

Overview of Creaky Voice in the English Language

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Glotalizacija u engleskom jeziku

Završni rad

Mentorica: izv.prof.dr.sc. Alma Vančura

Osijek, 2024.

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Abstract

Creaky voice, often referred to as vocal fry, is a low-frequency phonation characterized by irregular vocal fold vibrations. In English, it has evolved from being a peripheral phonatory setting to becoming a common vocal feature, especially among younger generations and media personalities. Initially observed in certain linguistic contexts as a marker of prosody or emotion, its use has now expanded into both informal and professional settings. In contemporary English, creaky voice is frequently used paralinguistically to signal hesitation, reservation, or the end of a conversational turn. Studies indicate that creaky voice is more prevalent among women, particularly younger speakers in American English. This vocal trend is often associated with a casual, relaxed communication style, contributing to its widespread adoption in media and entertainment. Perceptions of creaky voice are varied. While some listeners associate it with authority or trendiness, others perceive it as unprofessional or indicative of uncertainty. Social stereotypes linked to its use, particularly among women, reflect ongoing debates about vocal characteristics and their influence on perceived competence and confidence. Despite these mixed perceptions, the increasing use of creaky voice suggests that it is becoming a standard part of modern speech, particularly in American English. Overall, creaky voice's role in the English language continues to grow, reflecting broader societal shifts in communication norms and vocal expression. Its influence on how speakers are perceived makes it a significant area of study in phonetics, linguistics, and social sciences.

Key words:

Creaky voice, vocal fry, phonatory settings, perceptions, social stereotypes

Sažetak

Glotalizacija je niskofrekventna fonacija karakterizirana neregularnim vibracijama glasnica. U engleskom jeziku, evoluirala je od periferne fonatorne karakteristike, te postala uobičajna govorna karakteristika, pogotovo među mlađim generacijama i medijskim ličnostima. U početku, posmatrana u određenim jezičnim kontekstima kao označitelj prozodije ili emocija, njena se upotreba proširila na neformalna i profesionalna okružja. U suvremenom engleskom jeziku, glotalizacija je često korištena parajezično kako bi se signaliziralo oklijevanje, rezerviranost ili završetak faze razgovora. Studije pokazuju da je glotalizacija učestalija kod žena, specifično mlađih govornica američkog engleskog jezika. Ovaj vokalni pravac je povezan s neformalnim, opuštenim stilom komunikacije, što je doprinijelo širokom usvajanju među medijima i zabavnoj industriji. Percepcije glotalizacije su različite. Dok je neki slušatelji povezuju sa autoritetom ili trendom, drugi je vide kao neprofesionalnu ili kao pokazatelja nesigurnosti. Društveni stereotipi povezani sa uporabom glotalizacije, pogotovo među ženama, odražavaju debate oko glasovnih karakteristika i njihovog utjecaja na percipiranu kompetenciju i samopouzdanje. Unatoč ovim mješovitim shvaćanjima, povećano korištenje glotalizacije sugerira da ona postaje dio standardnog modernog govora, posebno u američkom engleskom jeziku. Krajnje gledano, uloga glotalizacije u engleskom jeziku nastavlja rasti, prikazujući šire društvene promijenje u komunikacijskim normama i glasovnom izražaju. Njen utjecaj na percepciju govornika čini ju značajnim područjem proučavanja u fonetici, lingvistici i društvenim znanostima.

Ključne riječi:

Glotalizacija, fonatorne karakteristike, percepcije, društveni stereotipi

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1. Introduction

Vocal quality and phonatory settings have long been central topics in the fields of phonetics and speech science, as they play a crucial role in both linguistic communication and the broader conveyance of social and emotional meaning. The human voice, with its remarkable range of expressive capabilities, serves not only as a vehicle for transmitting linguistic content but also as a nuanced medium for signaling aspects of personal identity, emotional states, and social relations (Jekosch, 2005). The tone, pitch, rhythm, and quality of voice can communicate much more than the words themselves, allowing for rich interpersonal dynamics and nuanced social interactions (Laver, 1980).

Among the diverse range of phonatory modes, creaky voice, also known as vocal fry or glottal fry, has gained notable prominence in the last two decades (Hornibrook et al., 2018)). Traditionally considered a marginal phonatory setting, creaky voice has evolved into a frequently used vocal quality, especially in certain social and demographic groups. Its growing presence in everyday speech has been particularly notable among younger generations, women, and media personalities, leading to extensive discourse about its role in modern communication (Yuasa, 2010). Vocal fry has also emerged as a key subject of inquiry due to its unique physiological characteristics and its perceptual impact, often sparking polarized opinions regarding its appropriateness and social significance (Yuasa, 2010; Anderson et al., 2014).

