Séminaire ACE 'Popular culture, politics and identity in Britain' – 07/12/2023

Conflicting Identities in British Heavy Metal

A sociophonetic perspective

Coline Caillol
under the supervision of Emmanuel Ferragne
CLILLAC-ARP (EA 3967 – Université Paris Cité)

Introduction

- Inherent link between **language** and **identity.**

- Americanization of British Pop Artists' pronunciation:

  "There can be no doubt that [British Pop] singers are modifying their linguistic behaviour for the purpose of singing."

  Trudgill (1983)

- Example of **style-shift** (Labov, 1972)

- Cultural domination leads to imitation?

20 Acts of Conflicting Identity: The Sociolinguistics of British Pop-song Pronunciation

Peter Trudgill

Anyone with an interest in British rock and pop songs will have observed that there are 'rules' concerning the way in which the words of these songs

Measuring Americanization

▪ **USA-5 model** – phonetic variables adopted by British performers when they sing (Simpson, 1999).

Feature	British Pronunciation	American Pronunciation
T Voicing	Intervocalic /t/ is voiceless	Intervocalic /t/ is voiced
BATH Broadening	Words like *bath* and *ask* realized as [ɑː]	Words like *bath* and *ask* realized as [æ]
Rhoticity	Non-prevocalic /r/ as vowel lenghtening [ː]	Non-prevocalic /r/ pronounced
PRICE Diphtong	Words like *life* and *eyes* realized as [aɪ]	Words like *life* and *eyes* realized as [aˑ]
LOT Unrounding	Words like *rock* and *top* realized as [ɒ]	Words like *rock* and *top* realized as [ɑ]

▪ Focusing **word-internal intervocalic /t/**

▪ "one of the most striking characteristics of American pronunciation to the ears of a non-American" (Wells, 1982)
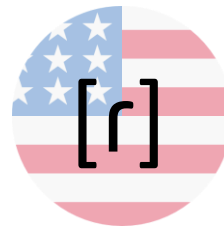
Word internal intervocalic /t/

▪ Between vowels or sonorants, before an unstressed syllable.

Voiceless stop, with a clearly defined closure and sharp release.

[t]
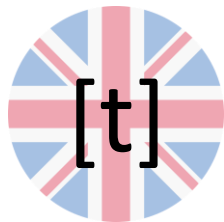
"And his web is the **city** at night"

Black Sabbath, "Johnny Blade"

Voiced flap, tongue making brief contact with the alveolar ridge.

[ɾ]

"I took the **city** 'bout one a.m."

Judas Priest, "Living After Midnight"

What about Heavy Metal?

Tipton Gasworks, Birmingham in 1980
https://flashbak.com/a-photographic-tour-of-the-black-country-1975-1985-455318/

- Highly situated genre: inseparable from socio-economic, cultural and historical context of the English Midlands in the 1970s and 1980s.
  (Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 2000; Moore 2009; Harrison, 2010)

- Link between language and identity:

Does this specific context outweigh the tendency towards Americanization of singing voice?

Heavy Metal Database

BLACK SABBATH

19 albums
174 songs
6 interviews

Judas Priest

18 albums
215 songs
8 interviews

IRON MAIDEN

16 albums
153 songs
9 interviews

DEF LEPPARD

11 albums
133 songs
8 interviews

Be**tt**er
Li**tt**le
Wai**t**ing
Ma**tt**er
Ge**tt**ing
Me**t**al
Eterni**t**y
Ba**tt**le
Figh**t**ing
Wa**t**er
…

1 868 /t/ tokens

"**Little**"

Iron Maiden, "Two Minutes to Midnight"

