How crazy is English r-insertion?
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Crazy rules, or more generally, marked phonological features emerge predominantly in isolated small communities, while the use of a language variety by a large group, as that of a Standard for example, leads to simplification of the sound system and grammar (Trudgill 1996). In this paper, I show discuss whether so-called crazy rules can also emerge as a result of unsuccessful speaker adaptation to a conceived norm and can subsequently become a feature of this standard variety. Many non-rhotic varieties of English show a combination of remarkable patterns commonly known as linking r and r-intrusion. Linking r is relatively 'uncrazy' in that r is produced in intervocalic contexts in lexical items that can be said to have an underlying postvocalic r (which is reflected in the spelling). Hence, lexical r is not allowed in coda position, but can surface if it can be realised in an onset. Intrusive r occurs in a wider context, that is, in the same phonological environment, i.e., between vowels, but also in lexical items that do not have an underlying postvocalic r.

a. [ ] beer  b. the beer is warm [ ]
   [ ] (to) store  Storing [ ]
c. [ ] law  d. the law abiding man [ ]
   [ ] gnaw  Gnawing [ ]

We can assume that the pattern in (d) has emerged as an overgeneralisation of the pattern in (b). Both, linking and intrusive r are accepted standard pronunciation in British English. Seen as a process of epenthesis, r intrusion is already quite crazy, since no serious feature theory currently available would predict the liquid as an epenthetic consonant. The glottal stop or the coronal stop are much better candidates here. However, the picture is more complex. Some British and American accents are even 'hyper-rhotic' (Wells 1982) in that words usually ending in a nonhigh vowel are produced with a final r, as in comma[ ], even in preconsonantal position. This might still be explained by assuming that r functions as a kind of boundary marker, delimiting the right edge of words. Some American accents, though, are even more rhotic than this (mega-hyper-rhotic so to say). In these varieties, r seems to be inserted after all non-high vowels, regardless of the phonological context (intervocalic position, right word or phrase edge) (Kurath 1949, Wells 1982, Murray 1986, Gick 1999). This results in forms such as Wa[ ]shington or clo[ ]th. While intervocalic intrusive r can be said to improve phonological structure by breaking up a vowel hiatus and providing an onset for an otherwise onsetsless syllable, this latter instance of r-insertion can neither be said to mark a word boundary, nor to improve the prosodic structure, to the contrary: insertion of r here seemingly unnecessarily creates a coda, or even a complex coda. In this paper, I examine these patterns in more detail to answer the question why and how these varieties have gone crazy about r and whether these patterns are crazy at all.