

Dance as a window to endangered languages and the phonetic world: results from Namibia 2022-2024

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Background

One of our aims is to create phonetic English training methods for Namibian schools. We have examined the speech sounds of Namibian English (NamE) and the influence of indigenous languages on NamE. We have also collected phonetic training data as part of LAB-lab's larger research themes.

Quality of speech sounds

- NamE vowel qualities differ partly from BrE and might include influences from other Namibian languages (Figure 1)
- Khoekhoegowab speakers' NamE consonants have the same voicing opposition that is found in many other English varieties (Figure 2)
- Short phonetic training with non-native vowels did not result in production learning (Figure 3)

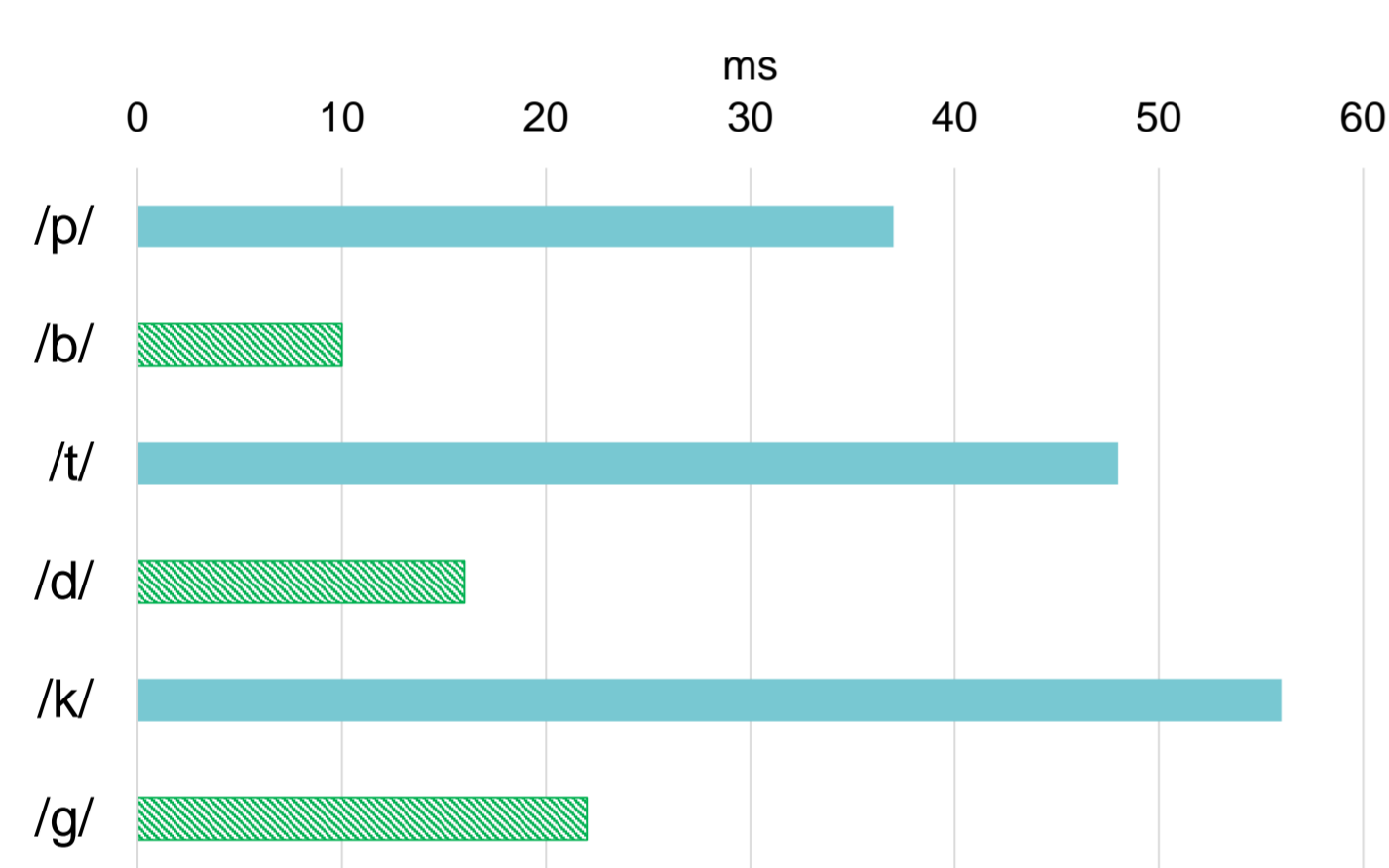


Figure 2. NamE stop consonant voicing measured with voice onset time (VOT) from Khoekhoegowab speakers. The shorter the VOT, the sooner consonant voicing begins.

