

Received Pronunciation as a Model Pronunciation of the British English: Its History and Evolution

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Annotation:

This article studies the main features and the evolution of the Received Pronunciation, the standard pronunciation of British English, also known as the Queen's English, the BBC English, etc. History and social status evolution of the RP are discussed as well as latest innovations in this variety of English pronunciation.

This study aims to help English learners correct their pronunciation, making it sound more natural and modern, and reduce phonetic interference.

Key words: Received Pronunciation (RP), model pronunciation, accent, variety, phonetic changes.

Introduction

Received Pronunciation (RP) is a linguistic term for the standard pronunciation of British English, which has traditionally been prestigious and served model of correct pronunciation in teaching English as a foreign language.

Received Pronunciation is probably the most widely described type of pronunciation of the English language. The tradition of describing RP has been based on informal observation or self-analysis of the authors, as in D. Jones [1]. Created by him in 1917 "Everyman's English pronouncing dictionary" is still being reprinted, the latest, 18th edition, published in 2012. The descriptive tradition was continued by Gimson and Wells (both gave exhaustive and detailed descriptions of the pronunciation of RP), as well as by many other authors [2]. At the same time, until recently, due attention was not paid to changes in RP, it was regarded as more or less unchanging and homogeneous. However, there is every reason to assume that RP is volatile and has the potential to change like any other living variant of the language [1].

The term "Received Pronunciation" has a number of synonyms used in everyday life and characterizing different aspects of the phenomenon. They are "The Queen's English", "Public School Accent", "Oxford English", "the BBC English", "Standard English", "talking without an accent", "talking posh", etc. All these expressions reflect important historical and social aspects of RP as the English pronunciation of the court and the upper classes, the accent of educated people, the pronunciation used by BBC newsreaders, also as a codified pronunciation serving as a standard for foreign English learners as an accent that obscures the speaker's regional pronunciation.

The historical roots of the English speech standard can usually be traced back to the **16th century**, when one of the regional types of pronunciation became prestigious. The beginnings were laid as early as the **15th century**, when speech, which was "a fusion of the forms of the southern and central parts of central England" [5], had a serious impact on the existing London dialect. For political and economic reasons, the speech of educated residents of the capital and surrounding areas were given high status, which was widely understood throughout the country. In addition, it was the pronunciation of the upper social classes, representing a model for spoken language. Pronunciation 16th century was not yet a fixed norm and was not sufficiently codified. Gradually, it

became a social norm associated with the upper classes, first in the southeast, and then throughout England [2].

In the **18th century**, there was a growing concern about spoken language and correctness issues, setting a standard for "good" or "correct" speech. This trend was associated with the growing prosperity of the middle class, who wanted to erase all traces of their working-class origin in speech [5].

The emerging speech standard remained the social norm only in the southeast of England until the end of the **19th century** was not widespread. During that period, representatives of the aristocracy used mainly regional accents. The emergence of the public school system after 1874, when the "Education Act" was passed, led to the birth of a new educated class, the impetus was given to the development and spread of the standard accent. The RP accent has become the main marker of social position, and it has become unprestigious for representatives of the upper classes to speak with a regional accent [2].

The spread and popularization of RP became even wider with the introduction of sound broadcasting in 1922, and then television in 1930. Using only natives in RP as announcers, the BBC emphasized the social significance of the accent, and RP became even closer in the public mind, associated with high status and intellectual competence [5].

Until the middle of the **twentieth century**, RP held a dominant position as the unsurpassed standard for English pronunciation. But after the Second World War, radical social changes took place in Great Britain, which affected the development of language and the attitude towards RP, whose role changed significantly. Between 1944 and 1966 the number of universities in the UK doubled, and higher education has become accessible to people from different social strata [5]. Professional and academic careers opened up to people from the lower strata of society who were not natives of RP, and RP's hegemony was found to be broken. In 1970 Gimson wrote: "The adoption of the BBC accent, i.e. some form of RP as a standard is no longer considered common among young people. The social structure of the country is much less rigid than it was forty years ago, and the young are particularly inclined to reject the authority of any kind.

Modern RP is still associated with erudition and social status and is "widely regarded as a model for correct pronunciation, in particular for the formal speech of educated people" [4].

RP, like all other types of pronunciation, changes over time and acquires new features, while losing some old ones. As a result, several subtypes of RP can be distinguished, which are more or less susceptible to the development of new pronunciation features or the conservation of old ones and which are spoken by different age groups.

Gimson distinguishes three main types of RP: "*conservative*" which is used by the older generation and, traditionally, by representatives of certain professions or social groups, "*general*" most often characteristic of the pronunciation adopted by the BBC, and "*advanced*" (Modern), which is mainly used by young people of certain social groups. The latter type presumably includes innovations or new trends that may become an integral part of RP in the future and which indicates that the RP system is evolving and that it will be accepted as a general RP in the future [3].

It should be noted that RP is the pronunciation model traditionally used by learners of British English as a foreign language. We consider it necessary to dwell on the changes that have taken place in RP recently. According to the British linguist and phonetician John Wells, English learners should be familiar with these characteristics, despite the fact that they are not necessary for imitation in the learners' own production of speech. Let's dwell on the most important ones.

The disappearance of [ʊə]. Words previously containing the diphthong [ʊə] are increasingly being pronounced with [ɔ:]. Thus, *your* is not pronounced like [jʊə], but like [jɔ:]. *Poor, sure, moor, cure, tourist* often sound like [pɔ:, fɔ:, mɔ:, kjɔ:, 'tɔ:rɪst].

The transition from weak [ɪ] to [ə]. In an unstressed syllable, [ə] is increasingly used in those positions where [ɪ] is used to sound. Therefore, *possible* now sounds ['pɒsəbl], and not as before - ['pɒsɪbl].

Fusion of consonants [tj] and [dj] (Yod-coalescence). There has long been a tendency in English to turn [tj] into [tʃ], [dj] into [dʒ], for example, as in the word *nature*, where [t] and [j] have long been replaced by the affricate [tʃ] - ['neɪtʃə].

Glottal stop (T-glottalling). The plosive consonant [t] is often replaced by a glottal stop [ʔ], as in *football* ['fʊʔbɔ:l], *quite good* [kwaiʔ gʊd], *witness* ['wɪʔnəs], *right* [raɪʔ].

Vocalization of L. The dark [ɫ] undergoes the process of vocalization and becomes a vowel, i.e.: [ɫ] → [o]. Thus, when pronouncing *milk* [mɪlk], the tip of the tongue may not touch the alveoli at all: instead, a new kind of diphthong is pronounced - /mɪok/. By analogy, *St. Paul's Cathedral* becomes /s(ə)nt pɔ:wz kə'θi:drɔw/, *whole* /hoʊ/, *tall* /toʊ/.

To sum up, due to social changes in the United Kingdom, it is becoming increasingly difficult to define RP and the term itself is becoming increasingly vague. The description of RP as belonging to one social class is no longer valid, and social ancestry is not a reliable indicator for identifying RP natives. At the same time, recent phonological changes have led to the need to update the description of RP. The only aspect that has remained stable in RP since at least the end of the 19th century is its lack of regional identity, since this type of pronunciation is common among a small circle of speakers throughout Great Britain.

Foreign language teachers using British Oriented English are encouraged to use RP as their pronunciation model. However, this model should be reviewed and updated from time to time.

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