

# AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE MALE AND FEMALE USE OF INTERRUPTIONS, OVERLAPS, QUESTIONS AND ALVEOLAR FLAPS [ɾ] IN MADE IN CHELSEA.

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**Abstract:** This dissertation analyses the effect of speaker sex on the language of Standard Southern British English (SSBE) speakers on reality tv show *Made in Chelsea*. Included are 3 discourse-pragmatic variables; interruptions, overlaps and questions. This study also provides an analysis of 3 phonological variants of intervocalic /t/ which are alveolar stops [t], glottal stops [ʔ] and alveolar flaps [ɾ], the latter variant is the primary focus of the study. The quantitative analysis evaluates the speech of 30 speakers on 5 episodes of *Made in Chelsea*. The results of the quantitative analysis suggest that male speakers tend to use a higher frequency of interruptions than female speakers, while female speakers use more overlaps than male speakers. There is no indication of differences in male and female use of questions. The study also indicates that alveolar flaps are common in SSBE speech and that male speakers are more likely to produce intervocalic /t/ using this variant. The study preliminarily concludes that speaker sex conditions interruptions and overlaps but not questions, and that [ɾ] is rife in SSBE speech and common in male speech. This study provides support for theories on competitive and collaborative communication styles, and a detailed analysis on alveolar flapping in British English, which has scarcely been recognised in research.

**Keywords:** Interruptions, overlaps, questions, alveolar flap, communication style, intervocalic /t/.

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My mum, for reminding me to de-stress and look after myself.

And my friends, for always being there to make me smile.

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## Abstract

This dissertation analyses the effect of speaker sex on the language of Standard Southern British English (SSBE) speakers on reality tv show *Made in Chelsea*. Included are 3 discourse-pragmatic variables; interruptions, overlaps and questions. This study also provides an analysis of 3 phonological variants of intervocalic /t/ which are alveolar stops [t], glottal stops [ʔ] and alveolar flaps [ɾ], the latter variant is the primary focus of the study. The quantitative analysis evaluates the speech of 30 speakers on 5 episodes of *Made in Chelsea*. The results of the quantitative analysis suggest that male speakers tend to use a higher frequency of interruptions than female speakers, while female speakers use more overlaps than male speakers. There is no indication of differences in male and female use of questions. The study also indicates that alveolar flaps are common in SSBE speech and that male speakers are more likely to produce intervocalic /t/ using this variant. The study preliminarily concludes that speaker sex conditions interruptions and overlaps but not questions, and that [ɾ] is rife in SSBE speech and common in male speech. This study provides support for theories on competitive and collaborative communication styles, and a detailed analysis on alveolar flapping in British English, which has scarcely been recognised in research.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Effect of Speaker Sex on Language

Speaker sex has long been an established conditioning factor of speech. The effect it has on language use has been studied numerous times, and the reasons behind male and female speech differences disagree in research. Seminal research states that language differences are a result of status differences between male and female speakers, and speech features reflect male dominance in society (see, for example Lakoff 1973, Zimmerman and West 1975, Fishman 1978). However, society has changed just as research has, and more recent studies seem to favour the idea that male and female speakers socialise in different ways from a young age, and therefore develop different styles of communication, this being the reason for differences in male and female speech (Ersoy 2008).

The objective of this study is to address the effect speaker sex has on the speech of Standard Southern British English (SSBE) speakers on reality TV show *Made in Chelsea*. I will be assessing this by quantitatively analysing the effect speaker sex has on the frequency of interruptions, overlaps and questions on *Made in Chelsea* and evaluating the frequency at which intervocalic /t/ is realised as 3 different variants: alveolar stop [t], glottal stop [ʔ] and alveolar flap [ɾ] and how the use of these variants is conditioned by speaker sex.

## 1.2 Variables

Interruptions and overlaps are contested phenomena in research, this paper identifies the range of definitions operationalised in research, and suggests that this is the reason for such debate. This study defines interruptions as disruptive violations of a speaker's turn (Kollock *et al* 1985, Yuan *et al* 2007) and overlaps as instances of spontaneous speech used with the intention to support the original speaker (Truong 2013), which are illustrated in Chapter 3.

Questions have been said to be a feature of female speech, as an attempt to maintain conversation (Fishman 1978). I provisionally expected a higher frequency of questions from female speakers than male speakers in my study based on Fishman's (1978) findings, however the findings of this study are indicative of no sex effect on their frequency.

Alveolar flaps [ɾ], alveolar stops [t] and glottal stops [ʔ] are 3 identifiable variants of intervocalic /t/. When /t/ is in an intervocalic position, it occurs between vowels, this includes across word boundaries (Gomez 2009 and Scott and Cutler 1984). Although alveolar flaps are not necessarily ignored in research, they are scarcely recognised as a variant of intervocalic /t/ in British English.

The key reason for carrying out this study is to test the effect of speaker sex in reality TV speech. This study aims to contribute to research on male and female communication styles, as the quantitative analysis suggests that the differences in male and female speech in my data are not the result of status differences of the cast members of *Made in Chelsea*. To my knowledge, this study also provides the first preliminary detailed empirical analysis of alveolar flaps in British English, by recognising it as an established variant in SSBE speech. Reality TV provides a new database from which language can be analysed, this paper studies *Made in Chelsea*. Using this reality TV show is relevant in studying the chosen variables as the cast members all use SSBE and are all belong to the same social class. There are also no apparent status differences among the cast member that could affect my results.

This study is unsupportive of the findings of early research about male and female language and contributes to recent work on communication styles by analysing 3 discourse-pragmatic variables; interruptions, overlaps and questions. In addition, this paper analyses intervocalic /t/ as a phonological variable. To my knowledge, there is little detailed study of alveolar flaps in British

English, this study fills this gap by quantitatively analysing the frequency of alveolar flaps, finding they are rife in the results.

The quantitative analysis finds that the male speakers in the speaker sample use interruptions more frequently than female speakers, though this is non-statistical, and that the female speakers use a higher frequency of overlaps than male speakers. The results are therefore indicative of speaker sex conditioning the frequency of these variables. The study finds no significant difference in the frequency of questions used by male and female speakers, suggesting no sex effect here. The results display [r] as the most commonly occurring variant of intervocalic /t/ compared to [t] and [ʔ]. They suggest that frequency of alveolar flaps is conditioned by speaker sex as the male speakers in the study use this variant more frequently than the female speakers.

