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Conclusion

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8 CONCLUSION

The present publication has aimed to present an updated model of Received Pronunciation and to test the feasibility of its adoption in a non-native environment as well. Moreover, particular focus has been placed on five selected variables.

It has been demonstrated that the model present in ELT textbooks has not changed significantly since the establishment of RP as a pronunciation model to be followed in those countries where British (rather than American) English is preferred. Since a high number of ELT recordings include young people with modern varieties of the prestige accent, there are more and more details in which the voices diverge from the model offered in textbooks and other teaching materials.

It should be clear from what has been maintained throughout the work that RP, despite numerous efforts to petrify it, is a constantly evolving accent. The nature of this change is societal, i.e. language changes especially at the level of *parole* (language in use).

The need to dust the model and present it in an updated version outside the native milieu is linked with the fact that the model is supposed to be widely intelligible (cf. Jones 1977: x, Cruttenden 2014). While the issue of intelligibility is discussed in detail below, intelligibility is understood as a general capacity to be understood with the minimal effort on the part of the receiver. The research results suggest that traditional RP does not fulfil the criterion of wide intelligibility as much as modern RP does.

Some of the results may seem questionable due to a low number of tokens. Above all, this applies to some linguistic contexts in which the glottal stop can appear. While it is true that a higher number of tokens would be needed to reach firm conclusions, I argue that the results presented here can be considered to

reveal certain tendencies regarding the perception of [ʔ] in the native and non-native environments.

The rest of this chapter discusses the findings based on the hypotheses set in the Introduction.

Hypothesis 1: there are differences between CZ and EN respondents regarding the mental categories that construct RP as well as regarding the level of tolerance towards variability in RP.

As expected in this hypothesis, CZ respondents have awarded a lower overall RP score than EN respondents. The differences between native and non-native ears may have played a part: CZ respondents do not recognise finer regional and social details that generally do not escape the natives. When they judge whether a particular voice is RP or otherwise, CZ respondents rely far more on intelligibility, which is largely influenced by the speed of utterance. The outdated model presented in the ELT world is also likely to have influenced the total RP scores.

As for the mental categories that construct RP in the minds of the respondents, the amount of data gathered from CZ and EN respondents varies considerably: the former set has provided 385 comments while the latter set has made 514 comments. Thus, every EN respondent has provided on average 6.45 more comments. Such numbers clearly reveal different levels of intensity with which both sets perceive the voices.

The category of intelligibility is only applied to CZ respondents. My previous research (Ježek 2009) firmly establishes its prominent position among all the categories, and it also proves the futility of asking native respondents to react to this category. This research shows that CZ respondents link RP with intelligibility so strongly that intelligible accents, irrespective of some non-RP features (e.g. raised STRUT in Sample 3) are, by and large, assigned high RP scores.

As regards CZ respondents, intelligibility is influenced mainly by the speed of utterance. This category is the only one where non-natives have made more comments than their native counterparts, as Table 88 shows.

If it were not for the category of speed, the categories of regionality, social status, education and poshness would occupy the same positions (in this order) for both sets of respondents.

Regionality has received the highest number of comments of all the categories; particularly EN respondents find this category crucially important. By way of explanation, I would like to highlight the discrepancy between the supposedly non-regional prestige accent and some regional features that are clearly part of

the RP repertoire without being accounted for in the model. My research shows that some regional features (especially short BATH) do not prevent voices from being labelled as RP.

Given the almost identical numbers of comments from both sets of respondents, social status and education play similar roles. As regards EN respondents, social status is prominent particularly in Samples 4 and 12 (traditional RP voices): 22 positive remarks out of the total of 86. Education is often mentioned in connection with northern voices where social status seems to play a less significant role.

It may be said that these two categories have merged to a considerable extent. Admittedly, the link between social status and education on the one hand and RP on the other used to be very strong, particularly in the first decades of the 20th century when the accent was called PSP (Public School Pronunciation; Jones 1917). Later, however, social status seems to have gained prominence and the overwhelming connotations were those of privileged upbringing rather than a high level of education. Now that the scope of RP has enlarged to include the sounds that educated speakers make (rather than what a preconceived model allows; cf. Upton 2000a: 78), the connotations of education have intensified.