1.22706887   1.81832767

little

0.9314   2.114

Time (s)
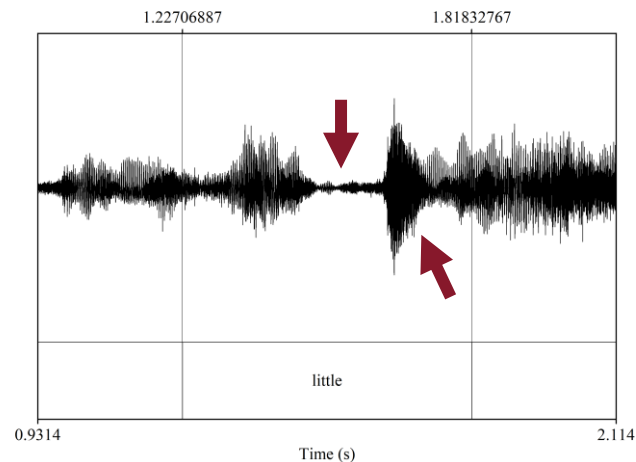
Heavy Metal Results

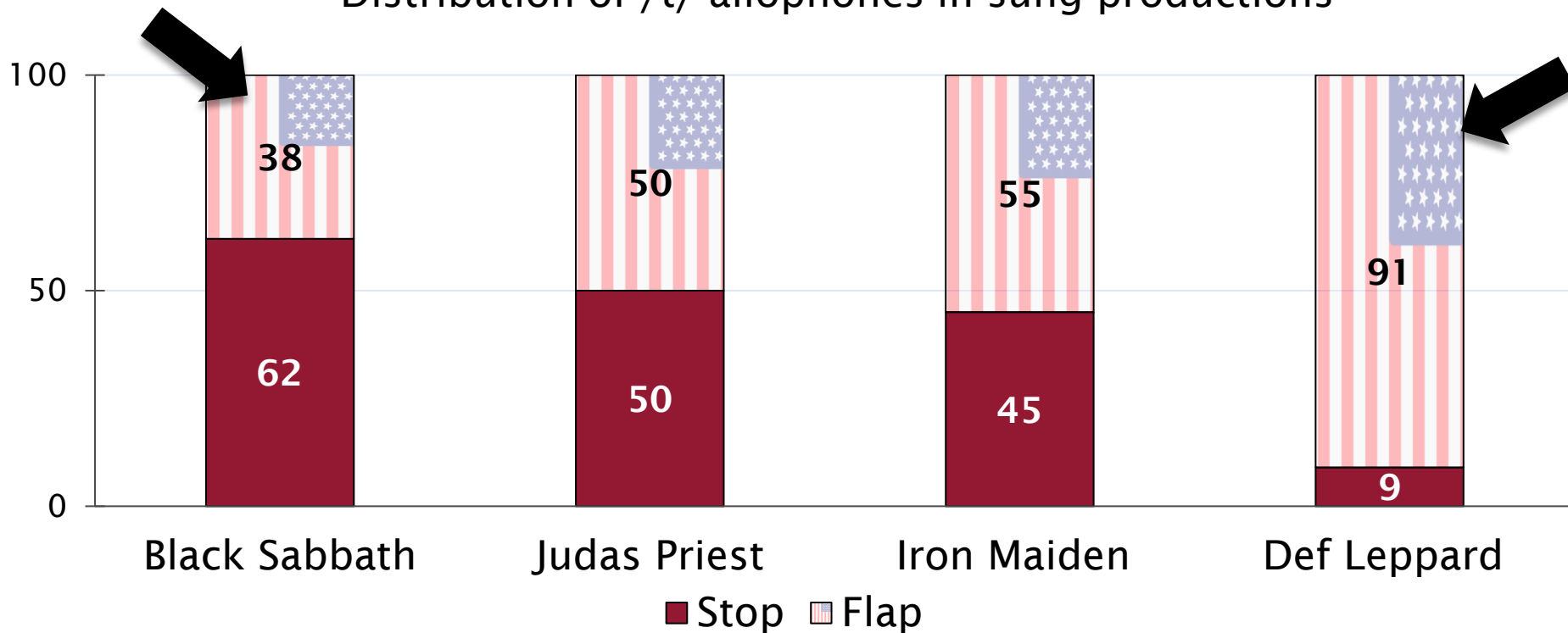**No** (word internal) flapping found in spoken interviews of the bands

Overall sung /t/ realizations

40

60
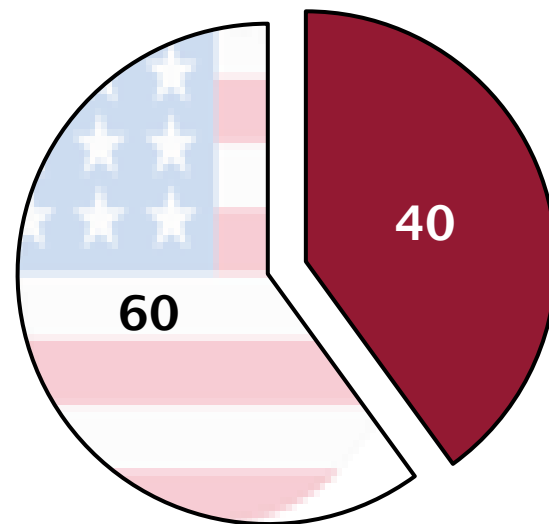
■ Stop /t/   □ Flap /t/

Heavy Metal Results

Distribution of /t/ allophones in sung productions

Why Americanization?