The preliminary conclusions formed, based on the results suggest that the different findings for male and female speakers are the result of the different styles of communication used by both sexes. They do not suggest that the variables carry connotations of dominance, like seminal research on sex-based speech differences suggests.

The following chapter provides a synopsis of previous research on the way speaker sex conditions language and previous analyses of the variables, followed by the methodology used to collect data for this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the quantitative analysis, and the final chapter discusses the reasons for the results and their theoretical implications.

## 2. Literature Review

This chapter outlines the relevant literature that motivates the inclusion of interruptions, overlaps, questions and alveolar flaps in this study and the effect speaker sex may have on their frequency. The development of research on male and female speech is summarised to highlight the contrasting theories concerning the reasons for sex-based language differences.

### 2.1 Studying Male and Female Speech

There are decades of research into the effect speaker sex has on language. Earlier studies comparing male and female speech focus heavily on status differences between men and women (see, for example, Lakoff 1973, Zimmerman and West 1975, Fishman 1978) suggesting the distribution of certain speech features is reflective of said differences. Features of male speech, such as higher rates of interruption were suggested to give male speakers more control over conversations, indicating dominance and reflecting the higher status they had in society at the time (Bilous and Krauss 1988). While female speech was said to reflect society's view of women as the inferior sex (Lakoff 1973). These early studies provide the initial analysis of speaker sex conditioning interruptions, overlaps and questions, motivating the analysis of these variables in my study.

However, research has shifted towards the idea that male and female speakers have different styles of communication, which motivates differences in speech (Ersoy 2008) and societal roles associated with sex have changed over time, meaning that attributing speech differences to status differences based on sex is less plausible. The idea that different sexes have different communication styles means that they follow different rules in conversation, and use speech features to different effects, giving them different social implications for male and female speakers (Kendall and Tannen 2001), both sexes interpret features in different ways (Maltz and Borker 1998). Tannen (1992) claims that the differences in the way male and female speakers form relationships as children affects their language use. Boys form larger friendship groups that tend to have a hierarchical structure, and use their language to gain high status and challenge others. On the other hand, girls tend to form smaller, more intimate friendships, taking a more egalitarian approach.

According to Ersoy (2008) this leads to the two sexes forming two different communication styles; competitive and collaborative, and their differences in language become more apparent with age (Robertson and Murachver 2003). Both sexes develop a different communication style due to their difference in perception of the purpose of conversation (Merchant 2012). Competitive conversation typically belongs to male speakers (Claes 1999), in which speakers compete for high status by using features such as interruptions, to steal the floor (Ersoy 2008). In collaborative conversation, speakers tend to support each other to show cooperation, speakers are more likely to share the floor, but they are not competing for it (Ersoy 2008). Collaborative communication is typically associated with female speech (Ersoy 2008).

## 2.2 Interruptions and Overlaps

### *2.2.1 Difficulty with Definitions*

Interruptions are a contested phenomenon in research, as some claim there is a sex effect on their overall frequency (see Maltz and Borker 1998, Zhao and Gantz 2006, Ersoy 2008, Zhou and Niu 2017) while others claim speaker sex has no effect (Beattie 1981, Marche and Peterson 1993). This is likely to be the consequence of the number of different definitions of interruptions employed by different researchers, it also suggests this phenomenon is complex (Zhao and Gantz 2006). Beattie (1981) does not find a sex difference in the frequency of interruptions, he defines them as any violation of a speaker's turn in which the first speaker does not complete their utterance, if the first speaker does complete their utterance, he regards this as an instance of overlapping. Marche and Peterson (1993) define interruptions as any instances of simultaneous speech that intrudes an utterance, and they also find no sex effect on rate of interruptions. Dindia (1987: 353) found female speakers to use interruptions more frequently than male speakers, she defined interruptions as "when the listener began to speak at a point that was not a possible completion point for the speaker's utterance." Dindia (1987) and Marche and Peterson (1993) both define interruptions in a very generalised way, which could be the reason for their conclusions about the effect of speaker sex on this variable.

Some studies categorise interruptions into disruptive and supportive interruptions (Zhao and Gantz 2006), while some categorise overlaps into competitive and collaborative overlaps (Truong 2013 and Egerow and Wendemuth 2019). Competitive overlaps are used to compete for the floor by disrupting the main speaker and threatening their turn. Cooperative overlaps signal supportive



agreement and are used to complete utterances (Truong 2013, Egerow and Wendemuth 2019). Menz and Al-Roubaie (2008) use similar definitions to differentiate between disruptive and supportive interruptions. The definitions of these categories seem to be intersecting, as one theorist may regard a competitive overlap as a disruptive interruption, or a supportive interruption as a collaborative overlap and vice versa. Because of this, studies may disagree on sex effects of these variables. Therefore, it is important that the definition of interruptions and overlaps used in this study is clear and specific. Interruptions in this study are defined as an instance of turn violation which is not supportive, used with the intention of taking over a speaker's turn and as more disruptive than an overlap, based on Kollock *et al* (1985) and Yuan *et al* (2007). Overlaps are defined in this study as an instance of simultaneous speech which does not threaten a speaker's turn, used supportively (Truong 2013). I have defined these features this way so that both features in my study do not have multiple functions, eliminating the effect this may have on my data. Both variables are illustrated in Chapter 3.

### 2.2.2 Previous Findings

Zimmerman and West (1975) provided one of the first analyses of male and female interruptions, and found that male speakers use interruptions most frequently in mixed-sex conversations, meaning they are most likely to interrupt a female interlocutor. They claim that differences in speech are parallel to differences in society, particularly in terms of job opportunities and financial status. It would be reasonable to suggest that the difference in these factors between male and female speakers has diminished since Zimmerman and West's study in 1975 and that, in *Made in Chelsea*, there are little to no differences in job opportunities and financial status between cast members. Therefore, in a study of language in modern society, it may not be as viable to accredit sex-based speech differences to these factors.

