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# A phonetic analysis of the *which~witch* merger in Edinburgh, Scotland

Josef Fruehwald, Lauren Hall-Lew, Zac Boyd, Claire Cowie, Mirjam Eiswirth and Zuzana Elliott  
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 University of Edinburgh

## Edinburgh Speaks



Welcome to Edinburgh!



### The Edinburgh Speaks Project

Edinburgh is a city of contrasts

- Seat of Scottish Parliament & site of commodified Scottishness (Hall-Lew et al 2015) ——— Often characterized as basically “English”
- Considered a very middle class city ——— Has many highly economically deprived areas, including adjacent to the University.
- Many neighborhoods with strong sense of localness ——— Very international city, with some areas being intensely AirBnB-ified

## The Edinburgh Speaks Project

Our goal is to explore how these social contrasts are reflected in the linguistic landscape.

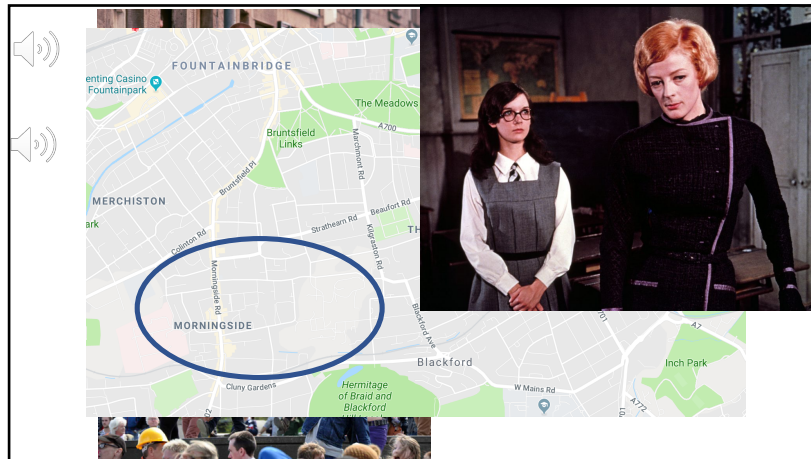
### Today:

A neighborhood based analysis of the *which~witch* merger, and how it is situated with respect to linguistic continua in Edinburgh.

## The Edinburgh Speaks Project

Edinburgh is a city of contrasts

/w/ ————— /ɹw/



## Morningside and Leith

Leithers on Leith:

- 🔊 A: It's what used to be know as the village up a stair.  
🔊 B: A village up a stair, yeah
- 🔊 C: A lot of the old Leithers, up till say, a generation a generation before us, and and, so far going back, used to talk about going up to Edinburgh.  
🔊 B: Aye, that's true.  
🔊 D: Aye, going up to Edinburgh, aye.  
🔊 C: "Oh, I'm going up to Edinburgh", as if it's another planet.

## Morningside and Leith

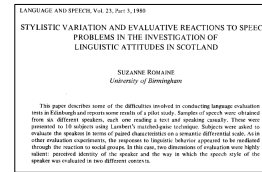
Morningsiders on Morningside



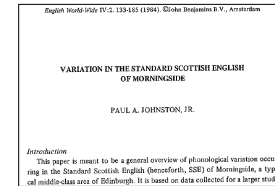
Well Morningside, of course, when I grew up, was still in some ways, a very tight community. It had been a village. I mean, we still had a village school.

## Neighbourhood-Based Previous Research

- Previous research on sociolinguistic variation in Edinburgh typically mentions the Morningside accent.



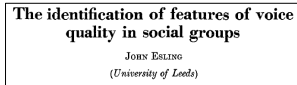
(Romaine 1980)



(Johnston 1984)

## Neighbourhood-Based Previous Research

- The first sociophonetic study on social class in Edinburgh compared speakers from Morningside to speakers from Pilton (next to Leith)



*Comparison of boys and men from three different social class groups (where Group II were those born WC but upwardly mobile)*

(Esling 1978)

Creakier:

Harsher:

## Edinburgh Neighbourhoods

These two neighborhoods constitute two ideological and linguistic poles within Edinburgh.

*It's where <unk> I think of an Edinburgh accent, I think of Morningside*



*which~witch* merger

- SSBE: Complete since the 19th century (MacMahon 1999)
- Other varieties: barely maintained (Wells 1982; Trudgill 2004).
- **Still ongoing in Scotland** (Brato 2007, 2014; Macafee, 1983), including **Edinburgh** (Schützler 2010; Reirsen 2013)

*which~witch* merger

Why? Anglo English Contact? (Schützler 2010)



*which~witch* merger

Why? Posification of Scottish Standard English? (Stuart-Smith et al 2007, Dickson 2016)



*which~witch* merger

How?