1.1. Creaky voice

Creaky voice has garnered attention for its distinct auditory quality, characterized by a low-frequency, irregular vibration of the vocal folds, producing a tapping or crackling sound (Catford, 1964). While historically used in specific linguistic contexts or as a paralinguistic signal of hesitation or disengagement, its modern usage spans a wide range of social settings, including casual conversation, professional speech, and public performances (Yuasa, 2010; Anderson et al., 2014). Moreover, recent studies have shown that creaky voice is often perceived differently depending on the speaker's gender, age, and social context, making it a compelling phenomenon for sociophonetic research (Anderson et al., 2014).

Creaky voice serves as a fascinating example of how phonation types extend beyond mere linguistic phenomena. It intersects with issues of social perception, identity, and power dynamics (Anderson et al., 2014). For instance, while some perceive vocal fry as a marker of authority or trendiness, particularly when used by public figures in the media, others view it as a signal of uncertainty or untruthfulness, especially when used by women (Anderson et al., 2014). This disparity in perception raises important questions about the intersection of vocal expression and societal expectations.

This thesis will first provide an overview of vocal quality and phonatory settings, laying the groundwork for understanding how different voice qualities are produced and perceived. Following this, a more focused examination of creaky voice will explore its physiological basis, historical significance, and its contemporary use and perception within the English-speaking world. Finally, the work will address the social stereotypes and biases surrounding the use of creaky voice, highlighting how vocal choices can be influenced by, and in turn influence, social norms and power structures.

2. Vocal quality

A definition of vocal quality varies depending on the author. Vocal quality is a multifaceted concept influenced by a range of acoustic and perceptual dimensions, making it difficult to measure precisely. Laver (1980) provides a more detailed definition:

Voice quality is conceived here (...) in a broad sense, as the characteristic auditory colouring of an individual speaker's voice, and not in the more narrow sense of the quality deriving solely from laryngeal activity. (...) Perceptually, voice quality in this broad interpretation is a cumulative abstraction over a period of time of a speaker-characterizing quality, which is gathered from the momentary and spasmodic fluctuations of short-term articulations used by the speaker for linguistic and paralinguistic communication.(p. 1)

This definition describes the continuous nature of vocal quality as an aspect of both linguistic and paralinguistic communication. It reflects the idea that vocal quality, unlike speech sounds or words, is a constant feature of speech, always present as long as a person is communicating.

2.1. Vocal quality, emotional and social information

As a part of paralinguistic speech, vocal quality plays a crucial role in conveying emotional and social information. Poyatos (1993) defines paralanguage as:

the nonverbal voice qualities, voice modifiers and independent utterances produced or conditioned in the areas covered by the supraglottal cavities (from the lips and the nares to the pharynx), the laryngeal cavity and the infraglottal cavities (lungs and esophagus), down to the abdominal muscles, as well as the intervening momentary silences, which we use consciously or unconsciously supporting or contradicting the verbal, kinesic, chemical, dermal and thermal or proxemic messages, either simultaneously or alternating with them, in both interaction and noninteraction. (p. 6)

This, quite often, subconscious perception of a person's voice and their vocal quality can have profound social and professional implications. For example, during a job interview, vocal quality might subtly influence the interviewer's impression of the candidate's confidence and professionalism. The perception of vocal quality, however, is highly subjective. Different listeners may interpret the same speaker in different ways based on their prior experiences, emotions, and biases (Poyatos, 1993).

Vocal quality, the perceived characteristics of the voice, is determined by the configuration of the vocal folds and the specific phonatory settings adopted by the speaker (Fant, 1972). The quality of voice varies across different phonation types, including modal voice, breathy voice, harsh voice, falsetto, and creaky voice. Each phonation type results from distinct physiological adjustments and aerodynamic forces within the vocal system.

In conclusion, vocal quality encompasses a range of auditory characteristics influenced by both physiological and perceptual factors. Although it is difficult to quantify, vocal quality plays an essential role in shaping how speakers are perceived by others. It reflects both the mechanical aspects of speech production and the broader emotional and social contexts in which communication takes place.