Zhao and Gantz (2006: 349) define interruptions as "an act in which a new speaker starts a turn while the current speaker has not yet reached a possible point of completion in his turn." They found little difference in the frequency of interruptions used by both sexes overall; 56% used by male and 43% by female speakers. However, they split interruptions into disruptive and cooperative categories, the rates of which were greatly affected by speaker sex in their study; 81% of male interruptions were disruptive while 68% of female interruptions were cooperative. They found male speakers to use more disruptive interruptions (categorised in this study as interruptions)

and female speakers more cooperative ones (categorised as overlaps). They claim these differences are conditioned by status differences and conversation topic.

Rhodes *et al* (2001) and Menz and Al-Roubaie (2008) studied the rate of interruptions during physician-patient interactions. Both studies found that status and sex affected the frequency of interruptions. There are power differences between speakers in Rhodes *et al's* (2001) study, as physicians are of higher status than patients during conversations taking place in a medical setting and therefore likely to produce more interruptions because of this. However, they found male physicians to interrupt patients more than female physicians did. According to Menz and Al-Roubaie (2008: 649) all female speakers in their study used more supportive interruptions (overlaps) which by their definition “can be of a completing, clarifying or mending mode” than male speakers.

Yuan *et al* (2007) found female speakers to use overlaps more frequently than male speakers. Their study also suggests that both male and female speakers use overlaps more frequently when in conversation with female speakers. Coates' (2007) study shows a similar trend, as she claims that overlaps occur more frequently in all-female conversations than all-male ones, and male speakers to use more overlaps in mixed-sex conversations.

Previous literature on male and female rates of interruptions and overlaps formulates the following research questions for this study:

*RQ1: Does speaker sex condition the frequency of interruptions and overlaps?*

*RQ2: Does frequency of interruptions and overlaps differ between same- and mixed-sex conversations?*

Using the definitions of interruptions and overlaps specified for this study, previous literature suggests a higher frequency of interruption use by male speakers, while female speakers seem to take the lead on frequency of overlaps. Previous trends show a higher rate of overlaps in all-female conversations, which allows me to hypothesise the following:

*H1a: Male speakers will display a higher frequency of interruptions than female speakers.*

*H1b: Female speakers will display a higher frequency of overlaps than male speakers.*

*H2a: Male speakers will use interruptions most frequently in mixed-sex conversations while female speakers will use them least frequently in mixed-sex conversations.*

*H2b: Female speakers will use overlaps most frequently in same-sex conversations.*

### 2.3 Questions

Fishman (1978) provided one of the original analyses of the effect of speaker sex on frequency of questions, and the main motivation for analysing questions in this study. She claims that the amount of work put into maintaining a mixed-sex conversation is not distributed equally between sexes, and female speakers work harder by asking more questions, as by doing this they strengthen the possibility of receiving a response. Fishman (1978) also found female speakers to use more tag questions, for example, *it's cold outside, isn't it?* than male speakers, also as an attempt to gain interaction. Kollock *et al* (1985) found that questions in greetings, such as *how are you?* can be used to create further conversations as they demand a response, in which the speaker aims to gain support from their interlocutor via their response.

Maltz and Borker (1998) and Zhou and Niu (2017) acknowledge the idea that female speakers use questions in conversation more frequently than male speakers, and Zhou and Niu (2017) claim that their study partially supports this, but neither studies analyse the frequency of questions quantitatively. In fact, there is a lack of recent empirical research on the effect of sex on questions as a variable, which suggests that questions are no longer seen to be conditioned by speaker sex.

According to Coates (2016), questions tend to be used to elicit information, however they appear to be scarce in all-female conversations. Female speakers are more likely to use questions in supportive functions such as, encouraging interaction, initiating topics and requesting support from other speakers. These tend to be in the form of tag questions. Erwiarti (2021) studied questions and tag questions separately, and found a similar frequency of male and female questions, but found female speakers to use double the amount of tag questions male speakers used.

Fishman (1978) reported female speakers to use more questions than male speakers, but there seems to be limited recent empirical study on the effect of speaker sex on questions in general. However, Coates (2016) and Erwiarti (2021) claim that female speakers produce a higher rate of tag questions than male speakers. Coates (2016) also notes that female speakers are less likely to use questions in same-sex interactions. This prompts me to pose the following research questions:

*RQ3: Does speaker sex condition the frequency of questions, including tag questions, in my data?*

*RQ4: Does frequency of questions differ between same- and mixed-sex conversations?*

And propose the following hypotheses:

*H3: The female speakers in my data will produce more questions than the male speakers.*

*H4: Female speakers will produce more questions in mixed-sex conversation than same-sex, there will be no significant difference in male speakers' use.*

## 2.4 Alveolar Flaps

This study analyses three different ways in which intervocalic /t/ can be realised in speech; alveolar stops [t], glottal stops [ʔ] and alveolar flaps [ɾ] and the sociolinguistic factors that condition this. Alveolar flaps, sometimes referred to as taps, are a phonological variant of intervocalic /t/, used instead of a plosive dental or glottal stop. Alveolar flaps occur when /t/ is positioned between vowels, and the first vowel is stressed (Gomez 2009). This includes intervocalic /t/ across word boundaries (Scott and Cutler 1984).

