The individual vs. the community:
Evidence from *t/d* deletion in Canadian English

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This study explores the relationship between individual- and community-level variation by looking at the deletion of coronal stops in word-final clusters, also known as t/d deletion (*cf.* 1a–c) (Guy 1980; Tagliamonte & Temple 2005).

(1) a. No, it wasn't **colØ**.
    b. The girls *loved* him.
    c. I *left* the firm.

Earlier research suggests that the constraints on *t/d* deletion are fairly stable, with minor lectal differences among speakers (Guy 1980). The recent rise of mixed-effects models enables individual-level differences to be tested within the statistical model employed for analysis. Our study goes beyond this newly established method of treating the individual as a random effect by combining mixed-effects modeling with data visualization techniques to assess rates of inter-speaker variation (see Tamminga & Fruehwald 2013).

We analyze 6,253 tokens of *t/d* deletion from spoken Toronto English (Tagliamonte 2012). Following previous literature, the tokens were coded for social (age, sex, education) and linguistic factors (preceding and following phonological segment, morphological class). In order to compare speakers' deletion rates across categories, the data were partitioned by morphological category — monomorphemes (1a), regular past tense (1b), and semi-weak verbs (1c) — and fitted to mixed-effects models with a random speaker intercept to each subset. Next, the inter-speaker variance across the three morphological categories was plotted.

Using a similar method, Tamminga & Fruehwald (2013) showed that *t/d* deletion was the result of phonological processes in monomorphemes and past tense forms, but allomorphy in semi-weak verbs. However, our replication indicates that inter-speaker differences are consistent across categories, instead suggesting a single unified process. Ultimately, a building tradition of replication and comparison in the field together with new statistical techniques adds to the variationist's methodological toolbox; examination of variation at the individual level across data sets continues to offer new insights into an old variable.