It is nevertheless true that while the link between education and RP is still strong, the accent does not enjoy the same amount of exclusivity it used to have. There are many educated speakers who use a range of regional voices that are, more or less, removed from the prestige accent. Moreover, the present survey implies that traditional RP voices are not perceived to be any more educated than those containing certain regional features.

Poshness seems to be more prominent for female respondents and it is also associated with southern voices rather than with northern ones. The former difference is, however, not big and any conclusions would border on pure speculation. Southern voices are viewed as posher chiefly because of N EN respondents, who relatively often find southern voices posh. In contrast, S EN respondents do not use the label so often—especially not so in connection with northern voices.

Poshness divides the two sets of respondents very sharply: while CZ respondents define this category mainly via negative remarks (i.e. a voice does not sound posh enough to be considered RP), their EN counterparts' comments are largely positive (i.e. a voice is posh and RP). It is thus concluded that CZ respondents expect poshness more than EN respondents do. This is in line with the overall RP scores from both sets of respondents (Figure 1): EN respondents' perception of RP is less exclusive and tolerates more variability. As a consequence, EN respondents label many accents as RP even though posh overtones are not present (or at least not mentioned). If a voice is found to be posh, the RP label remains but it is a marked variety of the prestige accent that often makes the natives point out the undesirable social connotations connected with the posh elements. Reactions

to Sample 12 exemplify the prevailing attitude to traditional RP: a large number of EN respondents deem it necessary to add comments regarding the outdated, old-fashioned and pretentious character of this variety of RP.

Speed is the most divisive category of all. It is only of marginal importance for EN respondents (they only comment on this category in connection with traditional RP voices: Samples 4 and 12) whereas CZ respondents regard it crucial, for speed largely determines to what extent a given voice is intelligible. The close relation between speed and intelligibility explains the chasm between the two sets of respondents. EN respondents have hardly any difficulty understanding the voices in the present survey; the category of speed would, in all likelihood, be more relevant to native respondents if the voices were much more regional, thereby creating considerable problems in terms of intelligibility.

The general pattern seems obvious: the slower the speech, the more intelligible and, therefore, the more RP. Yet, there may be exceptions to this rule; namely Sample 4, which is so slow that many non-native respondents find it regional or even a non-native accent of English.

Hypothesis 2: the selected variables are part of the RP repertoire in both the native and non-native environments

This hypothesis is partially confirmed. The native environment seems to accept the variables, though there are some important issues to deal with as far as short BATH and the glottal stop are concerned. The non-native environment has not entirely accepted the changes; the reasons for this are discussed below.

From the perspective of native speakers, the research confirms that TRAP [a], intrusive /r/ and fronted FOOT/GOOSE belong to the RP repertoire unquestionably. Native speakers do not feel any stigma attached to these variants and their reaction to them is thus minimal.

The glottal stop, however, is such a complex phenomenon that it cannot be treated as a binary (either/or) phenomenon. Various phonetic environments must be distinguished with their varying degrees of acceptability attached to them. Also, it appears that the glottal stop in RP is only acceptable as a replacement of /t/; the other two plosives (/p/ and /k/) remain stigmatised regardless of the linguistic context.

According to the results presented here, the glottal stop is questionable as an RP sound in the following positions:

- across word boundaries preceding vowels (*quite easy*),
- pre-pausally (*Quite!*),
- word-medially preceding a syllabic nasal (*button*).

Despite there being no token of word-medial [ʔ] in an intervocalic position (or preceding a syllabic [ɹ]), it seems valid to conclude that this type is utterly unacceptable in RP. This conclusion is based on the social status of the speakers in my research (they are university educated and middle class) as well as the fact that there is no glottal stop in this position in more than 60 minutes of authentic speech from which the samples have been selected.

I am convinced that short BATH deserves its place in the model of RP owing to the fact that northern speakers keep this sound, which has lost the stigma it used to be endowed with, even though they otherwise completely modify their regional accents in the direction of RP. The comments from S EN and N EN respondents as well as their RP scores bear it out beyond doubt. While it is possible to deny such speakers the RP label (and call them Near-RP; Wells 1982: 287) or RGB (Cruttenden 2014: 81), it appears rather controversial to restrict a supposedly supraregional accent to a specific region. It seems fairer to me to agree with Upton et al. (2003: xiii) that there are two equal varieties of RP (northern and southern) and stop viewing the accent as non-localisable. Whether RP BATH is [ɑ:] only or both [a] and [ɑ:] does not prevent RP from being affiliated with a particular region.