Picard (1997) claims there is a lack of formal study on the process of intervocalic /t/ flapping, and thus a gap in research. Alveolar flaps have not always been recognised as a variant in British English, Scott and Cutler (1984) claim they are much more apparent in American English. However, Badia Barrera (2015) and Alderton (2021) report instances of flapping in Standard Southern British English (SSBE), the dialect used by *Made in Chelsea* cast members. It is suggested that alveolar flaps are used by SSBE speakers to avoid the working class stereotype associated with glottal stops, while simultaneously avoiding the formal connotations tied to alveolar stops. Alderton (2021) develops this study by claiming that alveolar flaps are used as an alternative to glottal stops or alveolar stops, and are a mark of high social class used to indicate prestige but also informality. Therefore, the following research question has been formulated for this study:

*RQ5: How often is /t/ realised as an alveolar flap in comparison to the other variants?*

Badia Barrera's (2015) study focuses on the effect of type of education on the use of /t/ variants. She found that the privately educated people in her study used the least glottal stops and the most alveolar flaps. Alderton (2021) also found a common use of flaps by speakers who were privately educated in his study. This allows me to formulate a hypothesis:

*H5: /t/ will be realised as /r/ most frequently compared to /ʔ/ and /t/.*

Male speakers are found more likely to use flaps as authoritative and informal associations appear to be most appealing to them (Badia Barrera 2015 and Alderton 2021). Female speakers are found to use more standard forms of language (Gordon 1997 and Meyerhoff 2011) which in this case is [t]. The research question and hypothesis regarding speaker sex effect on frequency of alveolar flaps is as follows:

*RQ6: Does speaker sex condition the frequency of alveolar flaps in my data?*

*H6: Male speakers will use a higher frequency of alveolar flaps than the female speakers in my sample.*

## 2.5 Reality TV

As stated by Sung (2013: 26) “media representations play an important role in shaping the ways in which audiences understand and male sense of the social world.” Media such as reality TV reinforces stereotypical male and female behaviour as it influences an audience’s perception of what is appropriate to each sex. Cast members of *Made in Chelsea* are constructing and performing their sex identity which suggests sex-based speech differences will be apparent. Sung (2013) finds this in their study of *The Apprentice* claiming there is evidence of male and female communication styles differing. SturtzSreetharan (2017) notes a lack of analysis of discourse on reality TV. Discourse analysis on reality TV is relevant as speaker identity and social meanings behind features of speech are represented through discourse, thus motivating the analysis of pragmatic variables in reality TV in this study.

Speaker sex is a vital driving mechanism of reality TV, therefore representations of sex, and social class, relevant to the use of alveolar flaps, are likely to be heightened. This means that trends of data according to speaker sex are likely to arise, but may not be applicable to general populations of speakers (Holmes-Elliott and Levon 2017). However, this is relevant to the research questions in this study as it focuses on upper-middle class speakers of reality TV.

### 3. Methodology

In order to operationalise the hypotheses stated in Chapter 2, I conducted a quantitative analysis described in the ensuing sections. This allowed me to evaluate the extent to which speaker sex may condition the use of discourse-pragmatic and phonological variables in my study.

#### 3.1 Data

The data were gathered from *Made in Chelsea*, an established, popular reality TV show which follows the lives of a group of people in their twenties who were born into some of the most affluent families in London. Holmes-Elliott and Levon (2017: 1049) refer to *Made in Chelsea* as “engineered reality” as scenes from the show are staged by producers, but the data collected is from spontaneous conversation, as no interactions seen on the show are scripted. The cast members use a Southern Standard British English accent (SSBE), used by many of Britain’s upper-middle class (Holmes-Elliott and Levon 2017). The speaker sample was stratified by speaker sex, as it is the main social factor this study focuses on, and whether the conversation was between same or mixed-sex speakers. The speaker sample contains 30 speakers, 14 of which are female, 16 are male.

I collected the data by transcribing and analysing speech from 5 episodes of *Made in Chelsea*; 3 episodes from Season 1 and 2 from Season 8. Due to limitations of time available to collect data, not all episodes of *Made in Chelsea* could be analysed. Using 5, 45-minute episodes provided a representative sample of data and was attainable within the time limit. I chose these episodes to include data from when the series started in 2011 and some episodes from 3 years into the show. Cast members on the show change throughout seasons, so collecting data from more than one season increased the speakers in my speaker sample. This also reduces the likelihood of individual speakers affecting my data, making the results more generalisable. I transcribed the data in Excel as this software allowed me to look at the effect of speaker sex on multiple variables.

As I collected data from a reality TV show, it is possible that interactions with people who are not part of the show could be staged. Therefore, only interactions between cast members on the show were included, conversations with non-cast members such as waiters, drivers, pets and meta-linguistic commentary were excluded from the data set as these interactions are not instances of

natural conversation. Telephone conversations between cast members were included as this displays spontaneous conversation between speakers.

### 3.2 Variables

The linguistic variables in this study are interruptions, overlaps, questions and intervocalic /t/. Therefore, every token of each variable was recorded. The dataset is comprised of 130 tokens of interruptions, 323 tokens of overlaps, 721 tokens of questions, 220 tokens of [t], 223 of [ʔ] and 401 of [r]. I operationalised my hypotheses regarding these variables as follows.

Interruptions are defined in this study as a violation of a speaker's turn which is not supportive, with the intention of taking over a turn (Kollock *et al* 1985). Overlaps are different, as they do not tend to threaten a speaker's turn, they are often used cooperatively in support (Truong 2013). Based on literature cited in the previous chapter, I hypothesised that speaker sex will affect a speaker's frequency of interruptions and overlaps, as male speakers would use interruptions more frequently while female speakers would use more overlaps. In order to test these hypotheses, I coded the data for when an interruption occurred (1-3).

- (1) Francis: *There's nothing more beautiful than a girl in fur-*  
Fredrik: *just quickly, can I talk to you about Caggie?*
- (2) Fredrik: *Yeah well you've gotta stay in good shape-*  
Millie: *Did we kiss that night?*
- (3) Spencer: *Well mate I-*  
Hugo: *I feel like I've been run over several times.*

In Examples (1-3), we can see *Fredrick*, *Millie* and *Hugo* interrupt their interlocutor as their utterances are off-topic and disrupt the original speaker's turn. In examples (4-6) we can see these are instances of overlaps because *Hugo* and *Cheska's* utterances are on the same topic as their interlocutor, therefore these are not attempts to take the original speaker's turn, and they are supportive.

- (4) Caggie: *Can't even explain, like right now*  
Hugo: *just to make you feel better we're not judgmental at all*
- (5) Spencer: *I've been better*  
Hugo: *looking a bit worse for wear, big night.*
- (6) Ollie: *Charles Dickens wrote Great Expectations absolutely*  
Cheska: *Great Expectations?*

The third variable is questions. I coded utterances as questions when they had the function of receiving a verbal or non-verbal response from an addressee (Hawkins and Power 1999) or with the purpose of gaining information (Freed 1994). I also included tag questions as interrogatives, as they can be used to encourage conversation (Kollock *et al* 1985) which is the function of questions this study focuses on. Using Kollock *et al*'s (1985) study as a model, I included questions in greetings as interrogatives, as they are used to encourage conversation and look for support. Examples (7-10) all demand a response from their addressee, (7-8) are coded as questions as their purpose is to elicit information, as is (9) but this can also be used in a greeting. (10) is an example of a tag question.