3. Phonatory settings

Phonatory settings are crucial in shaping the distinct qualities of human speech. They refer to the specific configurations, actions, and dynamics of the vocal folds and the larynx during speech production (Laver, 1980). These settings allow for a wide range of vocal expressions, each corresponding to different types of voice qualities. The distinctions between phonatory settings largely depend on the vibration of the vocal folds, the level of airflow, and the tension within the laryngeal muscles, which together result in various types of phonation such as modal voice, breathy voice, creaky voice, harsh voice, and falsetto (Laver, 1980) (see Table 1.).

Table 1. Comparative Features of Different Phonation Types (Table according to Laver, 1980)

Phonation Type	Vocal Fold Behavior	Acoustic Properties	Perception
Modal Voice	Regular, periodic vibration	Balanced airflow and frequency	Neutral, typical speech quality
Breathy Voice	Partial vocal fold closure	Excess airflow, low intensity	Intimacy, vulnerability, or weakness
Creaky Voice	Irregular, low-frequency vibration	Low fundamental frequency, irregular periods	Education, professionalism (Yuasa, 2010); lack of professionalism, laziness (Anderson et al., 2014); politeness and deference (Brown & Levinson, 1978: p. 272)
Harsh voice	Tightly compressed, vibration with excessive tension	Irregular glottal waveform, spectral noise, aperiodic fundamental frequency	Aggression, anger, frustration
Falsetto	Stretched tightly, vibration at a high frequency, only edges vibrate	High fundamental frequency, different pitch control	Emotional elevation, excitement, or fear

3.1. Voiced (lenis) and voiceless (fortis) features

Voiced and voiceless features form the foundation of phonatory settings. In voiced phonation, the vocal folds are brought together and vibrate as air passes through them, creating sound waves that are modulated into speech sounds. This is essential for producing vowels and voiced consonants such as [b], [d], and [g]. The regular vibration of the vocal folds generates the harmonic structure

that characterizes voiced sounds (Fant, 1972). On the other hand, in voiceless phonation, the vocal folds remain open, allowing air to pass through without vibration. This produces voiceless consonants like [s], [f], and [p], which rely on turbulent airflow to create sound (Zemlin, 1964). Newer research (Roach, 2009) disputes the usage of voiced and voiceless terms and claims that some sounds, namely voiceless consonants, are produced with more force than the voiced ones. Some phoneticians believe the name should indicate that fact, and therefore, fortis (meaning 'strong') and lenis (meaning 'weak') should be used instead. Nonetheless, fortis/lenis distinction is a very complicated one due to the difficulty in measurement of the 'force of articulation' and lack of conclusive evidence (Lisker, 1970 as cited in Roach, 2009).

3.2. Phonation types

3.2.1. Neutral mode

The neutral mode of phonation represents the default or baseline state of the vocal apparatus when the vocal folds are at rest and not actively engaged in speech. In this state, there is minimal muscular tension in the laryngeal region, and the vocal folds remain in a relaxed, slightly open position. Laver (1980) describes neutral mode as the physiological baseline against which other phonation types are measured (Laver, 1980). Since this mode does not involve significant vocal effort, it lacks the distinctive qualities associated with more specialized phonation types, making it acoustically neutral and perceptually unremarkable (ibid.).

3.2.2. Modal voice

Modal voice is the most common and typically used phonatory setting in everyday speech. It involves regular and periodic vocal fold vibration, with the folds coming together and separating in a balanced manner (Laver, 1980). This phonation type is considered the normative voice quality for most spoken communication and is characterized by a relatively smooth and stable sound. The fundamental frequency of modal voice typically falls within a range of 94 to 287 Hz, with individual variations depending on factors like gender, age, and vocal anatomy (Laver, 1980).

3.2.3. Vocal fry (Creaky voice)

Vocal fry, also referred to as creaky voice or glottal fry, occurs when the vocal folds are relaxed and vibrate at an extremely low frequency, generally below 100 Hz. (Michael 1968, as cited in Laver, 1980). The vocal folds in this setting come together loosely and vibrate irregularly, producing a distinctive low-pitched, rattling or tapping sound (Catford, 1964). As described by Zemlin (1964), vocal fry occurs with the glottal chink growing in size, which allows less air through vocal folds. The low subglottal pressure and tension in the vocal folds contribute to the characteristic irregularity in the vibratory cycles, which often sound like a series of taps (Catford, 1964).

