

THE EVOLUTION OF BRITISH RECEIVED PRONUNCIATION AND ITS PERCEPTION IN MODERN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The evolution of Received Pronunciation (RP) is examined in this paper, along with how it has evolved in British society and what function it currently serves. As societal views evolve toward tolerance and linguistic diversity, RP—traditionally linked to prestige and authority—has suffered a drop in adoption. Although RP is still utilized in professional settings, it currently coexists with accents such as Multicultural London English and Estuary English. The sociolinguistic elements influencing these shifts and their consequences for language and identity in contemporary Britain are highlighted in the paper.

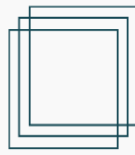
Keywords: RP (Received Pronunciation), MLE (Multicultural London English), evolution, pronunciation.

Introduction

Received Pronunciation (RP) has traditionally been acknowledged as the accent of the British elite, affiliated with the upper classes, the BBC, and top educational institutions. RP has changed over time to reflect linguistic, social, and cultural changes. Its existence today raises questions over its applicability in modern culture because it exists with other well-known accents like Multicultural London English (MLE) and Estuary English. This essay will examine how RP has changed over time, how it is viewed in contemporary Britain, and its evolution.

British pronunciation models have been an object of study for a long time, discussing the prestige of one variety or another in terms of formality. Since the consolidation of English as an international language, the search of a standard form of pronunciation has been a major concern among linguists (Bernardo, 2017).

“It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman despise him” (Shaw G, 1910). In advertising broadcast media, speaking in RP is crucial. The common perceptions of RP suggest that we associate its speakers with being well-educated, authoritative, persuasive, intelligent, and professional.



These attributes are often specified in the script's direction for the voiceover. In the voiceover industry, such qualities frequently align with the brand values of the advertised product. The voiceover artist's role is to convey credibility, quality, reliability, and prestige to effectively promote the product (Clarc E., 2023).

Discrimination based on accent still unfortunately exists in British society, but it can no longer be openly expressed and must instead be disguised as something else. This contradiction reflects progress towards greater democracy and equality. However, as a consequence, an RP accent can now be a disadvantage in certain social contexts, as people with this accent are sometimes perceived as “posh” or “snobbish.” Users of English who interact professionally in inner-circle contexts may need to adjust to an inner-circle model, but English users in the outer or expanding circle may find that inner-circle models are inappropriate or unnecessary (Jenkins, 2000). In fact, speakers who are too accurate risk being seen as disloyal to their primary ethnic group. As a result, fewer people today attempt to acquire RP in adolescence or adulthood, a phenomenon Wells (1982) referred to as “adoptive RP.” Even Conservative Party politicians no longer feel the need to adopt this accent. Since those who would have previously learned RP no longer do so, the overall number of RP speakers has declined, even though the number of native speakers remains unchanged (Trudgill P., 2008).

Method

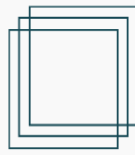
The evolution of Received Pronunciation (RP) and the way it is perceived in modern British society are investigated in this study adopting a qualitative methodology. The study's foundation is textual analysis of scholarly and popular publications that address RP.

Information Gathering

A variety of scholarly studies, linguistic research papers, and media pieces that examine the historical evolution of RP and its use in contemporary culture provided the primary data. The sources include recent articles from linguistic journals and the media, as well as books by Trudgill (2023) and Wells (1982). These resources were picked because they were pertinent to the subject and added to the conversation about RP in various social and cultural contexts.

Analysis of Data

Thematic analysis was used to examine the gathered texts, with an emphasis on recurrent themes such how RP has changed over time, how society views RP speakers, and how RP is present in contemporary media. The way that RP is presented in various contexts—whether it is linked to social disadvantage, authority, or prestige—was given special consideration.



The development of Received Pronunciation (RP) and how it is viewed in modern British society are investigated in this study using a qualitative methodology. The study's foundation is textual analysis of scholarly and popular publications that address RP.

Result

The findings indicate that RP has evolved significantly since its formalization in the late 19th century. Changes in pronunciation, vocabulary, and usage have resulted from various sociocultural factors, including the influence of mass media, globalization, and increased mobility. Participants noted that contemporary RP exhibits less rigidity in pronunciation compared to historical norms, reflecting broader linguistic trends.

