

# The fate of the Scottish Vowel Length Rule in contemporary Scottish English

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The Scottish Vowel Length Rule (SVLR) posits that in word-final stressed syllables, certain Scottish English vowels are short except before /r/, voiced fricatives and morpheme boundaries. (e.g. Aitken, 1981, 2016; Scobbie, Hewlett & Turk, 1999). The current manifestation of the SVLR continues a much earlier process, which is known from historical record to have begun in the 1600s, and appears to be gradually receding. The number of vowels to which it now applies is a matter of debate. It is also closely linked to the definition of 'Scottish English', which now tends to follow e.g. Aitken (1984) and takes Scottish English as a sociolinguistic continuum with Scottish Standard English (SSE) at one end and a local variety of Scots at the other (e.g. Stuart-Smith, 2004). Current descriptions of the SVLR agree that it does not apply to /ɪ/ and /ʌ/, which are short in all environments in all dialects (e.g. for Scots, Aitken, 1981, 2015; for SSE, Scobbie et al, 1999). Describing Scots, Aitken (1981, 2015) excludes an additional four of the 19 vowels featured in his Historical Table of the Scots Vowels and concludes that the SVLR applies to all the remaining vowels in some dialects, and to a number of these vowels in all dialects. More recent research suggests that in SSE the Rule only applies to /i/, /u/, and /ai/ (e.g. Scobbie et al, 1999), although there is new evidence to suggest more vowels may be affected in the North-East (Warren, 2018). Weakening of the SVLR is linked with dialect contact with Anglo-English in Edinburgh (Hewlett, Matthews & Scobbie, 1999), while prosodic factors play a key role in real-time evidence for weakening of the Rule in Glasgow vernacular (Rathcke & Stuart-Smith 2016; Stuart-Smith, José, Rathcke, Macdonald, & Lawson, 2017).

This paper is the first to consider the fate of the SVLR by vowel, dialect, social factors, and time period, from a large-scale analysis of vowel duration from approximately 500 speakers across three SSE corpora (Arthur the Rat, DoubleTalk, How Stable is the Standard) and five regional vernacular Scots corpora (Sounds of the City, SCOTS, One Speaker Two Dialects, Brains in Dialogue, Glaswegian) together covering the main dialect areas across Scotland: the Central Belt (Glasgow and Edinburgh), the South/Borders, the North East and the Highlands & Islands. Large-scale acoustic analysis across multiple datasets, also controlling for prosodic factors such as speech rate and phrase position, is possible using the Integrated Speech Corpus ANalysis (ISCAN) tool (e.g. McAuliffe et al, 2017).

Our dataset allows us to consider the fate of the SVLR for all stressed monophthongs, in SSE and Scots, with respect to the key dimensions of interest. Recordings of both spontaneous and controlled speech from the late 1940s until the mid-2010s in a number of dialects enable inspection over time and across the lexicon (Rathcke & Stuart-Smith, 2016). In addition, the inclusion of gender and ethnicity within the dataset allows for investigation of the role of social factors in the maintenance of the SVLR, including the influence of heritage ethnic background (c.f. Hewlett, Matthews & Scobbie, 1999; Stuart-Smith, Timmins, & Alam, 2011). Using these data, we answer the following questions:

- Which vowels are subject to the SVLR across Scottish dialects?
- How use of the SVLR influenced by social factors, such as gender, social class, and ethnicity?
- How has the implementation of the SVLR changed over time in Scottish English?

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