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Unusual Palatalization in English by Native Russian Singers

Introduction

The linguistic variable to be examined in this pilot study is the existence (or lack) of an unusual palatalized consonant in English songs performed by the native Russian singing duo, t.A.T.u. By unusual, I mean a consonant which would not normally be palatalized in standard American English, a dialect in which there are no noticeable linguistic markers making it recognizable as another dialect of English in North America. This project stems from the observation that native Russian speakers, especially those with non-native English language understanding, are often heard palatalizing consonants which would be palatalized in Russian but not in standard American English. To examine whether this phenomenon carries over to music sung in English by native Russian speakers, I analyzed t.A.T.u's songs "All the Things She Said" from their album 200 km/h in the Wrong Lane (2002) and "Cosmos (Outer Space)" from their album Dangerous and Moving (2005). In beginning this project, it was my hypothesis that unusual palatalization would occur less in the latter song because it was recorded at a later date, after the singers had had more exposure to the English language. However, while the data did not support my hypothesis, I discovered some outside factors which may have led to this unexpected outcome.

Data Selection

I chose to analyze the group t.A.T.u because they have been very successful in the United States, and as a result have been able to record two albums in English. This

allowed me to choose two songs which were each recorded at different times: the first before any major exposure to the United States, and the second after becoming more familiar with the American English language. The two songs I analyzed were chosen because they both had high frequencies of the environment which I was looking for, and most of the other songs did not. The environment I examined is where a labial, dental, post-alveolar, or velar consonant occurs before a high front vowel, which also can occur in the Russian language. The vowels examined include /i/, /e/, and /ɛ/, which occur in both Russian and English¹, and the high front vowel /ɪ/. Although [ɪ] does not occur in Russian, it is very close to the Russian vowel /i/ according to Avanesov (49). For this study, I did not examine consonant clusters or any environment where the vowel is immediately followed by a nasal, due to the possible effect of nasal raising on palatalization. Furthermore, only the verses, and not the choruses, were examined so that distinct palatalization by each singer could be identified.

Results and Basic Analysis

Upon analyzing these songs, I was surprised to find that the occurrences of unusual palatalization were about even for both songs (see Table 1). In “All the Things She Said” (2002), there were five tokens for the unusual palatalized variable out of a possible 28, giving a frequency of 17.9%. Similarly, in “Cosmos (Outer Space)” (2005), there were again five tokens out of a possible 31, giving the close frequency of 16.3%. Therefore, according to this quantitative analysis, the three year difference between the two songs did not have a major effect on the occurrences of unusual palatalization.

¹ Basic Russian language knowledge such as this is taken from my own personal knowledge and experience with this language.

Table 1. Frequency in unusual palatalization (C□V) versus no unusual palatalization (CV) in two songs by t.A.T.u

	"All the Things She Said" (2002)	"Cosmos (Outer Space)" (2005)
CV	23 (82.1%)	26 (83.7%)
C□V	5 (17.9%)	5 (16.3%)
TOTAL	28 (100%)	31 (100%)

In the first song, four of the five tokens occurred in /fi/ environments (e.g. *feel*), which is not surprising as palatalization can often be heard here in Russian. The fifth token occurs in a /fe/ environment (e.g. *face*). This occurrence is described by Jaye Padgett very simply, “The palatalization contrast before *e* is very limited,” (189) meaning that in native Russian words /e/ is only preceded by palatalized consonants. Hence, this token too can be expected.

In the second song, three of the five tokens again occur in /fi/ environments (e.g. *feelings*). The fourth occurs in a /ɹi/ environment (*reach*). It is possible that this occurrence is due to extra stress being placed on the /i/ as the singer tries not to pronounce the English /ɹ/ as the Russian /r/, combined with the following consonant being the lateral /l/ (*real-*). All of this may contribute to the unusual palatalization of this token. The fifth occurs in a /tɛ/ environment (e.g. *tell*). We would not expect any palatalization here in English, but, as mentioned above, in native Russian words /t/ is always palatalized before /ɛ/.

Cultural Analysis

While Table 1 shows evidence that a greater familiarity with the English language does not, in this case, greatly effect unusual palatalization, it is possible that there is more to it than this. Upon examining the data more closely, it can be seen that there is a

difference between the frequency of unusual palatalization for each member of the duet. According to their website, the first member, Lena, has had knowledge of English since before their first English album was recorded, and she speaks quite fluently in her interviews.² In the first song, she uses unusual palatalization two of the five times, and a total of two of a possible fifteen environments (13.33%). In the second song, she has four of the five tokens, and a total of four of nineteen possible environments (21.08%).

Yulia, on the other hand, became familiar with English from an English professor at Moscow State University shortly before recording the first album. In the first song, she has three of the five tokens, and this is out of a possible thirteen instances of the environments for her verses (23.08%). In the second song, she only has one of the five tokens, out of a possible twelve environments (08.33%). In sum, the frequency of unusual palatalization in English songs increased for Lena, but decreased for Yulia.

Table 2. Frequency of unusual palatalization tokens by Yulia versus those by Lena

	"All the Things She Said"	"Cosmos (Outer Space)"
Yulia	3 (60%)	1 (20%)
Lena	2 (40%)	4 (80%)
TOTAL	5 (100%)	5 (100%)

As a result of the frequency differences between the two singers, a question of cause is raised, in which a sociocultural analysis is appropriate. While it cannot be determined from the available information exactly why Lena's frequency of occurrences increased while Yulia's decreased, a few possibilities can be put forth. First, it is very possible that Yulia used unusual palatalization less in the second song because she had been learning English during that time academically, and therefore had a more technical focus on the language. Lena, however, was already familiar with English and used it very

² t.A.T.u.ru <<http://www.tatu.ru/en/history.html>>

comfortably, thereby allowing her native Russian linguistic attributes to be more prominent in her speech.