Ross Halfin Photography

I'm outta luck, outta love
Got a photograph, picture of
Passion killer, you're too much
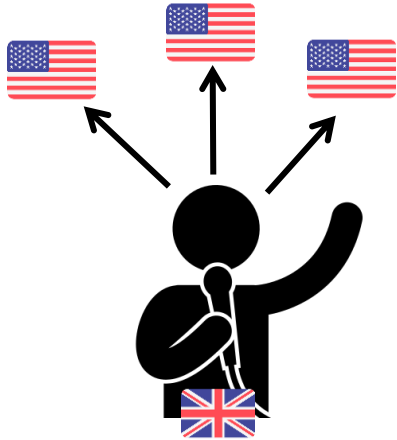You're the only one I wanna touch

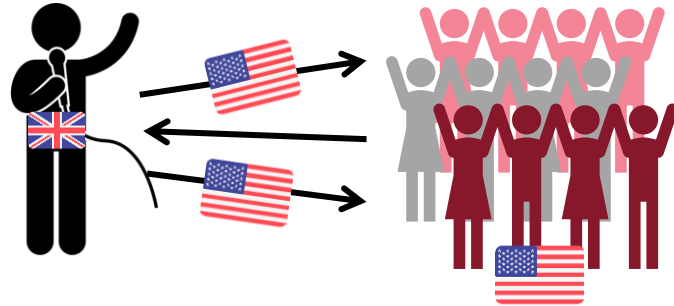"Pour Some Sugar On Me"   "Photograph"

Theoretical approaches

▪ Two complementary sociolinguistic models:

Acts of Identity (Le Page, 1974)   Audience Design (Bell, 1984)

Why Americanization?

▪ Real and perceived **cultural domination** of the US and its music industry.