Phonetically abrupt?

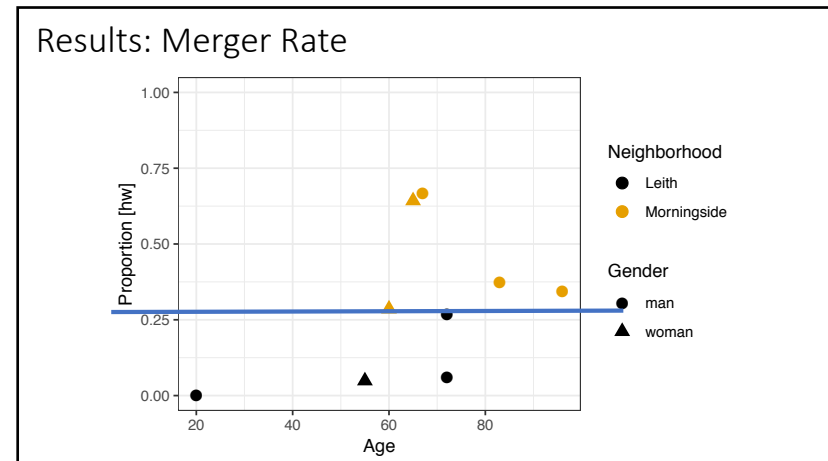
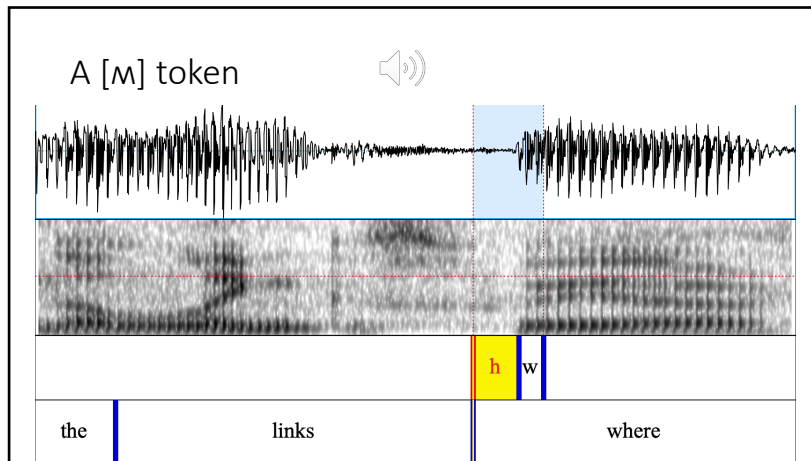
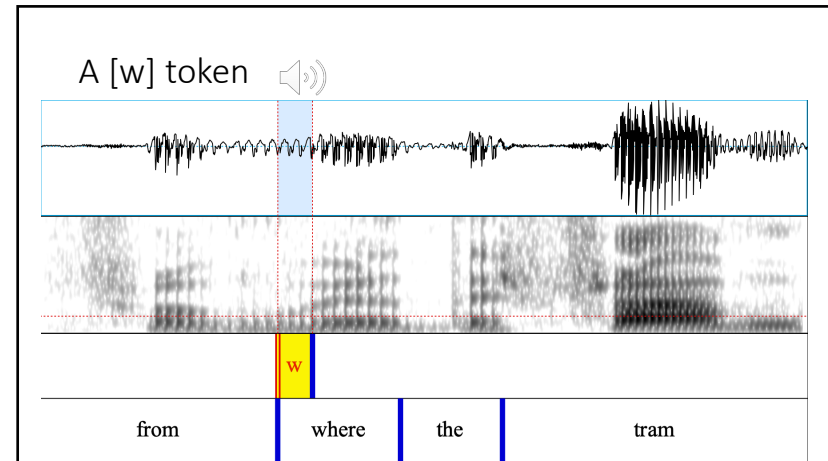


Phonetically gradual?

