Linguistics Sample Paper

1. Introduction[1]

A political commentator who discusses some of the most tragic and outraging events in recent history and a comedian who interviews actors and voices characters in children's movies are two identities that are not often attributed to one person.[2] The former condemns transphobia and calls for government action regarding gun violence. The latter makes jokes about topics such as their fondness for Harry Potter and awkward celebrity encounters. However, it is possible for one person to portray both of those identities, and do so quite well, even within the same physical location and within a very short period of time. One person that exemplifies this ability is talk show host Stephen Colbert.[3] His successful portrayal of these contrasting identities cannot be attributed to a change of environment, as Colbert's show almost always takes place entirely in his studio, nor to any change in appearance, as Colbert's habitual outfit is a dark suit. Thus, Colbert must be using a different tool to convey these contrasting identities. We posit that this tool is language and that Colbert uses a specific linguistic variant, released word-final /t/, at a higher rate when portraying his political commentator persona as opposed to when he is enacting his comedic interviewer persona.

Language is an instrument which is particularly well-suited to aid in the production and enactment of social personae because it is composed of many versatile components which can all take on their own social meaning.[4] There are a vast number of linguistic variables which can contribute to the creation and portrayal of social personae;

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[1] The introduction provides a brief overview of the major themes of the paper – in this case, language as a tool in persona design – and some important related research.
[2] These first few sentences introduce the general social phenomenon that will be analyzed.
[3] Here, we start to move more explicitly to the specific situation that the paper focuses on, expanding on the social context.
[4] We now bring in the justification for taking a linguistic approach to the problem.

to ensure the most thorough analysis possible, this study focuses on one specific variable and its variants. This variable is /t/ and the variants concerned are unreleased /t/, flap, and the previously mentioned released /t/. The study will be concerned with the word final production of the variable /t/.[5]

As stated in Eckert (2008),[6] interlocutors and passive listeners construct schemata (Piaget, 1954), associations of an object or topic with certain characteristics which are based upon past experiences, when interacting with or listening to others speak.[7] These schemata are used to lead to the association of certain traits with specific linguistic features and to aid in the interpretation of the speech of others (Eckert, 2008). Thus, linguistic variables take on distinct social meanings through schemata. Colbert's use of language draws heavily upon a certain schema in which the released variant of /t/ is correlated with authority and knowledge.[8] This particular schema of released /t/ is described by Bunin Benor (2001) in which she details the indexicality of the aforementioned variant with learnedness and precision. Opposingly, the contrasting variant, unreleased /t/, is commonly associated with informality, and even "sloppiness" (Benor, 2001). These schemata intertwine with Colbert's successful portrayal of his contrasting personae because, as will be shown in the following sections, they are the very linguistic features upon which he draws to construct and differentiate said personae.

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[5] In this paragraph and the next, we introduce the specific feature of focus and why we believe it has social relevance (particularly in the case of Colbert).

[6] Citations should be in APA style unless otherwise specified.

[7] This paragraph also serves a brief literature review. In some cases, the review may be given its own section, but it's not uncommon to see it integrated into the introduction as it is here.

[8] The more closely the literature discussed can be related to specifics of the new study, the better.

As Colbert portrays his political commentator persona while presenting monologues and his comedian persona when interviewing celebrity guests, it was decided that the research would be carried out by coding for the variable /t/ in those specific situations. The division of material from Colbert's show into those two categories led to a prediction that Colbert will use a higher rate of the released variant while assuming his political commentator persona in his monologues than while portraying his comedian persona in interviews. [9]

2. Speaker Background:[10]

Colbert is a native American English speaker who grew up in Charleston, South Carolina. However, as even the most casual viewer of Colbert's talk show is aware, he rarely speaks with even the slightest vestige of a Southern American English accent; nor does he frequently use any linguistic features that are characteristic of Southern American English speech. Colbert addresses this point in an interview with CBS in the following quote:

"At a very young age, I decided I was not going to have a southern accent. Because people, when I was a kid watching TV, if you wanted to use a shorthand that someone was stupid, you gave the character a southern accent. And that's not true. Southern people are not stupid. But I didn't want to seem stupid. I wanted to seem smart. And so I thought, 'Well, you can't tell where newsmen are from.'"

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[9] The hypothesis should be included at the end of the introduction, building on the concepts and ideas addressed so far. (If you are having trouble figuring out what needs to be addressed in the introduction, try writing the hypothesis and working backwards.)

[10] This section is optional. Most of the time, information about speaker background can be folded into the introduction or methodology, but it may be useful to put more emphasis on it if doing a case study of one or two speakers.