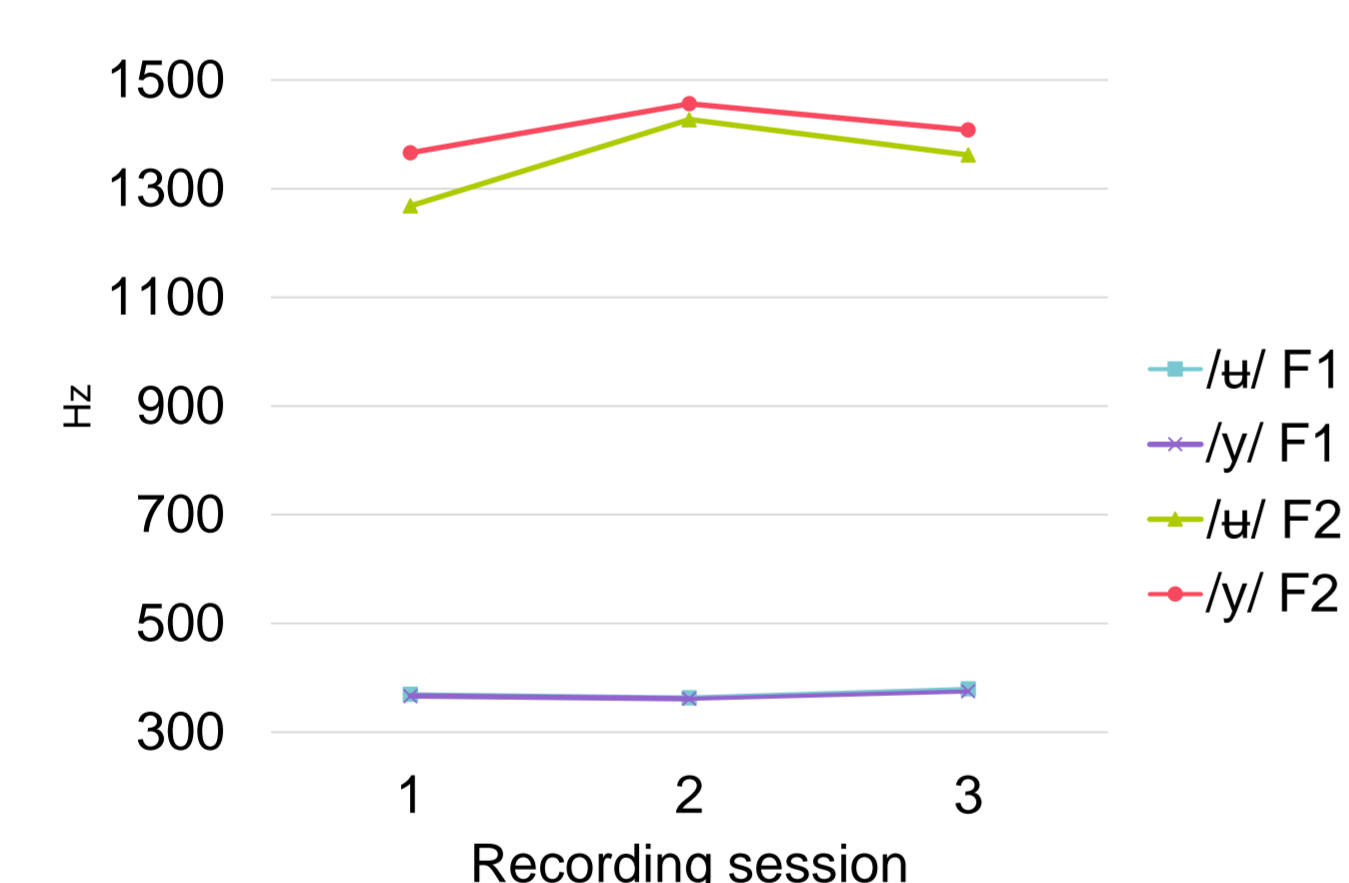


Figure 3. Production of /y/ and /u/ did not change as a function of training.