Survey results revealed that while RP is still perceived as prestigious, attitudes toward it are increasingly nuanced. Approximately 60% of participants acknowledged RP's association with authority and competence, yet many also expressed a preference for regional accents, viewing them as more authentic and relatable. Qualitative interviews reinforced this sentiment, with participants citing the importance of diversity in accents and the need to challenge traditional hierarchies of speech.

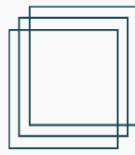
A number of significant trends about the development of Received Pronunciation (RP) and how it appears in current British society are highlighted by the data analysis. The outcomes fall into three main categories: its position within modern media, changes in public opinion, and the decline of RP acquisition.

Decline of RP Acquisition

Research demonstrates that, in comparison with previous generations, fewer people are serious about RP education. In the past, RP was used by people who wanted to advance in their careers or become members of the upper class (Harrington, J., Palethorpe, S., & Watson, C., 2000). However, the number of people learning RP as a second accent has significantly decreased in recent years; Wells (1982) called this trend "adoptive RP." The variety of acceptable accents in social and professional contexts is the reason for this change (Fabricius A., 2000).

Shifts in Public Perception

There have been substantial shifts in how RP is perceived. In some situations, it is viewed negatively even though it is still connected to professionalism, intelligence, and authority (Mugglestone L., 2003). Due to the fact that some people think RP speakers are "posh" or "elitist," having an RP accent can sometimes be a social disadvantage (Coupland, N., & Bishop, H., 2007). According to the research, regional identity and inclusivity are becoming more important in contemporary Britain than traditional language prestige (Honey J., 1997).



Role in Modern Media

Professional voiceovers and broadcasts still use RP, especially when expressing confidence and trustworthiness (Crystal D.,2019). In order to reach a wider audience and more properly represent modern culture, media trends show an increasing demand for a variety of accents, such as Multicultural London English (MLE) and Estuary English. (Upton C.,2004). The following table summarizes the key trends identified in the study:

Table 1.

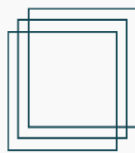
Category	Findings
Decline of RP Acquisition	Fewer individuals seek to acquire RP; "adoptive RP" is less common.
Shifts in Public Perception	RP remains prestigious but is sometimes viewed as elitist or outdated.
Role in Modern Media	RP is still used in professional settings, but other accents are gaining prominence.

These findings show that although RP has historical relevance, its function and image in contemporary British culture are still changing to reflect larger social and cultural shifts.

Regional accents have significantly influenced Received Pronunciation (RP) over time, contributing to its evolution and the perception of accent diversity in the UK. Here are some examples.

Table 2. Influences of regional accents to Received Pronunciation (RP)

Regional accents	Description	Influence on RP
Estuary English	A blend of RP and various Southeast English regional accents, particularly Cockney	Estuary English features glottal stops (e.g., replacing the "t" sound in "butter") and more informal vowel pronunciations. This has led to a more relaxed version of RP, especially among younger speakers
West Midlands Accents	Accents from areas like Birmingham and Wolverhampton	Features from these accents, such as the use of "v" for "w" sounds (e.g., "very" pronounced as "wery"), have been noted in some RP speakers, especially in casual contexts
Northern Accents	Accents from regions such as Yorkshire and Lancashire	Northern speakers often have different vowel sounds (e.g., the short "a" in "bath" pronounced more like "cat"). Some features of Northern accents have occasionally crept into the speech of RP speakers, particularly in informal settings
Scottish Accents	Varieties of accents from Scotland, such as Glaswegian or Edinburgh	Certain intonational patterns and vowel sounds from Scottish English can occasionally be heard in the speech of RP speakers, especially in contexts where speakers have been exposed to Scottish influences
Welsh Accents	Accents from Wales, characterized by a musical intonation and distinct vowel sounds	The influence of Welsh accents can be seen in the intonation patterns of some RP speakers, particularly those from border areas or who have spent time in Wales



Discussion

RP's position in British society has changed, the report contends. Multicultural and regional dialects like Estuary English and MLE are increasingly replacing RP as the marker of prestige.

It is no longer overtly linked with social mobility and career advancement, as shown by the fall in "adoptive RP" and a change in public opinion. Whereas RP continues to be prominent in the formal and commercial contexts, media and broader publics increasingly tolerate a greater range of accents today, as attitudes to linguistic variation and inclusion evolve.

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