$ Bigger market

Rise of MTV

Increased popularity

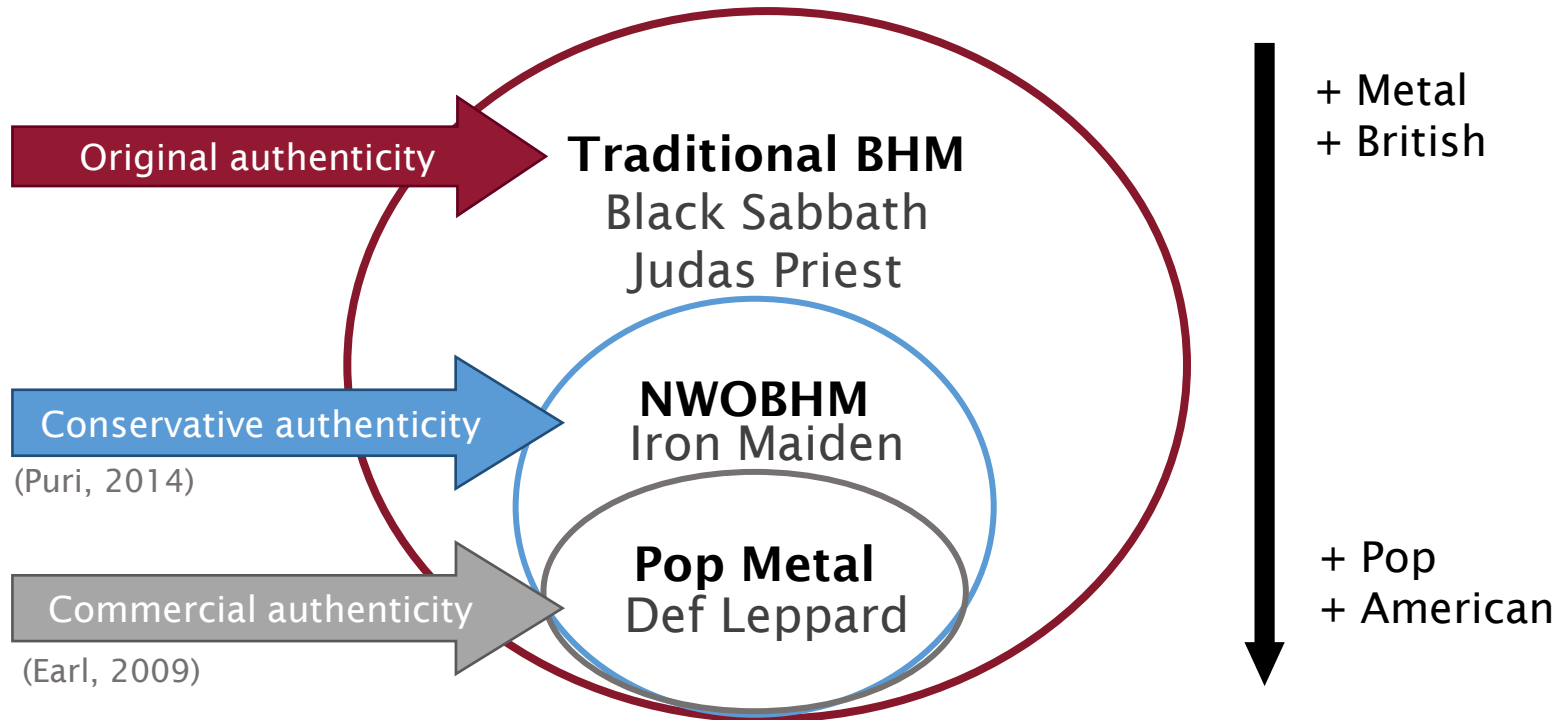"There was this sense that America was where everything was happening"

K.K. Downing, Judas Priest

"We were so desperate to go to America to get our big break"

Ozzy Osbourne, Black Sabbath

Why Americanization?

▪ Aspects of **subgenre** and **authenticity**.

Heavy Metal vs. Pop music

▪ What about **80s** Pop music?

▪ Did the **First** (and Second) **British Invasion** change this phenomenon?

Top 10 best selling albums of 1980s in the UK
→ **86** albums by **54** artists
→ **350** songs randomly selected for analysis
→ Analysis of **967** /t/ tokens

Pop music results

- 61% of all tokens flapped
- Similar to HM results

Hypercorrection

▪ Insufficient access to the American model group:

Phonetically		Culturally

The Housemartins
"I'll Be Your Shelter"

Martin Fry
lead singer of ABC

"**I'm gonna take me a greyhound bus down the motorway**
I'm going to spend a little time in Frisco and L.A."

"Hello America" Def Leppard

"*Just like a shelter…*"

When introducing himself

In "The Look of Love"

"*They say, Martin, maybe one day you'll find true love*"

Acts of conflicting identities (Trudgill, 1983)

- Americanization of pronunciation does not imply rejection of British identity, rather **conflicting motivations** → **conflicting identities**.

"We weren't turning our backs on our British roots, but   there was this sense that America was where everything was happening"

K.K. Downing (Judas Priest guitarist)

Def Leppard by Ross Halfin Photography

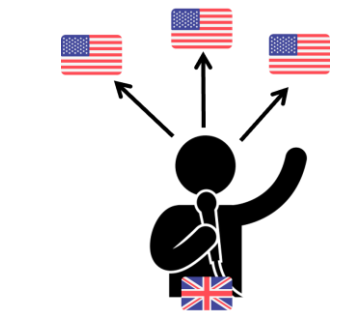Bruce Dickinson by John McMurtrie
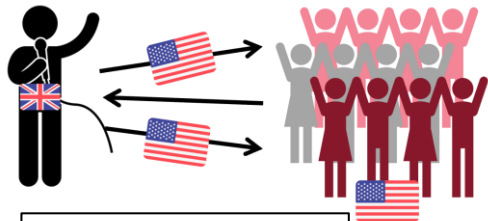
Ozzy Osbourne, unknown source

British Steel (1980) album cover

Pop Song English (Gibson, 2023)

▪ Development in the approach:

Identity-based

Audience-based

Enregisterment

AKA "socially recognized as indexical of" pop singing
(Agha, 2005)

Pop Song English
Standard, appropriate variety of English when singing,

and also expected by listeners
(Jansen, 2018)

Pop Song English (Gibson, 2023)

Pop Song English
Standard, appropriate variety of English when singing

Appropriate, (mostly) unconscious shift

"It is an American accent *before you know it* […] the stuff in England wasn't homegrown."