- (7) *Will you be playing that card later?*
- (8) *I mean what do you think she's gonna say?*
- (9) *How are you doing sweetie?*
- (10) *I'd rather take you on a date, you know?*

The phonological variable intervocalic /t/ has three variants: alveolar stop [t], glottal stop [ʔ] and alveolar flap [ɾ]. The phonological context in which this occurs is between vowels either within a word or across a word boundary (Scott and Cutler 1984). Previous literature cited in the preceding chapter led me to hypothesise that [ɾ] will be the most frequent variant of /t/ compared to [ʔ] and [t], and that male speakers will use this variant more frequently than female speakers. Examples (11-13) display the 3 variants of /t/. An alveolar stop can be seen in (11), alveolar flap in (12) and glottal stop in (13).

- (11) *And bring my shots later [leitʔ:]*
- (12) *Pretty tame actually to be honest [priɾi]*
- (13) *Well it's a funny way of showing it I guess [iʔ]*

Only tokens of intervocalic /t/ which occur after the stress in a word were included (Gomez 2009), this is because flapping only occurs to intervocalic post-stress /t/ (Monnot and Freeman 1972). This means that instances of intervocalic /t/ which occurred across word boundaries and in a word-initial position (14-16) were excluded from the data set.

- (14) *He tells everyone he's in love with you, openly.*
- (15) *You have to support me.*
- (16) *Topshop is definitely a turn-off.*



Each token of intervocalic /t/ was transcribed in a separate cell in Excel, even if they appeared in the same sentence, as one sentence may contain multiple variants of /t/. The term intervocalic position here refers to /t/ occurring between phonological vowels, not orthographic vowels. For example (4) orthographically is not the correct environment but phonetically is.

(17) *Party* [pa:ti]

This also applies to instances such as (18-19) or instances of h-dropping (20).

(18) *Maybe your pillows are not cleaned right or something* [rait ɔ:]

(19) *Pretty* [priti]

(20) *You're not happy* [nɒt api]

The same principle applies in reverse, as (21) appears to be an intervocalic environment orthographically but is not phonetically, therefore instances such as this were excluded from the dataset.

(21) *I don't think Spencer would be happy with that one.* [ðæt wɒn]

Only native speakers of British English were included in the speaker sample, as this study focuses on SSBE speakers from Chelsea, therefore utterances produced by speakers who are not native English speakers were excluded from the dataset.

The sociolinguistic variable in this study is speaker sex, the variants are male and female. It is important to distinguish between sex and gender here. An individual's sex is their biological category, male or female, gender is a social construct of sex, which is a complex, subjective spectrum (Eckert 1989). This study quantitatively analyses the effect of speaker sex on language, therefore the data are not coded for gender.

### 3.3 Representativeness and Reliability

The presence of cameras and staged scenarios on *Made in Chelsea* could affect the representativeness of my data as this could lead to the speakers in my sample adopting performative speech styles (Holmes-Elliott and Levon 2017). However, all speakers in my sample experience this, so the effect this may have on my data does not vary between speakers. Additionally, Schilling-Estes (1998) claims that speech is always performative to a certain degree.

This study analyses sex effects on language, therefore it was important to look at same-sex and mixed-sex conversations (Bilous and Krauss 1988). To look at differences in conversational behaviour depending on speaker sex, it is necessary to study more than one conversational situation, i.e. same and mixed-sex conversations. If the rate at which male speakers interrupted other male speakers was the same as the one at which they interrupt female speakers, this feature could not be attributable to speaker sex of the interlocutor (Bilous and Krauss 1988). Some sex-based language differences are more prevalent in same-sex conversations than they are in mixed-sex ones (Ridgeway and Diekema 1992).

As speaker sex is the focus of this study, it is necessary to control for age and social class, as these factors can also condition my variables (Eckert 1989, Badia Barrera 2015). Collecting data from *Made in Chelsea* is useful as all the cast members belong to the same age group (early to mid-twenties) and social class (upper-middle).

### 3.4 Data Quantification

Interruptions, overlaps and questions are all discourse-pragmatic variables, which means they do not have easily identifiable variants. Therefore, to quantify the frequency of these variables in my data, I used normalised frequencies. Raw frequencies can be misleading. A speaker's frequency of interruptions or questions may be higher just because they spoke more. I used normalised frequencies to control for the effect of verbosity on these variables (Kollock *et al* 1985). The total word count of the dataset is 24,829 words. I divided the raw tokens of each variable by this, then multiplied by 10,000 to calculate their normalised frequency per 10,000 words. Decimals were rounded to the next whole number. I used log-likelihood tests on the raw numbers to assess the statistical significance of my results for these variables.

To quantitatively analyse the frequency of each variant of intervocalic /t/, I calculated their proportional frequency, by dividing the number of instances of each variable by the number of possible instances they could occur in, to give a percentage. The statistical significance of these results was tested using Chi-square tests.

#### 4. Results

This chapter presents the results found in the quantitative analysis described in Chapter 3. First, I compare the proportional frequencies of alveolar stops, glottal stops and alveolar flaps in my data to address the research question concerning the apparency of [ɾ] in Standard Southern British English. Following this, the normalised frequencies of interruptions, overlaps and questions from male and female speakers are compared, along with their frequency in same-sex and mixed-sex conversations. Finally, the frequency at which male speakers use [t], [ʔ] and [ɾ] are compared to that at which they are used by female speakers.

*Table 1. Raw frequency and normalised frequency per 10,000 words.*

	Variable			
	Interruptions	Overlaps	Questions	/t/
Raw Frequency	130	323	721	844
Normalised frequency	52	130	289	n/a

The overall distributions of each variable are presented in Table 1. Questions had the highest normalised distribution, and the normalised frequency of overlaps is high compared to that of interruptions, at over double.