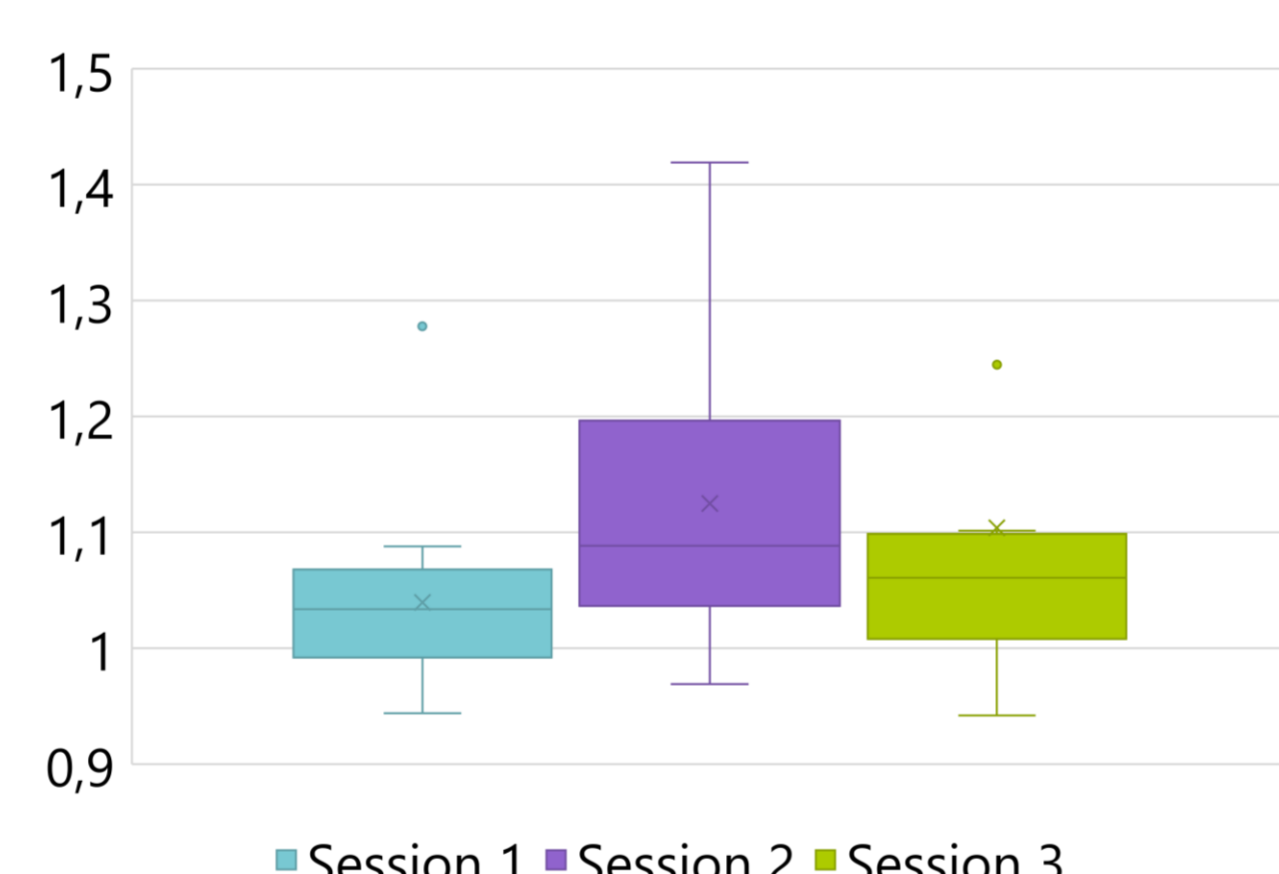


Figure 4. Production of the long/short duration ratios did not change as a function of training.

In addition

Phonetics pronunciation course helped Finnish university students to perceive features of Khoekhoegowab speech. Next, we will examine Afrikaans and indigenous language influences on NamE sounds.