The acoustic properties of vocal fry make it distinct from other phonation types, as it features low fundamental frequencies and pronounced period-to-period variations. According to Monsen and Engebretson (1977), the "glottal waveform of creaky voice is highly irregular " (Monsen & Engebretson, 1977, p. 989).

3.2.4. Breathy voice

Breathy voice is characterized by the partial closure of the vocal folds, allowing a significant amount of air to escape during phonation. The breathy quality of the voice is also associated with a broader bandwidth of the first formant, as described by Fant (1972), who notes that breathy voice leads to significant energy loss (Fant, 1972). In breathy voice, the vocal folds do not completely close during the glottal cycle, resulting in excess airflow and an airy sound (Fant, 1972). ð

This phonation type produces a softer, whispery voice quality, often perceived as more intimate or vulnerable (Fant, 1972). Breathy voice has both linguistic and paralinguistic uses.

3.2.5. Harsh voice

Harsh voice, sometimes referred to as strained or pressed voice, occurs when the vocal folds are tightly compressed and vibrate with excessive tension. This results in a rough, grating sound that is often perceived as strained or aggressive. According to Laver (1980), harsh voice is produced by a high degree of laryngeal tension, leading to irregular vocal fold vibration and increased force in the voice. The excessive tension in the vocal folds can cause irregularities in the vibratory pattern, which are perceived as roughness or harshness in the voice.

Harsh voice is often associated with emotional states such as anger, frustration, or assertiveness (Laver, 1980). It is used in speech to convey strong emotions or to emphasize certain points. However, prolonged use of harsh voice can lead to vocal strain or damage, as the high level of tension in the vocal folds requires considerable effort to maintain (Kaplan, 1960, as cited in Laver, 1980).

3.2.6. Falsetto

Falsetto is a phonation type produced when the vocal folds are stretched tightly and vibrate at a high frequency, typically above the modal register. In falsetto, only the edges of the vocal folds vibrate, creating a light, airy, and often higher-pitched sound. Laver (1980) describes falsetto as a mode of phonation where the vocal folds are lengthened and thinned, resulting in high-frequency vibrations and minimal contact between the folds during phonation. The fundamental frequency of falsetto is generally above 300 Hz, making it significantly higher than that of modal voice.

Falsetto is often used in singing, particularly in male singers who need to reach higher notes beyond their normal vocal range. In speech, falsetto can be used for expressive purposes, such as conveying excitement, surprise, or even fear (Ladefoged, 1971). The light and airy quality of falsetto makes it distinct from other phonation types, and its use can create an impression of emotional elevation or heightened intensity in communication (Murry & Brown, 1971).

Phonatory settings are central to understanding the vast array of vocal qualities that humans can produce. By manipulating the configuration of the vocal folds, the amount of subglottal pressure, and the airflow dynamics, speakers can adopt various phonation types, each with distinct acoustic and perceptual properties. Understanding these settings provides insight into the ways in which voice quality is shaped and how it can be used to convey emotion, identity, and social information in communication.

4. Creaky voice: definitions

Creaky voice, also known as vocal fry or glottal fry, is a phonatory mode frequently discussed in the phonetic literature. As Catford (1964, p. 101) explains, creaky voice involves "low-frequency (40-50 Hz) periodic bursts of air through a very small chink near the front end of the vocal folds." This results in an auditory effect that resembles "a rapid series of taps, like a stick being run along a railing" (Catford, 1964, p. 98). The low fundamental frequency of creaky voice is a key characteristic of vocal fry, according to Michel and Hollien (1968), a group of males spoke in a range of 7-78 Hz, while a group of females spoke in a range of 2-78 Hz.

Creaky voice is distinct from other phonation types due to specific laryngeal adjustments. Hollien et al. (1966) describe that, in creaky voice, "the vocal folds when adducted are relatively thick and apparently compressed, the ventricular folds are somewhat adducted also, and the inferior surfaces of the false folds actually come in contact with the superior surfaces of the true vocal folds" (ibid., 247). This thickened, compact structure allows for creak's characteristic vibratory pattern, often produced with low subglottal air pressure. Monsen and Engebretson (1977) offer further insights, noting that the fundamental frequency of creaky voice ranges between 30 Hz and 90 Hz. They emphasize the irregularity of the vocal fold vibrations, describing how "period-to-period variations in fundamental frequency are quite high" (ibid., p. 989). This irregular glottal waveform, alongside the slackness of the vocal folds, gives creaky voice its distinct auditory texture (Monsen, Engebretson, 1977). Hollien and Wendahl (1966 p. 246) explain that creaky voice is characterized by "a train of discrete excitations or pulses of low frequency," where the vocal tract is highly damped between these glottal excitations. They emphasize that the damping of the vocal folds elongates the closed phase of each vibratory cycle, enhancing the perception of creaky voice. Studies such as those by Murry and Brown (1971) confirm that vocal fry is produced with lower subglottal air pressure compared to modal phonation. This lower pressure, coupled with the damping effect of the vocal folds, makes creaky voice distinct from other phonation types, allowing it to play a significant role in linguistic and paralinguistic communication.

