

The Arctic Monkeys Then and Now

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The renowned Sheffield indie rock band Arctic Monkeys intentionally stylize their Northern English accent and dialect features. By using these regional features, they index values such as authenticity, localness, and youthfulness, while at the same time resisting to adopt an Americanized singing style which is associated with commercial 'mainstream' popular music (Beal 2009). On their debut album, the Arctic Monkeys even openly criticize artists who betray their values and sell out their identity, i.e. use "the handbook" (Beal 2009: 225) and follow the Americanized mainstream to quickly achieve global success. However, after performing at the Glastonbury Festival in 2013, Alex Turner, the Arctic Monkeys frontman himself, was criticized by the audience for performing with a "weirdenheimer American accent" and for "acting like a 50's crooner" (Wakeman 2013). The aim of our study is to find out 1) whether and to what extent Turner's singing behavior has changed between their first album in 2006 and their most recent one released in 2018 and 2) which additional, non-linguistic factors may have influenced the audience's perception. For this purpose, we analyze salient Sheffield/ British and USA-5 (Simpson 1999) accent features in 30 songs of their six albums. As music performances are inherently multimodal, we further take extralinguistic aspects into account that might contribute to an actual or perceived transformation. The Arctic Monkeys have changed their outward appearance, experimented with different music genres, and broadened the topics of their songs.

Preliminary results show that the performance style of the Arctic Monkeys has changed on different levels. First, a change in their accent can be detected: Whereas songs of the earlier albums show an extensive Sheffield linguistic repertoire and a total absence of 'American' features, songs released on more recent albums show fewer Northern English features and a growing number of instances indicating an Americanized singing style, such as the realization of post-vocalic /r/ and /t/-flapping. However, salient accent features such as the Northern English variant of strut stay indexical for the band's origin and demonstrate the co-existence of possible conflicting identities (Trudgill 1983) in the band's language behavior. Second, non-linguistic factors such as Turner's metamorphosis into an Elvis look-alike and the band's use of different music genres, changing from 'edgy', independent genres like garage rock and post-punk to pop and glam rock, contribute to the perceived Americanization of the band.

References

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