*Table 2. Raw frequency and proportional frequency of each variant.*

	Variant		
	[t]	[ʔ]	[ɾ]
Raw Frequency	221	221	402
Proportional Frequency	26%	26%	48%

To test the hypothesis regarding the frequency of each variant of intervocalic /t/, I calculated the proportional frequency for [t], [ʔ] and [ɾ]. Table 2 shows an uneven distribution across the 3 variants /t/. We can, however, see in the first and second columns that speakers used [t] and [ʔ] at the same rate. It is apparent in Table 2 that intervocalic /t/ was realised most frequently as [ɾ] by the speakers in the sample, at almost double the rate at which [t] and [ʔ] was used.

To operationalise the hypothesised sex effects on the frequency of interruptions, overlaps and questions, I calculated their normalised frequencies as seen in tables 3-5.

Table 3. Raw and normalised frequency of interruptions based on sex.

	Interruptions					
	Speaker sex					
	Male			Female		
	Total	Same Sex	Mixed Sex	Total	Same Sex	Mixed Sex
Raw Frequency	79	51	28	51	19	32
Normalised Frequency	58	37	20	46	17	29
Total Word Count	13662			11178		

The data in Table 3 is suggestive of a sex effect on the frequency of interruptions, as the normalised frequencies in the first and fourth columns show that overall, male speakers used interruptions more frequently than female speakers. This difference is non-statistical, however, as the log-likelihood value is 1.77 which is  $<3.84$ . Male speakers interrupted more frequently in same-sex conversations than in mixed-sex conversations, this difference is statistically significant. Conversely, female speakers interrupted more frequently in mixed-sex conversations, however this difference is non-statistical. According to Table 3, male speakers used more interruptions in same-sex conversations while female speakers used more in mixed-sex conversations, meaning both sexes interrupted a male interlocutor more frequently

Table 4. Raw and normalised frequency of overlaps based on sex.

	Overlaps					
	Speaker Sex					
	Male			Female		
	Total	Same Sex	Mixed Sex	Total	Same Sex	Mixed Sex
Raw Frequency	146	57	89	177	80	97
Normalised Frequency	107	42	65	158	72	87
Total Word Count	13662			11178		

Table 4 tentatively suggests that female speakers used higher rate of overlaps than male speakers overall. The log-likelihood value is 12.45, which is  $>3.84$ , making this sex-based difference statistically significant. Speaker sex did not seem to influence whether speakers used overlaps more frequently in same or mixed-sex conversations, as both male and female speakers produced more overlaps in mixed-sex conversations. However, this is only a statistically significant result for the male speakers in the dataset, not the female speakers.

Table 5. Raw and normalised frequency of questions based on sex.

	Questions					
	Speaker Sex					
	Male			Female		
	Total	Same Sex	Mixed Sex	Total	Same Sex	Mixed Sex
Raw Frequency	392	175	217	329	136	193
Normalised Frequency	286	128	159	294	122	173
Total Word Count	13662			11178		

The normalised frequencies in Table 5 suggest a small, non-statistical difference in the overall frequency of questions due to speaker sex as female speakers used questions more. The male and female speakers in the sample used questions more frequently in mixed-sex conversations, this difference is statistically significant for both sexes.

Table 6. Raw and proportional frequency based on sex.

	[t]		[ʔ]		[r]	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	107	23	125	26	242	51
Female	113	31	98	26	159	43

Table 6 is indicative of a non-statistical difference in frequency of /t/ variants depending on speaker sex. We can see in the final column that both sexes used [r] most frequently, males using them at a higher rate than females. Male speakers used [ʔ] more frequently than [t], while female speakers used the standard form [t] more frequently than [ʔ], meaning that females used [t] more frequently than males, this is non-statistical.

## 5. Discussion

In this chapter I discuss my results in relation to the research questions and hypotheses posed in this study and their relevance to previous literature. I offer explanations for the trends seen in my results and identify the implications this study has for research. The quantitative analysis in Chapter 4 suggests that speaker sex conditions the frequency of interruptions and overlaps, but not questions in speech. Intervocalic /t/ was realised most frequently as an alveolar flap in my results, and the male speakers used this variant more frequently than the female speakers. This study is relatively small in scale due to limitations on time and resources therefore the findings and conclusions in this chapter are preliminary.

To reiterate, the objective of this study was to assess the extent to which speaker sex conditions the frequency of interruptions, overlaps and questions. The study also aims to analyse the frequency at which intervocalic /t/ is realised as an alveolar stop [t], glottal stop [ʔ] or alveolar flap [ɾ] in Standard Southern British English, and the effect speaker sex has on the frequency of [ɾ].

### 5.1 Questions

Of the discourse-pragmatic variables in the study, some seemed to be conditioned by speaker sex, while others did not. I will begin by discussing questions, the research questions concerning this variable are as follows:

*Does speaker sex condition the frequency of questions, including tag questions, in my data?*

*Does frequency of questions differ between same- and mixed-sex conversations?*

I hypothesised a higher frequency of questions from female speakers than male speakers, but this variable did not seem to be affected by speaker sex in my results. While the normalised frequency of questions used by female speakers (286 per 10,000 words) was slightly higher than those used by male speakers (294 per 10,000 words), this difference was small and not statistically significant, falsifying my hypothesis. I also hypothesised that the female speakers would use more questions in mixed-sex conversations than in same-sex. The results show that both sexes used more questions in mixed-sex conversations, this is statistically significant. This suggests that frequency of questions does differ between same- and mixed-sex conversations. However, this does not appear to vary between male and female speakers, and therefore does not seem to be conditioned by the

sex of the speaker. This partially supports my hypothesis that postulates a higher frequency of female questions in mixed-sex conversations, but the higher normalised frequency of male questions seen in mixed-sex conversations compared to same-sex conversations was not anticipated and therefore does not support the theory behind the hypothesis.