5. Use and perception of creaky voice in the English language

The use of creaky voice, or vocal fry, can be traced back across various languages and cultural contexts, both as a phonological feature and a paralinguistic tool. Historically, creaky voice has played a significant role in signaling specific phonological contrasts in languages as well as serving expressive functions in communication. In some languages, such as Danish, creaky voice is used to distinguish between words that are otherwise phonetically similar. For example, the Danish words "hun" (she) and "hund" (dog) are distinguished by the presence of creaky voice in the latter (Abercrombie, 1967: p. 101). This phonological use of creaky voice shows its importance in certain linguistic systems, where it can serve as a critical element in communication and meaning.

In English, creaky voice has traditionally functioned as a paralinguistic cue, often signaling the end of a speaker's turn in conversation or indicating a sense of closure, it still seems to be the case, as it was found by Wolk et al. that it is mostly used at the end of the sentences (Wolk et al., 2012)

It has become increasingly prominent in modern media, especially among younger speakers. Studies by Yuasa (2010) suggest that creaky voice has gained popularity in American English, particularly among female speakers, as a stylistic feature. In her research, Yuasa found that young American women use creaky voice to convey authority, sophistication, or detachment, challenging traditional gender norms about vocal expression (Yuasa, 2010). This phenomenon, which has been amplified by the rise of social media and broadcast media, reflects the changing social dynamics surrounding vocal identity and the perception of vocal characteristics in different contexts.

Hornibrook et al. cite Labov, saying that the reason mostly young women speak with creaky voice is that middle class women are the ones leading the changes in speech. As they are the ones who start the change, others adopt it and it becomes widespread (Labov, 1990, as cited in Hornibrook et al., 2018).

5.1. Phonological role and paralinguistic functions

Ladefoged (1971) notes that creaky voice often plays a phonological role in various languages, including Arabic, Chadic, and Nilotic languages, where it contributes to the linguistic distinction of words. In English, creaky voice serves more of a paralinguistic function, signaling emotions like boredom or resignation, particularly in Received Pronunciation, where it is used to indicate the speaker's completion of an utterance (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

Unlike modal voice, which is characterized by even, periodic vibrations, creaky voice reflects reduced vocal fold tension and a slow cycle of vibrations. This phonation type is commonly used at the end of sentences in American English, as a marker of discourse completion (Yuasa, 2010) (see Table 2.).

Table 2. Characteristics of Creaky Voice Compared to Modal Voice (Table according to Laver, 1980; Michel and Hollien 1968; Monsen and Engebretson, 1977)

Phonatory Setting	Frequency Range	Vocal Fold Tension
Modal Voice	100-300 Hz	Moderate
Creaky Voice	30-90 Hz	High, with low vibration

Phonologically, creaky voice has been observed in several languages where it serves as a distinctive feature that differentiates words or sounds. For example, in the Mayan language Tzeltal, creaky voice is used paralinguistically to express emotions like commiseration and complaint, marking an intimate or empathetic tone in social interactions (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

5.2. Cultural significance

The cultural significance of creaky voice in media is easily perceived. In recent years, its association with popular figures, such as social media influencers, celebrities, and podcast hosts, has led to it being exposed to a large audience of people. This shift in perception mirrors broader cultural changes in how voice quality is understood and appreciated, as individuals increasingly use their voice to shape their public persona and social image.

5.3. Social identity marker in American English

Creaky voice has become a prominent vocal feature in English, both in formal linguistic functions and in paralinguistic expression. Its usage has evolved over time, with distinct patterns of use observed across different demographics and social groups. Particularly in American English, the use of creaky voice has sparked interest due to its increasing prevalence, especially among young, educated women, as well as its varied perception across cultures and regions (Yuasa, 2010).