Phil Collen, Def Leppard
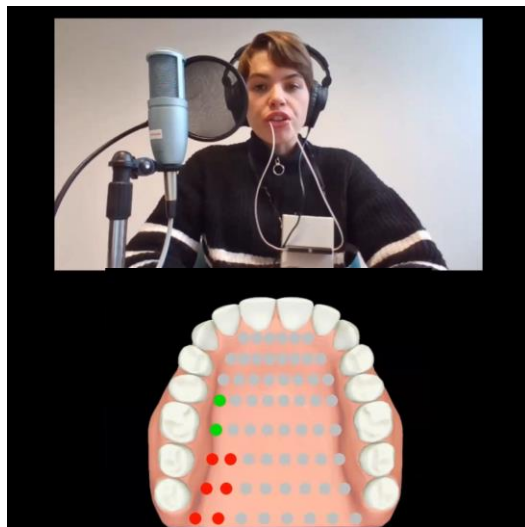
Conscious effort to maintain native accent
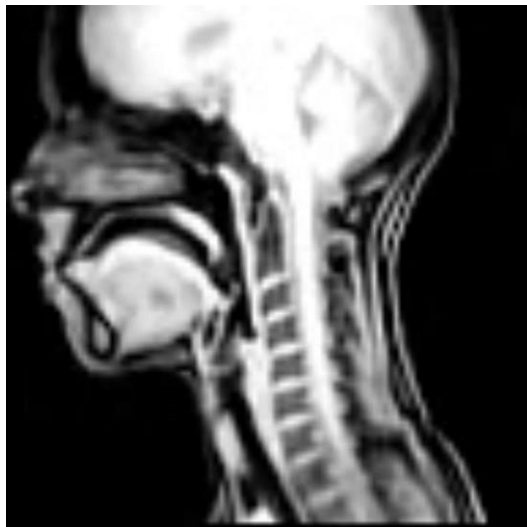
(Beal, 2009)

Arctic Monkeys, "Mardy Bum"

Towards an articulatory explanation?

- Complementary approach: **linguistic** and **articulatory** constraints inherent to the singing voice?

- **Singability** (Morrissey, 2008). Not just about sounding American, it may just be easier to do when singing.

Articulatory features of flapped /t/ make it the preferred /t/ allophone in singing