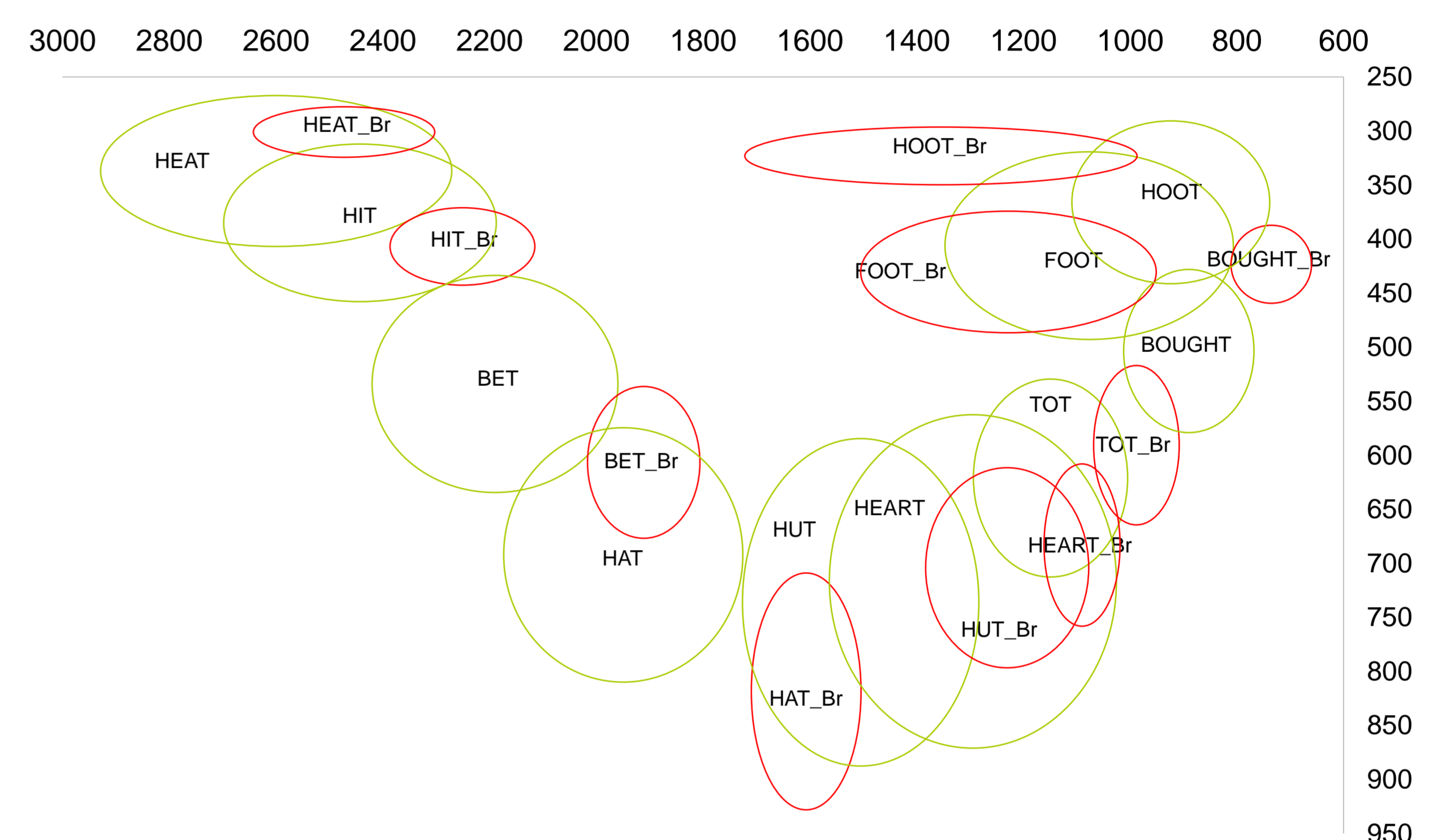


Figure 1. English vowels produced by NamE (green) ja BrE (red) speakers.