Creaky voice has been historically associated with specific paralinguistic functions in British English, particularly within Received Pronunciation (RP) (Laver, 1971, as cited in Laver, 1980). Laver (1980) observed that in RP, creaky voice is commonly used to signal the end of an utterance or to indicate that the speaker is yielding the conversational floor. This suggests that creaky voice functions as a marker of interactional dynamics, regulating turn-taking in conversations (Laver, 1980). In such contexts, creaky voice may be used sparingly and subtly, signaling politeness, deference, or hesitation. In the United States, however, creaky voice has gained significant prominence, especially in younger generations. Yuasa (2010) found that creaky voice is particularly common among American college women in California, where it has become a fashionable and socially accepted vocal trait. Her study revealed that listeners often associate creaky voice with positive traits such as education, professionalism, and urban orientation (Yuasa, 2010). The use of creaky voice in this context appears to convey confidence and authority, marking the speaker as socially adept and in control of the conversation.

The perception of creaky voice varies significantly across different social groups, genders, and regions. In American English, listeners tend to associate creaky voice with traits like authority and non-aggressiveness (Yuasa, 2010). However, these associations are not universal. In some cultures, when used throughout a sentence, creaky voice may signal emotional distance, indifference, or boredom (Laver, 1980). This divergence in perception underscores the complexity of creaky voice as a vocal phenomenon, as it carries different meanings depending on the social and linguistic context.

In a study (Yuasa, 2010) comparing the use of creaky voice between American and Japanese speakers, found that American females are more likely to use creaky voice than their Japanese counterparts (Yuasa, 2010). Table 4. shows the frequency of creaky voice usage in both groups.

Table 3. Frequency of Creaky Voice in American and Japanese Speakers (Yuasa, 2010)

Group	Total Words	Words with Creaky Voice	Percentage (%)
American Females	401	49.2	12.4%
American Males	401	27.5	5.6%
Japanese Females	401	22.4	6.9%

The Table illustrates that creaky voice is significantly more prevalent among American female speakers, with 12.4% of words exhibiting creaky voice, compared to 6.9% for Japanese females

and 5.6% for American males. This indicates a gendered dimension to the use of creaky voice, with women, particularly in America, using it more frequently as a marker of identity and style.

5.4. Context and setting

While creaky voice has become a distinctive marker of social identity, particularly among younger generations, its perception is often influenced by the listener's social biases and the specific context in which it is heard. For instance, in informal settings, creaky voice may be perceived as relaxed or casual, contributing to a more approachable and laid-back persona (Yuasa, 2010). However, in formal or professional environments, creaky voice is often viewed negatively, with listeners associating it with a lack of professionalism or uncertainty (Anderson et al., 2014).

Table 4. Perception of Creaky Voice Based on Context (Table according to Anderson et al., 2014; Yuasa, 2010)

Context	Positive Perception	Negative Perception
Informal conversation	Relaxed, casual	Disinterested, untrustworthy
Media and entertainment	Trendy, authoritative	Insecure, hesitant

The table above illustrates how the perception of creaky voice shifts depending on the social setting. In informal conversation, creaky voice is often associated with a relaxed, casual demeanor, while in media and entertainment, it can be perceived as trendy and authoritative. On the other hand, creaky voice may be interpreted as a sign of insecurity or hesitation, particularly when used by younger speakers or women (Yuasa, 2010).

However, the increasing use of creaky voice, particularly in professional settings, has not been without controversy. Anderson et al. (2014) highlight that while creaky voice can project confidence and sophistication, it is also sometimes perceived as signaling hesitation or lack of competence, especially in formal or high-stakes situations (ibid.). This negative perception is more common in older generations or in contexts where traditional speech norms are expected, such as job interviews or formal presentations. As such, the use of creaky voice is highly context-dependent, with listeners' interpretations varying based on social and cultural factors.

The gendered nature of creaky voice use further complicates its perception, particularly as it becomes increasingly associated with young women in urban settings. As this vocal trend continues to spread across media and professional environments, it is likely that creaky voice will remain a topic of interest, both for linguists studying phonation and for individuals navigating the social implications of vocal identity.

5.5. Social stereotypes

The use of creaky voice, particularly among women, has sparked significant debate and scrutiny, often intertwined with broader social stereotypes related to gender, age, and authority. As creaky voice becomes more prevalent in everyday speech, especially among younger women, it has been both celebrated as a marker of modernity and authenticity and criticized as a vocal trait that undermines the speaker's credibility (Yuasa, 2010). This chapter explores these social implications in depth, highlighting how creaky voice usage is linked to various societal perceptions and stereotypes.