Trade-Off Model

Sociocultural constraints

Articulatory constraints

British Origins

Intelligibility

American Model

Ease of Articulation/Singability
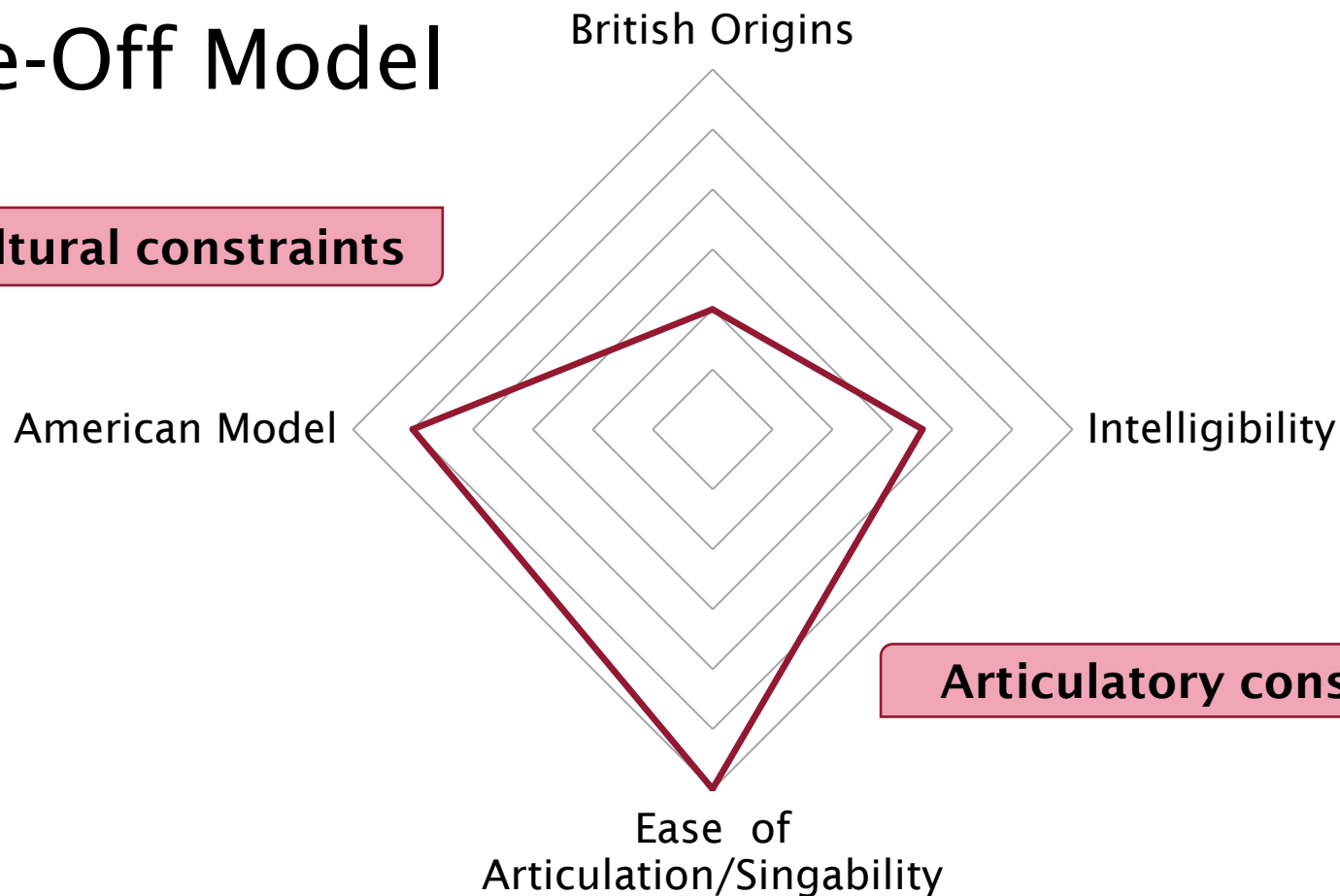
Thank you!

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References – media

Slide 4

Black Sabbath, "Johnny Blade" Never Say Die! (1978)
Judas Priest, "Living After Midnight" British Steel (1980)