Research by Fishman (1978) motivated the study of this variable, as she found female speakers to use questions more frequently than males, claiming they work harder to maintain the conversation. She analysed interactions between male and female speakers in their homes, claiming there is a hierarchical relationship between the two, as a result of the different roles men and women have at home and in the workplace. Fishman (1978: 400) describes “an overwhelming difference between male and female use of questions...the three men asked fifty-nine questions, the women one hundred and fifty, nearly three times as many.” The difference in male and female frequency of questions in my results is arguably not significant enough to support Fishman’s theories, as the female speakers in my data only asked eight more questions per 10,000 words than the male speakers. This suggests that Fishman’s (1978) claim that there is a hierarchical relationship between male and female speakers at home and in the workplace is unfounded.

Fishman’s (1978) study was carried out much earlier than this project, when views towards sex in society and therefore societal roles tied to sex were different to how they are now. Therefore, the difference in results could be said to reflect changes in society as there are less likely to be hierarchical roles in interactions between male and female speakers that are purely based on sex. Differences in use of questions could be due to status differences of speaker as Fishman (1978) suggests, but there is no hierarchical structure among the cast members of *Made in Chelsea*. This could account for the results suggesting no sex effect on use of questions. A lack of recent literature on male and female use of questions also suggests little current sex effect on frequency of questions in speech.

Including tag questions in the analysis of questions in this study may be a confounding factor affecting the data. Erwiarti (2021) found no sex effect on the frequency of questions, but did find a significant effect on the frequency of tag questions. This suggests that the difference in rates of questions between same- and mixed-sex conversations for both male and female speakers could be due to a sex effect on tag questions in my data. Separating questions and tag questions in the

quantitative analysis may be beneficial in future research on the effect has speaker sex on frequency of questions to avoid this confounding factor.

## 5.2 Interruptions and Overlaps

The research questions formulated regarding interruptions and overlaps were:

*Does speaker sex condition the frequency of interruptions and overlaps?*

*Does frequency of interruptions and overlaps differ between same- and mixed-sex conversations?*

Based on previous literature, I hypothesised that interruptions would be used most by male speakers, my results show a normalised frequency of 58 per 10,000 words for male speakers and 46 per 10,000 words for female speakers. These results support the hypothesis, all though the difference in male and female frequencies of interruptions is non-statistical. I also hypothesised that the male speakers would use interruptions more commonly in mixed-sex conversation than same-sex, however my results reject this hypothesis as the male speakers used more interruptions in same-sex conversations and this difference is statistically significant. I hypothesised that the female speakers would use interruptions least often when in mixed-sex conversation, however my results reject this hypothesis as they used them most frequently in mixed-sex conversations in my data. This allows me to hypothesise that male interruptions are not the result of a female interlocutor and thus reflective of high status, but rather they are just a feature of the competitive communication style male speakers use (Ersoy 2008) and that the higher rate of female interruptions in mixed-sex conversation is due to them converging to the male communication style (Grainger and Dunbar 2009).

As my results show a higher frequency of interruptions from the male speakers than female speakers in my sample, they follow the same general trend of many other studies on male and female speech (Zimmerman and West 1975, Tannen 1990, Maltz and Borker 1998, Ersoy 2008 and Zhou and Niu 2017), which all found male speakers to be more likely to interrupt their interlocutor. However, my results do not support the theories proposed by Maltz and Borker (1998) as they claim that differences in interruption rates are due to status differences, and male speakers use them more often to dominate their interlocutor. My results display both male and female speakers using interruptions most frequently when in conversation with male speakers, suggesting



that while male speakers use interruptions most frequently, they are also interrupted the most. This does not support Zhou and Niu (2017), as they found that male speakers are most likely to interrupt female speakers. Rhodes *et al* (2001) found that female speakers were interrupted most in their study, however there are status differences between speakers in this study that are not due to speaker sex alone, as they analysed interactions between physicians and patients, in which the physicians are of higher status. My results do not imply status differences between sexes, and are supportive of Ersoy (2008) as she found male speakers to use interruptions more frequently, but claimed that this is due to differences in communication styles rather than power.

I hypothesised that the female speakers in my sample would use overlaps more frequently than the male speakers, as the normalised frequency of female overlaps was much higher than that of male overlaps; 158 compared to 107 per 10,000 words, a statistically significant difference, the results support this hypothesis. I also hypothesised that there would be a higher frequency of overlaps in all-female conversations rather than mixed-sex ones, however my results falsify this hypothesis by showing an opposite trend as both male and female speakers used overlaps more frequently in mixed-sex conversations in my data.

As my results show a much higher normalised frequency of overlaps from female speakers than male speakers, they support Coates (2007), Yuan *et al* (2007), Ersoy (2008) and Grainger and Dunbar (2009) who also noted overlaps as a very common feature in female speech. Ersoy (2008) states that overlaps occur most frequently in all-female conversations, however my results show a different trend, as the female speakers used more overlaps in mixed-sex conversations. My results are supportive of Coates (2007) and Yuan *et al* (2007) as they find male speakers to use overlaps more frequently in mixed-sex conversations than all-male conversations.

### 5.3 Competitive vs Collaborative Communication

The findings in Chapter 4 are not suggestive of status differences between male and female speakers. This prompts me to hypothesise that the differences between male and female rates of interruptions and overlaps in my data is a result of the different communication styles used by both sexes during conversation. The higher frequency of male interruptions and female overlaps in my data can be accounted for using theories of competitive and collaborative communication.

Interruptions and overlaps seem to have different social indications to different sexes (Merchant 2012, Kendall and Tannen 2001). This allows me to hypothesise that the male and female speakers in my sample are using interruptions and overlaps differently as they view the purpose of both features differently. My results suggest that the male and female speakers in my sample are employing different communication styles and are therefore using interruptions and overlaps at different rates.

The male speakers in my data using a higher frequency of interruptions than the female speakers could be reflective of the competitive communication style they employ during conversation, using interruptions to compete for the floor (Claes 1999 and Ersoy 2008). Moreover, the higher frequency of overlaps from the female speakers compared to male speakers in my data could be indicative of a collaborative communication style, typically associated with female speech behaviour, as they use overlaps to support their interlocutor (Ersoy 2008).