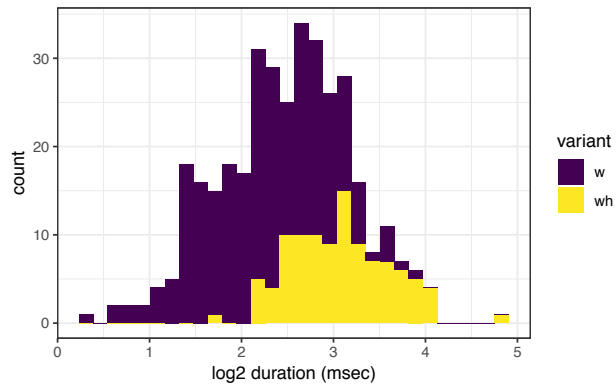


### Speakers in this study

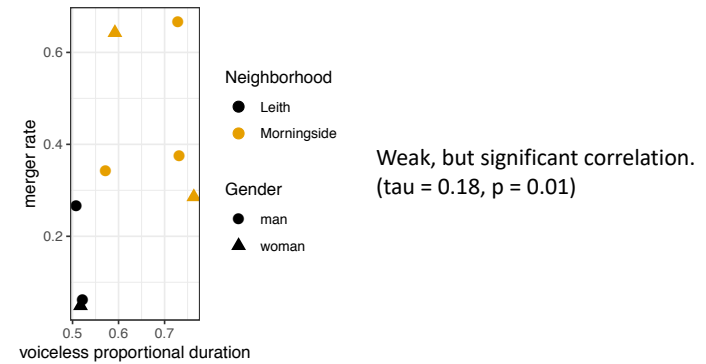
- 9 speakers from Leith and Morningside (recorded 2014)
  - 5 Morningside (Middle Class)
  - 4 Leith (Working Class)
- Levels of coding:
  - etymological /w/ realised as [ɹ] or [w]
  - [ɹ] tokens: duration of voicelessness
- 358 tokens, total



## Results: Duration



## Voiceless Duration and merger



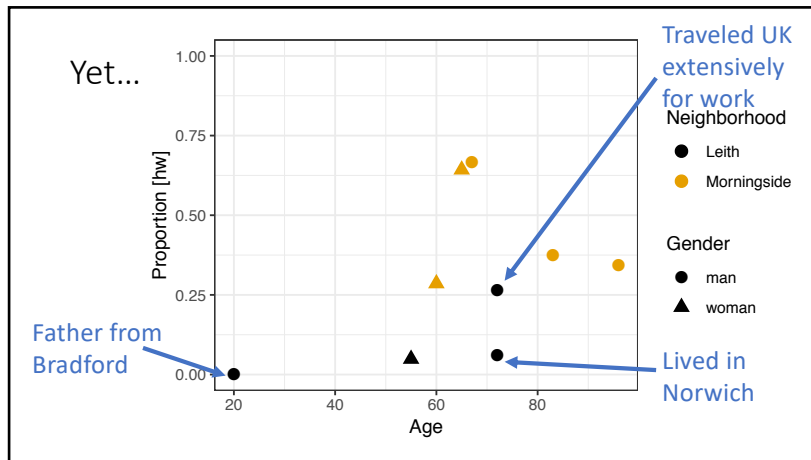
## Summary

- Every Leither had a higher merger rate than every Morningsider.
- Equivocal evidence for a phonetically gradual merger.

## Discussion

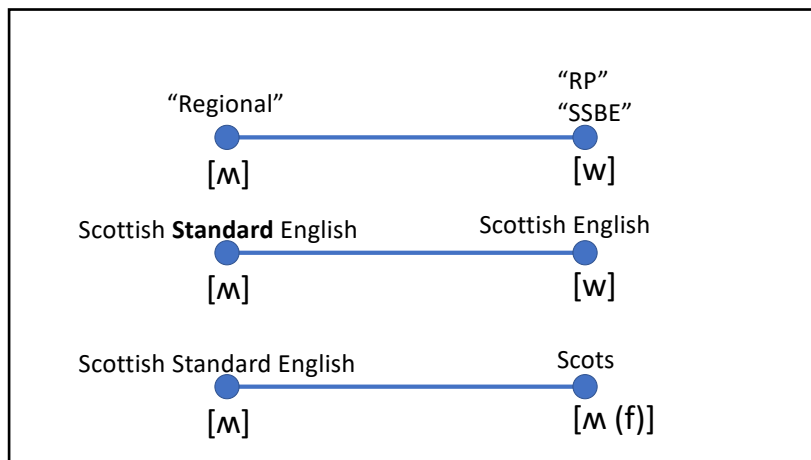
The social distribution of this merger is more complex than “RP Influence” or “dialect levelling.”

It isn't very plausible that the Leithers are attempting to approximate Anglo English models.



Yet again...

As we are speaking, it's just kinda rounded a wee bit because of all our different jobs, all met different people, in different str-parts of society and life, but I think we speak Leith.



Moving forward

- Transcription and analysis of Esling’s 1978 recordings ongoing.
- Recent fieldwork in Leith ongoing (Markl 2019)

Stay Tuned!

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