Slide 6

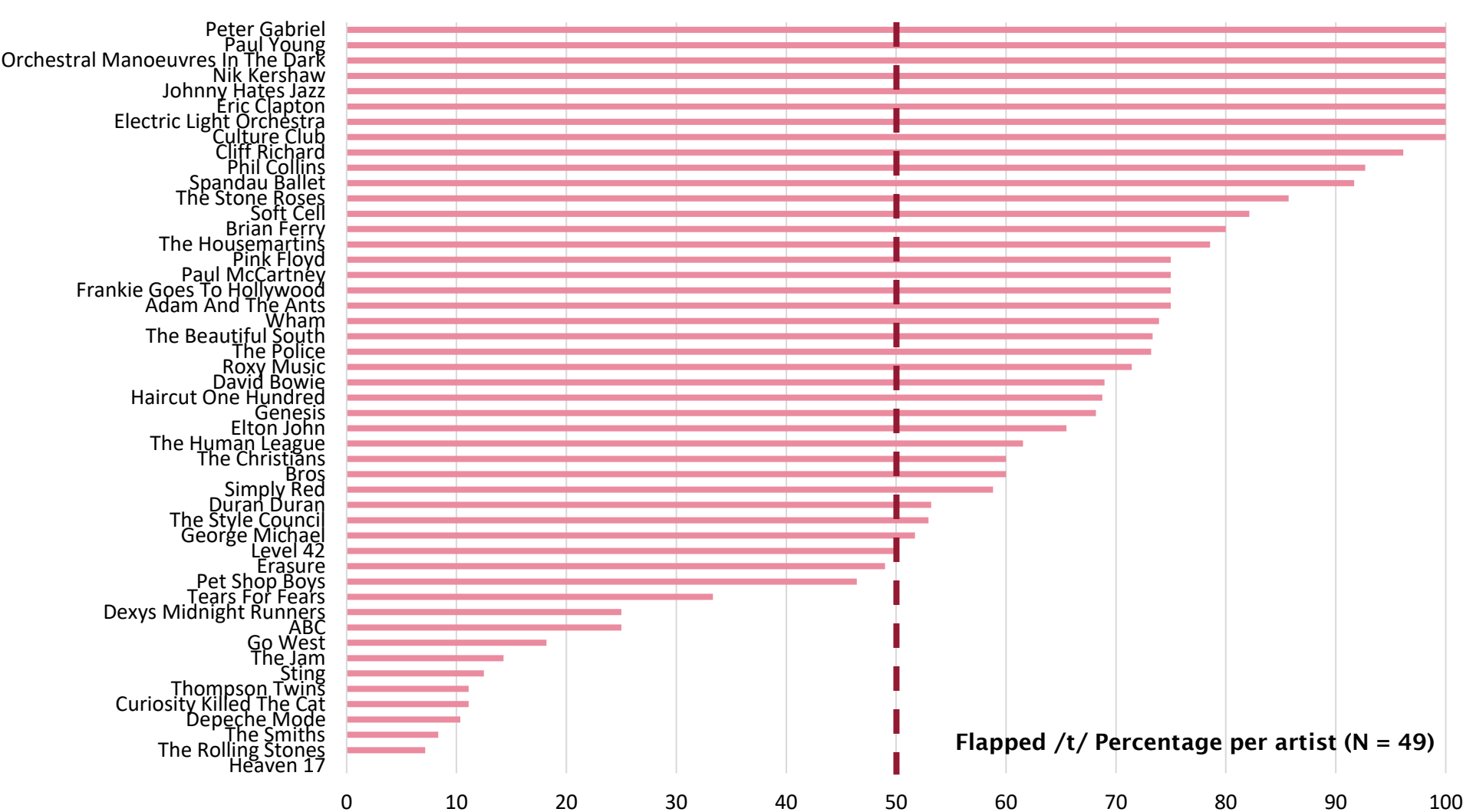Iron Maiden, "Two Minutes to Midnight" Powerslave (1984)

Slide 8

Joe Elliott and Rick Savage Interview (1983)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66PYErWUQ1g&t=139s
Def Leppard, "Pour Some Sugar On Me" Hysteria (1987)
Def Leppard, "Photograph" Pyromania (1983)

Slide 15

The Housemartins, "I'll Be Your Shelter (Just like a Shelter)" London 0 Hull 4 (1986)
BBC 6 Music – Martin Fry from ABC's 80s fashion tips (2006 Interview)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpfg0cJKRD8&t=1s
ABC, "The Look of Love" The Lexicon of Love (1982)

Slide 18

Arctic Monkeys, "Mardy Bum" Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not (2006)

Flapped /t/ Percentage per artist (N = 49)

Artist	
Peter Gabriel	100
Paul Young	100
Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark	100
Nik Kershaw	100
Johnny Hates Jazz	100
Eric Clapton	100
Electric Light Orchestra	100
Culture Club	100
Cliff Richard	
Phil Collins	
Spandau Ballet	
The Stone Roses	
Soft Cell	
Brian Ferry	
The Housemartins	
Pink Floyd	
Paul McCartney	
Frankie Goes To Hollywood	
Adam And The Ants	
Wham	
The Beautiful South	
The Police	
Roxy Music	
David Bowie	
Haircut One Hundred	
Genesis	
Elton John	
The Human League	
The Christians	
Bros	
Simply Red	
Duran Duran	
The Style Council	
George Michael	
Level 42	
Erasure	
Pet Shop Boys	
Tears For Fears	
Dexys Midnight Runners	
ABC	
Go West	
The Jam	
Sting	
Thompson Twins	
Curiosity Killed The Cat	
Depeche Mode	
The Smiths	
The Rolling Stones	
Heaven 17	