Also, while working with an instructor, such as Yulia was, people usually become more familiar with them and bend to the accommodation theory. Trudgill writes on how this affects singers as follows:

This [accommodation theory], briefly, attempts to explain temporary or long-term adjustments in pronunciation and other aspects of linguistic behaviour in terms of a drive to approximate one's language to that of one's interlocutors, if they are regarded as socially desirable and/or if the speaker wishes to identify with them and/or demonstrate good will towards them (143).

It is also possible that because Lena had more possible environments in her verses each time, this allowed for more uses of unusual palatalization.

Conclusion

After a careful quantitative analysis, the data as presented in Table 1 shows that my hypothesis was mildly supported. That is, slightly less unusual palatalization was found in 2005 as compared to 2002. However, the difference was not as much as expected. Socioculturally, the change in Yulia's speech may support my hypothesis if more tokens can be found in another song. Also, the lack of a substantial amount of tokens for the unusual palatalization variable may be a result of any English speech coaching during the recording of their music. Without coaching, they would likely include more instances of this variable. It would be interesting in future research to

analyze an interview or concert performance with the girls using the same environments. The frequency of the unusual palatalization variable would most likely increase, especially for Yulia because she gained a familiarity with English more recently than Lena, and the tendency to naturally rely on Russian linguistic characteristics would remain strong for her.

Works Cited

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Appendix A:
“All The Things She Said” (2002)

- Chorus: All the things she said
 All the things she said
 Running through my head
 Running through my head
 Running through my head
 (Running through my head)
- All the things she said
 All the things she said
 Running through my head
 Running through my head
 (Running through my head)
 This is not enough
- Lena: I'm in serious shit, I feel totally lost
 If I'm asking for help it's only because
 Being with you has opened my eyes
 Could I ever believe such a perfect surprise?
- I keep asking myself, wondering how
 I keep closing my eyes but I can't block you out
 Wanna fly to a place where it's just you and me
 Nobody else so we can be free
 Nobody else so we can be free
- Chorus: All the things she said
 All the things she said
 Running through my head
 Running through my head
 Running through my head
 (Running through my head)
 All the things she said
 All the things she said
 Running through my head
 Running through my head
 All the things she said
 All the things she said
 (All the things she said)
 This is not enough
 Ya Soshla S Uma - Ma!
 This is not enough
 All the things she said
 All the things she said
- Yulia: And I'm all mixed up, feeling cornered and rushed
 They say it's my fault but I want her so much
 Wanna fly her away where the sun and rain
 Come in over my face, wash away all the shame
 When they stop and stare - don't worry me
 'Cause I'm feeling for her what she's feeling for me

I can try to pretend, I can try to forget
But it's driving me mad, going out of my head

Chorus: All the things she said
All the things she said
Running through my head
Running through my head
Running through my head
All the things she said
All the things she said
Running through my head
Running through my head
All the things she said
All the things she said
This is not enough
This is not enough
All the things she said
All the things she said
All the things she said
All the things she said
All the things she said
All the things she said
All the things she said
All the things she said, she said
All the things she said
All the things she said

Lena: Mother looking at me
Tell me what do you see?
Yes, I've lost my mind

Yulia: Daddy looking at me
Will I ever be free?
Have I crossed the line?

Chorus: All the things she said
All the things she said
Running through my head
Running through my head
Running through my head
All the things she said
All the things she said
Running through my head
Running through my head
All the things she said
All the things she said
This is not enough
This is not enough
All the things she said
All the things she said
All the things she said
All the things she said
All the things she said
All the things she said.

Appendix B:
"Cosmos (Outer Space)" (2005)

- Lena: Games we don't want to play
Same winner everyday
Kill for the second best
Feel no more, feel no less
We have our minutes cut
We lose our feelings but
That's what the movies show
This is where stories go
- Yulia: Stars we don't want to reach
Scars we don't want to stitch
Go where we haven't been
Fly away, time machine
Clouds, we will chase them out
Crowds, we will face them down
This is our secret place
Outer space, outer space
- Chorus: Our home forever is outer space
Black stars and endless seas; outer space
New hope, new destinies; outer space
Forever we'll be in outer space, outer space
- Lena: Ground we don't want to feel
Found what they didn't steal
Time, we were really lost
Bridges burnt, fingers crossed
We, shall we ever be
Free with no guarantee
Life on another plane
Same before, same again
- Yulia: Go where you want to go
So no one ever knows
Only what we decide
Is it gone? Has it died?
Dry every tear in my
Eye, you can tell me why?
This is our secret place
Outer space, outer space
- Chorus: Our home forever is outer space
Black stars and endless seas, outer space
New hope, new destinies; outer space
Forever we'll be in outer space, outer space
- Yulia: Outer space is where we get together
And this place we're meant to be
Stars are dancing and the time is fading
Die forever you and me, you and me

Lena: Passing stars and counting moons of planets
 In the cosmos, we are free
 There's no atmosphere and no obsessions
 It'll always be, it'll always be

Chorus: Our home forever is, outer space
 Black stars and endless seas, outer space
 New hope, new destinies; outer space
 Forever we'll be in outer space, outer space