5.5.1. Gendered perceptions and the feminine voice

One of the most striking aspects of the social perception of creaky voice is its association with young women. Research by Yuasa (2010) shows that the use of creaky voice is significantly more common among young, educated women in the United States. While some listeners perceive this vocal style as indicating traits like intelligence, urbanity, and professionalism, critics have argued that the prevalence of creaky voice among young women contributes to negative perceptions, associating it with vocal fry-related stereotypes such as laziness, disinterest, or even vocal damage (Yuasa, 2010). Anderson et al. (2014) expand on this, noting that in professional settings, women who use creaky voice may be perceived as less competent or less authoritative than their male counterparts. The notion that creaky voice signals uncertainty or lack of confidence can reinforce traditional gender stereotypes that undermine women's credibility, particularly in leadership or public speaking roles. This perception, Anderson et al. (ibid.) argue, is a reflection of deeper societal expectations surrounding how women should sound—assertive yet polite, authoritative yet non-threatening. When women deviate from these vocal expectations by employing creaky voice, they may be judged more harshly than men who exhibit similar vocal traits.

5.5.2. The "Vocal Fry": Trendy vs. Unprofessional

In recent years, creaky voice or "vocal fry" has been both praised and vilified in popular media. For example, in some contexts, creaky voice is seen as trendy, authoritative, or even empowering, particularly in the worlds of fashion, entertainment, and social media (Yuasa, 2010). As noted by Yuasa (2010), young women in California often use creaky voice as a deliberate stylistic choice, signaling their alignment with contemporary cultural norms.

However, in more formal contexts, the use of creaky voice is frequently criticized. Numerous media outlets and public figures have criticized the vocal style as being "annoying", as heard on "The Howard Stern Show" (robdcradle, 2012) and seen on an episode of a TV show "Loudermilk" (Shervin Safineh, 2019). Studies suggest that listeners, particularly those from older generations or more conservative professional backgrounds, may associate creaky voice with laziness, immaturity, or incompetence (Anderson et al., 2014). This dichotomy between how creaky voice is perceived in casual versus professional settings reflects a broader cultural tension: while younger generations may view creaky voice as a harmless or even positive trait, older generations and more traditional sectors of society often regard it as inappropriate for serious or formal communication.

The disapproval in formal contexts suggests that while creaky voice may function effectively in informal or media-driven environments, it can present challenges for speakers who need to project competence and professionalism in more traditional or hierarchical settings. Consequently, speakers using creaky voice in professional contexts risk being perceived as less capable or serious, which can influence hiring decisions, professional evaluations, or social judgments in formal workplace (Anderson et al., 2014).

5.5.3. Creaky Voice as a marker of social status

Creaky voice has also been identified as a marker of social status, albeit with conflicting interpretations. On one hand, some researchers argue that creaky voice signifies social prestige, particularly among young, educated women in urban environments (Yuasa, 2010). According to Yuasa (2010), creaky voice is often used by women in positions of relative privilege, and its use can signal membership in a particular social group that values modernity and cultural savvy. For example, in media industries, where vocal trends can quickly gain popularity, creaky voice may even function as a vocal marker of "coolness" or trendiness, signaling a connection to contemporary culture.

On the other hand, Anderson et al. (2014) suggests that creaky voice can also be perceived as a sign of lower social status, particularly in professional contexts. In settings where authority and competence are paramount, creaky voice may be seen as undermining the speaker's professionalism. This is especially true for women, who already face a host of societal biases regarding how they should present themselves in the workplace. When women use creaky voice, they may inadvertently reinforce stereotypes of feminine speech as being less authoritative, thus facing greater scrutiny than men for similar vocal traits.

5.5.4. Intersection of age, gender, and power

The intersection of age, gender, and power also plays a significant role in how creaky voice is perceived. Younger speakers, particularly women, are more likely to adopt creaky voice, and as a result, they are often subject to harsher judgments from older listeners (Yuasa, 2010). This phenomenon reflects broader societal tensions between generations, with older listeners perceiving creaky voice as a deviation from traditional norms of speech (Anderson et al., 2014).

Research suggests that creaky voice may be more socially acceptable when used by men or older speakers. Men who use creaky voice are often perceived as authoritative or commanding, while women who use it may be viewed as less competent or serious. This double standard reflects deeper gender biases in how speech is evaluated in different contexts, as well as the societal expectation that women should adhere to certain vocal norms in order to be taken seriously (Anderson et al., 2014).