Diachronic evolution

Pop Music Flapping proportion by year
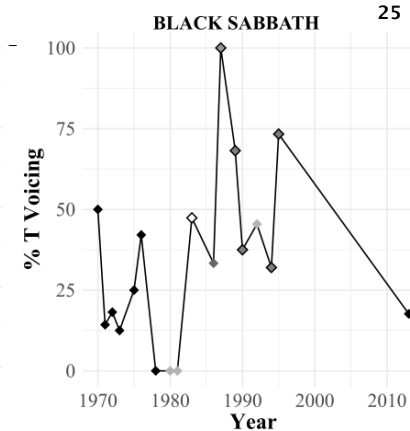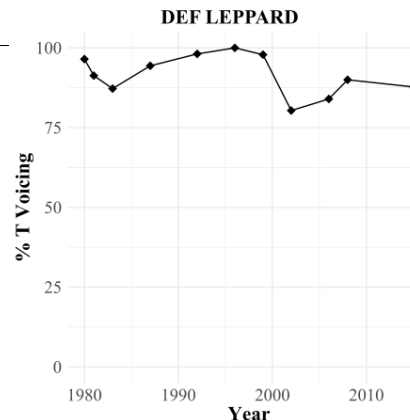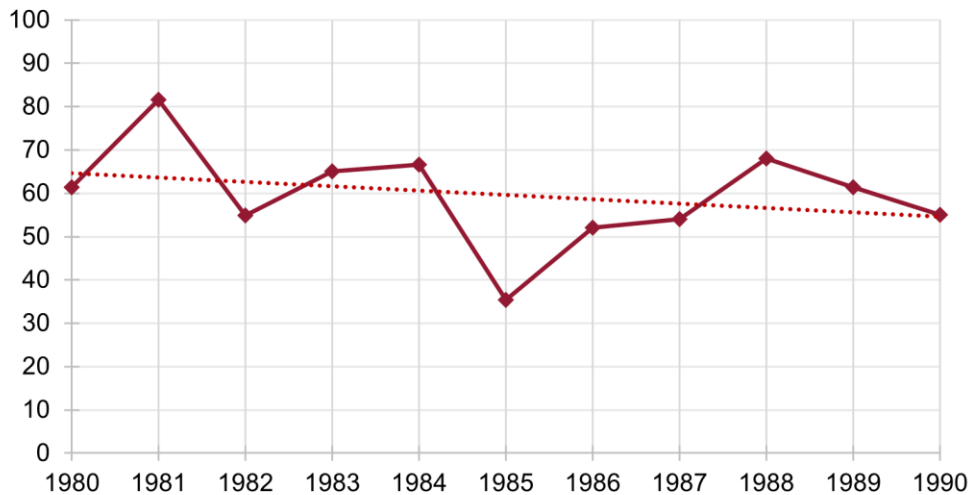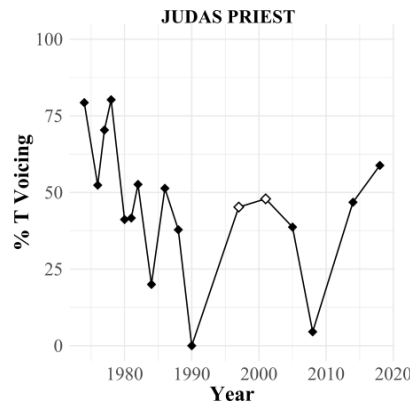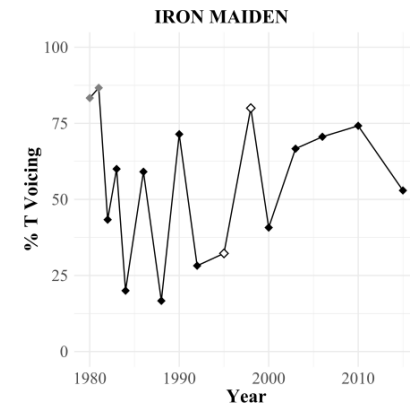
Flap features

Up-flap [ɾ˥]

Figure adapted from Gick, Wilson, and Derrick (2012)

- **Voicing**: constant vocal folds vibrations allows flap to "carry" the melody

- **Closure**: no full, airtight closure required
  - ➢ Tongue moves faster
  - ➢ Less precise articulation
    (Gick et al., 2012; Recasens, 2007)

→ Also more advantageous when bigger buccal aperture