A Review of a Final Thesis

submitted to the Department of English and ELT Methodology,
Faculty of Arts, Charles University

Name and titles of the reviewer:

Reviewed as: ☐ a supervisor   ☒ an opponent

Author of the thesis: Barbora Bockova
Title of the thesis: *Phonetic realization of coda /t/in curren tSouthern British English pronunication*
Year of submission: 2022
Submitted as: ☒ a bachelor's thesis   ☐ a master's thesis

Level of expertise:
☐ excellent ☒ very good ☐ average ☐ below average ☐ inadequate

Factual errors:
☐ almost none ☒ appropriate to the scope of the thesis ☐ frequent less serious ☐ serious

Chosen methodology:
☒ original and appropriate ☐ appropriate ☐ barely adequate ☐ inadequate

Results:
☐ original ☒ original and derivative ☐ non-trivial compilation ☐ cited from sources ☐ copied

Scope of the thesis:
☒ too large ☐ appropriate to the topic ☐ adequate ☐ inadequate

Bibliography (number and selection of titles):
☐ above average (scope or rigor) ☒ average ☐ below average ☐ inadequate

Typographical and formal level:
☒ excellent ☐ very good ☐ average ☐ below average ☐ inadequate

Language:
☐ excellent ☒ very good ☐ average ☐ below average ☐ inadequate

Typos:
☐ almost none ☒ appropriate to the scope of the thesis ☐ numerous

Brief description of the thesis (by the supervisor, ca. 100-200 words):

Review, comments and notes (ca. 100-200 words)

Strong points of the thesis:

The research idea is interesting and highly relevant, given the fact of changing British phonology (especially with regards to glottalization). The hypotheses are reasonable and drawn from the appropriate literature; results confirm many details known from previous literature, which lends credibility to the methodology and analyses of the present thesis.

Graphs are well done (even though color selection could have been better at times: e.g., purple/ blue distinction).

Weak points of the thesis:

Large sections of the introduction are based on a small range of literature (e.g., strong reliance on Ladefoged and Maddieson). Some of the hypotheses are not sufficiently discussed in the introduction, such as the sex difference and lexical frequency in relation to phonetic variation. The introduction should have been more narrowly focussed on the specific research questions you asked in the Methods section.

Questions to answer during the Defence and suggested points of discussion:

1. Please comment on the role of lexical frequency rate and the spread of glottalization in SBE.
2. From a speech perception/ recognition viewpoint, how do you explain the large number of co-existing (socio-) phonetic variants in Southern British English?

Other comments:

In the introduction, and throughout the thesis, there is a large number of direct quotations. Many of these could have been paraphrased.

On page 26 you write: " *In addition, the stops in the voiceless series generally acquire aspiration – [pʰ,tʰ,kʰ] – when occurring initially in accented syllables; the difference, however, is not contrastive, that is to say voiceless aspirated stops are allophones occurring usually occurring in complimentary distribution.*

→ I don't quite understand what is meant here. What difference is not contrastive – the one between voiceless aspirated and voiceless unaspirated? If so, this is not entirely correct. In fact, word-initially you have short-lag unaspirated (lenis) or long-lag aspirated (fortis) in English. And these two categories would be contrastive.

On page 30 you write "However, to be precise, rather than being aspirated, the alveolar plosive tends to be "released into a period of /s/-like friction" called affrication (Lindsey, 2019, p. 56).

→ What is an example of this? Do you mean that, for instance "steam" has an aspirated t?

p. 34:

The last rather rare variant to be mentioned is a pre-aspirated /t/, transcribed [ʰt] (in e.g., *putting* [ˈpʰʊʰtɪŋ]).

→ what an interesting variant!

The term "semantic status" usually refers to some type of meaning that goes beyond just grammatical vs. lexical word classes.

p. 40: a table with all target words would be appropriate around here.

You write on p. 40: the words "were then analysed through careful auditory analysis". It would have been desirable to establish reliability of your auditory coding, i.e., have another coder listen to a portion of your sample and do the same classifications. In addition, I wonder if you encountered any problems with coding. For instance, a glottal stop and a non-released one may be hard to distinguish at times. Equally, ejectives may be difficult to hear.

p. 45: Interesting results and graphs. It seems that grammatical words are subject to more phonetic variation and reduction. As you mention, you could have checked for lexical frequency of words and their likelihood of glottalization. I would suspect that your examples "get" and "put" are cases of high frequency types.

p. 60:
you write "while male speakers quite often appear to be guided by the economy of effort, using the more effortless variants"

→ interesting observation. Do you have a citation for this?

The individual analysis at the end is a good idea, since there is potentially a lot of idiosyncratic variation in your studied phenomena.

Minor comments:
- It would have been better to avoid the authoritative "we"
- p. 39: I assume you mean WAV files
- The term "a few one-off realizations" is used, which is odd since it implies that something occurred only once (hence not a few times)

Proposed grade:
☒ excellent   ☒ very good   ☐ good   ☐ fail

(grade 1-2)

Place, date and signature of the reviewer:
Prague,
May 20, 2022