As Colbert speaks the same form of English spoken by news anchors from across the country, it is obvious that the negative and erroneous association of Southern American English with low intelligence deeply affected him and caused him to change his manner of speaking. Further, the fact that as a child Colbert consciously altered his speech to a point that it contains virtually no trace of a southern accent shows that Colbert is highly conscious of the associations commonly made with certain linguistic features. This is evident because, although almost all speakers of any language are cognizant of the social meanings of certain linguistic features in the language(s) they speak, most do not actively adopt a particular dialect to replace the dialect that they naturally speak and that is spoken around them; through his adoption of "Newsmen" American English, Colbert did just that. [11]

3. Methodology:[12]

In order to gather the necessary data, each researcher selected two videos: a monologue and an interview. It was decided that Colbert's speech would be analyzed in these two specific types of segments due to the stark contrast between how he presents himself in the monologues compared to in the interviews. Colbert's monologues generally concern serious topics and are conducted while he is assuming his political commentator persona,

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[11] Overall, this speaker background section gives an overview of both Colbert's linguistic background (including information like hometown, dialect region, and profession) and the social consequences it may present. You should always tailor what kind of characteristics to include to the problems the study aims to address.
[12] The methodology section describes the data collection and analysis process, including information about relevant speaker background, transcribing practices, and any linguistic/statistical software used.

which allows him to discuss the topic with gravitas and authority.[13] Contrastingly, when interviewing guests, Colbert portrays his comedian persona and is jovial and comically sarcastic. The monologues concerned a mass shooting in Las Vegas and gun control, comments made by President Trump, comments made by Rex Tillerson (the current US Secretary of State), and neo-nazis in Charlottesville. The interviews were all much more light-hearted, and were conducted with actors Daniel Craig, David Tennant, and Tatiana Maslany, as well as with a Russian oligarch named Mikhail Prokhorov.

The video with oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov was intentionally chosen as a result of the researchers' desire to have one video which took place in a different environment and which featured an interviewee of a different occupation. The researchers wanted to code an interview that was distinct from the rest to discover how much influence the location of the interview and the occupation of the interviewee had on Colbert's use of language during said interview. This would allow the researchers to conclude how much the addressee affected Colbert's construction of personae through speech. As Prokhorov is not an actor and his interview took place in his home in Moscow, this interview had the potential to greatly affect the results of the study.[14]

The videos from Colbert's show were found on the official "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" channel on YouTube.com, a free, publicly accessible website. The researchers began by coding for the total number of tokens that had either a word-final /t/ or a /t/ followed by a word-final silent vowel. Both content and function words were

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[13] Rationale for choosing which features/situations to analyze should be put here if not mentioned in the introduction.
[14] Be sure to mention if any part of your study is different from the rest, and whether this poses a strength or weakness (or both).

included in the coding.[15] Next, the videos were coded again and these tokens were divided into three groups depending upon whether the word-final /t/ was released, unreleased or produced as a flap. Each researcher coded their own videos and then cross-checked the data of the other researchers in the group. In order to cross-check the videos, one researcher watched the videos chosen by one of their colleagues and coded those videos just as they had coded their own. Once they had finished coding the other researchers videos, the results of coding from both coders were compared to ensure that the first researcher's data matched that of their colleague that cross-checked their video. When discrepancies between data sets appeared, a general consensus was agreed upon. During the coding process, it was expected that the analysis of Colbert's speech would show that he uses the released /t/ variant at a higher rate in monologues than in interviews.

4. Data and Findings:[16]

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It is important to note that there were far more tokens collected in the monologues than the interviews since, as the purposes of the interviews were to let the interviewees speak, Colbert said less in these instances than in the monologues, where the only speaker was Colbert, with occasional comments made by cast members not in the camera frame.

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[15] Include as much detail as possible about the features being coded (e.g. content vs. function words) to strengthen credibility of the analysis.
[16] This section presents the findings from the study in as much detail as possible without interpreting them. (This paper includes a bit more interpretation in the data section than would normally be advised – this would usually go into a separate "results" section.)

However, the increased number of tokens in the monologues did not result in a higher percentage of unreleased /t/ in those segments as compared to the interviews. [17]

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There wasn't found to be a higher rate of /t/ release on content versus function words; instead, higher rates of the released variant were found in words that Colbert emphasized because he considered them to be important. Emphasis was placed on words when Colbert wanted to draw the audience's attention to these words or phrases or when a word had a strong emotional connection. [18]

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There is a slight discrepancy in the data collected for the interviews Colbert has with different people that it shown in the data from the video "Confirmed! Daniel Craig Will Return As James Bond". This discrepancy is Colbert's rate of /t/ release in this interview compared to the other interviews. In the interview with Daniel Craig, Colbert's use of the released /t/ variant is much lower than in the other interviews. We found that the two men are very familiar with each other and seem to have a long term friendship, so Colbert could be using more unreleased /t/ in this segment because he is especially at ease with Craig, at least compared to the other guests he had on the show.

With respect to the interview conducted in Russia with oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov, though the setting of the interview changes, Colbert's rates of all of the variants of /t/ were consistent with his rates in the other interviews. This shows that the

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[17] It's important to account for any potentially confounding factors (such as unequal numbers of tokens collected) and explain whether or not they seem to have influenced the data.