Duration of speech sounds

- Short phonetic training with a vowel duration contrast did not result in production learning (Figure 4)
- NamE vowel durations depend on the voicing of the following consonant, as in many other English varieties (Figure 5)

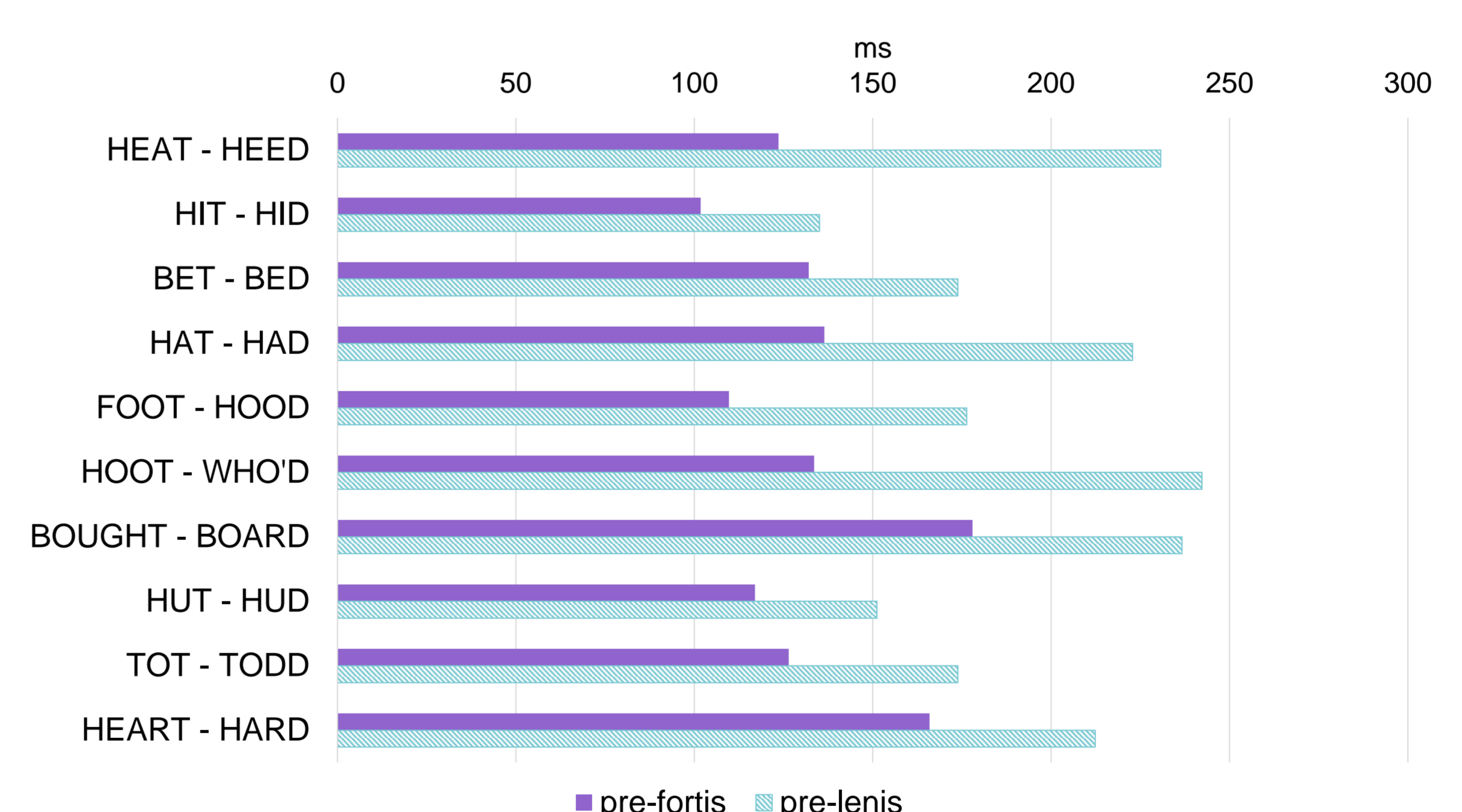


Figure 5. NamE vowel durations. Vowels are produced shorter before voiceless consonants (pre-fortis) and longer before voiced consonants (pre-lenis). This phenomenon exists also in many other English varieties.

Conclusions

The production patterns of NamE appear to be relatively established and stable in terms of speech sound quality and duration.