Kendall and Tannen (2001) claim that female communication style can vary depending on their interlocutor and the context of conversation. Additionally, Grainger and Dunbar (2009) state that it is common for female speakers to converge their communication style to that of a male speaker. My results may support this, as the female speakers in my data used more interruptions when in mixed-sex conversations, this could be evidence of them accommodating to the competitive communication style of their male interlocutor. Grainger and Dunbar (2009) claim that female speakers are much more likely to converge to their interlocutor's communication style than male speakers, however, my results suggest that male speakers also undergo this process, as the male speakers used more overlaps during mixed-sex conversations than in same-sex ones.

#### 5.4 Class and Variable /t/

The research questions composed with respect to intervocalic /t/ were as follows:

*How often is /t/ realised as an alveolar flap in comparison to the other variants?*

*Does speaker sex condition the frequency of alveolar flaps in my data?*

Findings from Badia Barrera (2015) and Alderton (2021) led me to hypothesise that there would be a high frequency of alveolar flaps in my data, compared to the other variants of /t/. The results shown in the previous chapter support my hypothesis, as the variable /t/ was realised most

frequently as [r] in the cast members' speech, at 48%. The other variants of /t/, [t] and [ʔ] had the same proportional frequency of 26%.

My results support those of Badia Barrera (2015) and Alderton (2021) who report instances of alveolar flapping in Standard Southern British English (SSBE). The high rate of alveolar flaps in my data can be accounted for by Badia Barrera (2015) as she suggests that type of education affects frequency of t-glottalling and speakers who attended private boarding schools seem to resist adopting glottal stops [ʔ] into their speech, reflecting the stigmatized perception of this variant. The privately educated speakers in her study displayed the lowest rate of [ʔ] and the highest rate of [r]. My results develop Badia Barera's (2015) study by looking specifically at privately educated speakers and the variation within this group. Alderton (2021) also suggested flapping to be led by speakers who were privately educated, the cast members of *Made in Chealsea* are all likely to have been educated privately and this allows me to hypothesise that education has had an effect on my data, this could be analysed further in future research by comparing cast members' speech from different reality TV shows who have had different types of education.

Badia Barrera (2015) and Alderton (2021) both suggest that SSBE speakers use flapping to avoid the working-class stigma of glottal stops and the stiff formality of alveolar stops. The way in which speakers want to be perceived is particularly relevant in this study, as reality TV cast members use speech behaviour as part of their construction of their identity (Sung 2013). Therefore I could hypothesise that the speakers in my dataset use [r] so frequently as an alternative to [ʔ] and [t], in order to avoid being perceived as the working class stereotype, as speakers from other regions or social classes may be more likely to use [ʔ], according to Badia Barrera (2015).

Glottal stops account for 26% of realisations of intervocalic /t/ in my data for both male and female speakers. Instances of glottal stops in my data suggests that the speakers in my sample are not completely avoiding using them, rather they appear to favour alveolar flaps as an alternative. Alderton (2021) notes that, as SSBE speakers do still use some glottal stops, it could be inferred that these speakers don't use [r] to avoid using [ʔ], but rather as an alternative to indicate a different social meaning, suggesting that the speakers in my sample are using it as an alternative.

### 5.5 Sex and Variable /t/

Based on previous literature (see cited in literature review, Gordon 1997, Meyerhoff 2011, Badia Barrera 2015 and Alderton 2021), I hypothesised that the male speakers in my sample would produce alveolar flaps at a higher rate than the female speakers. The results support this hypothesis, as the male speakers used [r] more frequently than the female speakers. My results are in line with Badia Barrera's (2015) and Alderton's (2021) studies, as they both also found male speakers to produce more alveolar flaps than the female speakers in their data, thus my data supports their findings.

These results allow me to hypothesise a sex effect on the use of standard forms, as the female speakers in my data used the standard variant [t] more frequently than the male speakers. This is supported by Gordon (1997) who found middle-class women to use more standard forms of language to avoid being perceived as working class, and Meyerhoff (2011), who suggests that female speakers could be more sensitive to what is a standard form of speech, and could also be evaluated more on how they appear compared to male speakers.

Therefore, the higher frequency of alveolar flaps from male speakers could be due the male speakers in my data favouring an authoritative yet informal perception of themselves and the female speakers using the standard variant [t] more often than them, as they may focus more on how they want to be perceived. This is particularly relevant in this study, as the cast members are performing their identity on reality TV.

### 5.6 Implications for Research

Due to constraints on time available to conduct this study, the results are consequently limited. Although this is not to criticize the validity of the results in the previous chapter, further study analysing all episodes on *Made in Chelsea* would develop the preliminary findings of this paper.

The findings in this study are suggestive of a distinction between male and female communication styles, supporting other research on this, such as that of Kendall and Tannen (2001), Ersoy (2008) and Merchant (2012). My study provides a preliminary contribution to these studies by providing tentative evidence of the effect of communication styles differentiated by speaker sex, while also supporting the shift in research away from theories of speech features indicating dominance.

Alveolar flaps are not a well-recognised feature of British English, according to Badia Barrera (2015), they are hardly reported in Standard Southern British English at all. To my knowledge, this study provides the first detailed quantitative analysis of alveolar flaps in British English, contributing original preliminary findings to research on SSBE phonology. Further study of alveolar flaps on a larger scale, including speech from the general population, not just specifically reality TV cast members, would be beneficial to broaden research on Standard Southern British English.

This study analyses discourse-pragmatic features on reality TV, which is lacking in research according to SturtzSreetharan (2017). Holmes-Elliott and Levon (2017) note a caveat to using reality TV as a source of data, as the show is edited and consequently there may be biases towards which interactions are included or cut out. I should acknowledge the effect that editing of reality TV could have on the distribution of pragmatic features, such as interruptions, overlaps and questions, as the editors and producers may have an incentive to include certain interactions for the purpose of entertainment, such as confrontations. Uneven distributions may be a result of the show's editing, editors may include more confrontational interactions for audience entertainment and this could affect my data, for example, interruptions tend to occur more in confrontation, as Smith (2012) claims that interruptions usually signal conflict. A follow up study comparing what was and wasn't cut from the show to investigate any biases from the editors and producers of reality TV would be interesting.

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