? Follow-up: If participant does not mention enough days of the week, ask, Can you tell me a little bit about what you did this week?
   h. Have you ever been in a situation where you thought there was a serious danger of being killed? Where you thought to yourself, this is it? What happened? How did you feel afterwards?
   i. How do you typically start your mornings?
      i. Follow-up: If participant does not mention "coffee," ask, Do you feel like you need to drink any caffeinated beverages before you start your day?
   j. Tell me a little about your family. Are you married? Do you have kids?
   k. Do you have any pets? Follow-up: If participant does not say "dog," ask Have you ever had any pets, or are they too hard to take care of?
   l. Do you play the lottery?
      i. Follow-up: If participant does not say the word “million,” ask, How many people do you think play the lottery in the United States?
   m. Being originally from Brooklyn, how do you feel about the way that the population of Brooklyn has been changing in recent years?
      i. Follow-up: If they have not yet mentioned Williamsburg, ask, Which neighborhoods in Brooklyn would you say have changed a lot?
   n. If the interviewee doesn’t have a fear of death story, ask them “Do you have any interesting stories from living in Brooklyn?”

3. Hand the informant the reading passage (Attachment A) and direct them to read it in their normal tone and at their normal pace.

4. Hand the informant the word list (Attachment B) and have them read the words in their normal tone with a noticeable pause between words.
5. Ask the informant to:
   - Count from one to ten
   - Say the days of the week
   - Say all of the months

6. Hand the informant the minimal pair sheet (Attachment C). Ask them to say each word pair, and then ask them if the pair sound the same or different to them.

7. Ask the informant to read the final two pairs of words out loud, and then ask them if each of those pairs rhyme.

8. Thank the informant for their time.
**Reading Passage:**

*In a normal tone and at a normal pace, please read the following passage.*

Miss Jones was an ordinary woman in her thirties. Every morning she took the train to work at the Starbucks on 44th Street and Park Avenue. She would get off the F train and walk along 42nd Street towards the small coffee shop near the Met Life building. She tried to avoid the other paths because there was a lot of construction taking place. She had a bad feeling about the metal rods that hung freely over her head. There was a lot that she feared. She didn't hold her head high when she walked, but looked at the floor instead. She had millions of worries.

When I was nine or ten, I had a lot of friends who used to come over to my house to play. I remember a kid named Henry who had very big feet, and I remember a boy named Billy who had no neck, or at least none to look at. He was a funny kid, all right.

We always had chocolate milk and coffee cake around four o’clock. My dog used to give us an awful lot of trouble: he jumped all over us when he saw the coffee cake. We called him Hungry Sam.

We used to play Kick-the-can. One man is “IT”: you run past the man as fast as you can, and you kick a tin can so he can’t tag you. Sammy used to grab the can and dash down the street – we’d chase him with a baseball bat, and yell, “Bad boy! Bad! Bad!” But he was too fast. Only my aunt could catch him. She had him do tricks, too: She even taught him to ask for a glass of milk, and jump into a paper bag.

I remember where he was run over, not far from our corner. He darted out about four feet before a car, and he got hit hard. We didn’t have the heart to play ball or cards all morning. We didn’t know we cared so much for him until he was hurt.

There’s something strange about that – how I can remember everything he did: this thing, that thing, and the other thing. He used to carry three newspapers in his mouth at the same time. I suppose it’s the same thing with most of us: your first dog is like your first girl. She’s more trouble than she’s worth, but you can’t seem to forget her.
Word List

*In your normal tone please read the following words.*

bat
bad
back
bag
pad
pass
pal
batch
bath
badge
bang
pat
cash
can
half
past
ask
dance
have
has
razz

jazz
hammer
hamster
fashion
national
family
paul
all
ball
awful
coffee
office
chalk
chocolate
chock
talk
taught
dog
forty-four
north
south

happy
sad
mad
song
along
cat
forest
beer
bottle
beer bottle
metal
red
purple
orange
butter
cream cheese
car
van
vanilla
caramel
Minimal Pairs

In your normal tone of voice, please read the following two words at a time. After each pair, please think about if the words sound the same or different to you. Report your finding to the interviewer.

dock  dark
mary  merry
pin   pen
which witch
guard God
I can! tin can
sure shore
since sense
do   dew
beer bear
ten tin
voice verse
poor pour
source sauce