[18] Considering other linguistic factors such as word type and phonetic environment (i.e. surrounding sounds) can strengthen analysis – again, the more factors accounted for, the stronger the conclusion.

location of the interviewer and the occupation of the interviewee have little, if any, affect on Colbert's use of speech in the casual interviews. This finding led to the conclusion that Colbert uses the Speaker Design Method in the construction of his social personae. Colbert's use of the Speaker Design Method allows him to construct his personae how he pleases, while still allowing audience members and interlocutors to identify which social persona Colbert is portraying.[19] This is because, as noted by D'Onofrio, "...not only do speakers project particular personae with their speech, listeners use persona-based expectations to process linguistic variation" (2015, p. 38). Thus, listeners and interlocutors use pre-formed associations between discrete linguistic variables and different traits to understand the social persona that a speaker is portraying.[20] Accordingly, Colbert is able to use the Speaker Design Method and audience members and interlocutors are able correctly identify the persona which he is enacting.

5. Issues and Remaining Questions[21]

When selecting and coding the videos, it was necessary to take into account the possibility that most of the dialogue had been written as part of a show script and practiced by Colbert before the final performance and interviews. Due to the possibility that the dialogue was rehearsed and predetermined, the assumption could be made that Colbert's use of released and unreleased /t/ can be attributed to the fact that he had the ability to his rehearsal the monologues. However, even if Colbert rehearses his

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[19] Make reference to concepts – such as speaker design, linguistic insecurity, etc. – that are key to the field whenever possible (especially ones mentioned in class).

[20] Including quotes from other research is a good way to support your interpretation, especially if you provide an explanation of the quote and draw a direct connection to the results.

[21] This section addresses any weaknesses and questions in the study that could not be addressed by the interpretation.

monologues and interview questions, our hypothesis is still supported. This is because Colbert's high rate of /t/ release when performing a rehearsed monologue as opposed to rehearsed interview questions strengthens the concept that /t/ release is the prestige variant that is associated with appearing intelligent and articulate, and therefore is the variant more frequently used when Colbert portrays his serious and learned political commentator persona.

       Another issue is that the sample size is relatively small, as the study focuses on an individual speaker in multiple different contexts, rather than multiple speakers in a variety of situations. If the study had examined the speech of multiple speakers in similar contexts to those that were chosen for Colbert, a larger body of data would have been available and this could affect the ultimate findings of the study. A future study such as that would show if Colbert's percentages of released and unreleased /t/ was mirrored by other talk show hosts who present similar shows, or if the findings of the present study are unique to Colbert.

6. Future Research and Topics of Interest[22]

As previously mentioned, future research could be conducted to discover if the same patterns that are found in Colbert's speech are found in the speech of other talk show hosts, such as Jimmy Fallon, Jon Stewart or Conan O'Brien.[23] This larger body of data would allow for the comparison of the rates of released and unreleased /t/ by different

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[22] Future research can be included in the conclusion (as can issues/remaining questions), but it can also be given its own section to draw attention to factors the study wasn't able to address.

[23] Finding larger or more diverse samples is always a good place to start when thinking about future research topics. Thinking about how to address outstanding or notable weaknesses from the last section can also be helpful.

talk show hosts who enact similar personae to Colbert. Further, the speech of male and female talk show hosts could be compared to see how the use of the variants of the variable /t/ varies by gender. A study such as this could provide interesting insight into the way that a female talk show host uses language to create social personae.

Additionally, a study could be carried out comparing the use of the variants of /t/ in the creation of similar social personae by speakers of different dialects of English, such as American English speakers as opposed to British English speakers.

Further studies could also be carried out concerning the use of different discrete linguistic features in the creation of social personae.

7. Conclusion[24]

In examining the role of the variants of the variable /t/ in the creation of social personae, this study has found that the released /t/ variant is associated with articulateness, authority, and intelligence. Though this study only considered the speech of one person and, thus, was carried out using a relatively small body of data, the aforementioned finding is supported in works by Podesva et al. (2015), Bunin Benor (2001) and Eckert (2008). And although this claim can only be concretely correlated to Colbert's personal associations between that variant and certain traits, these associations must be mirrored by many members of the general public. This is because, as discussed in D'Onofrio (2015) and Campbell-Kibler (2012), listeners also correlate certain variants to certain traits, and they can even use these associations to interpret the speech of the speaker. This

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[24] As with many other types of papers, the format of the conclusion can vary. Here, we take a summary approach, going back over the main findings and key themes. It is also possible, as noted earlier, to end on a discussion of future research topics. Either way, the conclusion should touch on the significance of the study results in one way or another.

explains both how Colbert has come to connect the released /t/ variant to authority,

intelligence and articulateness and how interlocutors and audience members are able to

interpret his use of that variant in the construction of a political commentator personae.

In closing, the role of discrete linguistic variables and their variants in the creation

of social personae is a rich field of study, both due to the vast range of topics and subjects

studied and to the insights that these studies have the potential to reveal.

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