In American media, creaky voice is often associated with women in positions of influence, such as television hosts, influencers, and celebrities. This association has reinforced the perception of creaky voice as both a fashionable and authoritative vocal feature, especially among younger generations. Public figures like Kim Kardashian and Katy Perry have been noted for their use of creaky voice, contributing to its normalization in media and pop culture (Yuasa, 2010). However, this trend is not without controversy, as critics argue that the use of creaky voice in professional media settings can undermine perceptions of professionalism and competence, particularly for women (Anderson et al., 2014).

9. Conclusion

Creaky voice, also known as vocal fry, has evolved from a marginal phonatory phenomenon to a central feature in modern English speech. Its emergence and integration into everyday communication, particularly among younger generations and women, reflects broader shifts in societal norms, identity expression, and media influence. Once seen primarily as an indicator of hesitation or emotional states, creaky voice now plays a more complex role, functioning both as a linguistic tool and a sociocultural marker.

Historically, creaky voice was identified in various languages for its phonological and paralinguistic roles, with Ladefoged (1971) noting its use in languages such as Arabic and Chadic to distinguish phonemic contrasts. In English, creaky voice evolved from a paralinguistic cue used in interaction, signaling hesitation, completion, or disengagement. The role of creaky voice in different cultures such as its paralinguistic function to express emotions like commiseration in Tzeltal (Brown & Levinson, 1978) demonstrates its versatility as a vocal mode.

However, the significant rise in creaky voice usage in English, particularly in American English, over the last few decades, marks a pivotal moment in the linguistic history of this phonatory setting. Once considered peripheral and occasionally stigmatized, creaky voice has gained widespread recognition in both casual and professional communication. This shift demonstrates the adaptability of language and vocal expression to social trends and media influence. The social implications of creaky voice are profound. As Yuasa (2010) observed, its prevalence among young, educated women suggests that creaky voice has become a marker of identity, signaling urbanity, education, and a casual but professional demeanor in informal contexts. In this sense, creaky voice reflects not only a vocal style but also a means of aligning oneself with certain social groups. It has become a form of vocal branding, particularly among women in media and entertainment, where it is often used to project trendiness and confidence.

However, these positive associations are not universal. Research shows that creaky voice can also carry negative connotations, particularly in formal or professional settings. Anderson et al. (2014) found that vocal fry is often perceived as untrustful or a sign of uncertainty, especially when used by women in professional environments. The association of creaky voice with negative stereotypes of women as unsure, passive, or lacking authority reveals deep-seated gender biases in vocal perception. This dual perception underscores the complex relationship between vocal qualities and

societal expectations, where the same vocal feature can be interpreted in vastly different ways depending on the context and listener.

Perception of creaky voice is highly context-dependent and varies significantly across cultures. In the U.S., where media and entertainment play a large role in shaping social trends, creaky voice is increasingly seen as fashionable (Yuasa, 2010). However, in other linguistic contexts, such as Japanese, the prevalence of vocal fry is much lower, and it does not carry the same cultural significance (Yuasa, 2010).

Moreover, even within the same culture, perceptions of creaky voice can shift based on context. In informal conversations, it may be interpreted as casual and relaxed (Yuasa, 2010), whereas in professional settings, it may be viewed as a flaw and is perceived as untrustworthy (Anderson et al., 2014).

The study of creaky voice is far from complete. As its usage becomes more normalized, particularly through media exposure, linguists and social scientists will continue to investigate its implications. Current studies provide insight into its sociolinguistic role, but more research is needed to understand the long-term effects of vocal fry on communication, identity, and social dynamics.

Future research could delve deeper into the physiological and acoustic properties of creaky voice, exploring how it interacts with other phonatory settings and how listeners process it at a neurological level. Additionally, further investigation into the gendered perceptions of vocal fry is crucial for understanding the biases that may influence both interpersonal communication and broader societal attitudes toward speech and professionalism.

In conclusion, creaky voice is not merely a vocal trend but a significant feature of modern communication. It bridges the gap between linguistic and paralinguistic expression, offering insight into how people use their voice to convey identity, emotion, and social standing. As it continues to evolve, creaky voice will remain an essential area of study, providing a unique lens through which we can better understand the relationship between language, society, and vocal expression. Its multifaceted role in speech highlights the intricate ways in which we communicate beyond words, revealing the power of voice in shaping perceptions and societal interactions.

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