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**The *Phonetics of Popular Song* (PoPS) corpus
Exploring sociophonetic variation in pop and hip hop
from New Zealand and the USA**

Case studies of a small number of singers have been the norm in sociolinguistic studies of song. These studies have focused on the relationship between singing and speech, exploring conflicting motivations in acts of identity (Trudgill 1983) and questions around automaticity and awareness in performed language (Gibson & Bell 2012). Despite the lack of face-to-face interaction, language variation in popular song is no less structured than in a traditional speech community. Rather than geographic place, variation in Anglophone pop song is structured primarily according to musical genres and the cultural spaces they represent (Coupland 2011). There is tension between standardisation and variation within and across genres, as singers seek to both fit in and stand out.

This paper argues for a corpus approach to language in song, and considers the steps involved in building such a corpus, using the *Phonetics of Popular Song* (PoPS, Gibson 2020) corpus as an example. PoPS includes 154 artists, structured according to country of origin (NZ and USA) and musical genre (pop and hip hop). Auditory analysis of BATH vowels and nonprevocalic /r/, and acoustic analysis of LOT reveal greater homogeneity in pop than hip hop. The styles and stances singers adopt agentively can be better understood if we explore structured variation across systematic datasets (Labov 1966). Finding large-scale patterns means temporarily sacrificing nuance, for example by classifying singers according to over-simplified demographic categories. Documenting broader trends, however, provides a valuable backdrop against which 'own accent' performances can then be explored as agentive acts of authentication.

References

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