It is extremely difficult to establish a pattern for non-native respondents and their comments regarding the variables under investigation. It is remarkable that all the scores fall in the area from 20% to 28.5%. The scores are so close to one another that no hierarchy of variables and their acceptability in RP can be established. The majority of CZ respondents mention all the variables but they do not mention them more than three times. Also, they rarely mention more than one variable per sample. I would like to offer the following explanations: CZ respondents may not be used to such a type of listening activity, there may be too much effort for a non-native ear, or they think they are supposed to spot one ‘mistake’ and once they do, their attention flags.

Generally speaking, CZ respondents are more likely to spot variables providing they appear in a given sample more than once. This is arguably linked with the reasons outlined above.

Furthermore, it is concluded that CZ respondents display a certain reluctance to accept the studied variables as RP sounds. It seems, however, that this reluctance does not stem from social values attendant upon the variables. A comparison of CZ results for short BATH and raised STRUT provides corroborating evidence for the claim that CZ respondents do not distinguish between non-stigmatised (short BATH) and stigmatised (raised STRUT) variants: CZ scores for these two variables, unlike the EN ones, are almost identical. Likewise, CZ respondents do not pay much attention to phonetic environments in which the

glottal stop may appear—they react to [ʔ] in absolute terms; in other words, [ʔ] is either present (and that often marks the accent down in terms of RP-ness) or it is not.

I interpret the reluctance as a reaction to sounds that do not comply with the model presented in ELT teaching publications (e.g. TRAP should be [], intrusive /r/ is not ‘there’ in the spelling, and short BATH as a regional sound has no place in a non-localisable accent such as RP). Yet, when CZ respondents hear the sounds that the model in ELT publications includes (Sample 4), their RP score is rather low. Upton (2008: 238) claims that ‘[t]he RP model with which [...] learners continue to be confronted is ultimately, of course, a matter of *sounds*’. Despite the symbols, which have not changed in ELT materials for decades, CZ respondents must by now have got used to modern RP sounds—to such an extent, in fact, that they have difficulty spotting and understanding traditional RP, i.e. the accent many of them are supposed, judging by the model found in teaching materials, to embrace and promulgate in the classroom.

Generally speaking, CZ respondents tend to perceive the prestige accent (individual sounds as well as the mental categories) in absolute terms. For instance, the glottal stop is thus either present or it is not. This is the biggest difference between them and their EN counterparts, who take a much more relative stance. They perceive the prestige accent with its features more as a scale; they discriminate between individual variants. It might be concluded that their mindset is different and this may always present the biggest obstacle when a native prestige accent is supposed to perform the role of a model in a non-native environment. Following Crystal and Davy (1969) non-native learners do not possess an inherent intuition concerning various styles, hence the absolute/relative mindset differences. This applies, above all, to pronunciation. While different styles in written discourse are discussed in ELT publications, various styles of pronunciation (e.g. the four styles distinguished by O’Connor 1948: 4) are largely neglected and the matters of pronunciation typically focus on what O’Connor labels a ‘formal colloquial style’. Such a narrow focus explains why the glottal stop is rejected by CZ respondents without discussing its use in less formal styles.

Hypothesis 3: the updated transcription model of RP created by Upton brings benefit to both native and non-native speakers of English.

It is hard to deny that professionals in the ELT world should be aware of innovations that affect RP. The introduction of lowered TRAP appears eminently desirable since the effort to learn traditional RP [æ] (a rather difficult sound from a non-native perspective) is rather unnecessary: TRAP [a] is now a firmly established sound in RP and has more positive social connotations than [æ],

which is being increasingly perceived as outdated. In addition, the position of [a] outside the native milieu is now likely to become stronger as more publications have adopted the feature (most notably Cruttenden 2014).

The glottal stop is only recommended to those non-natives who are aware of the various phonetic environments in which [ʔ] can appear and of the social values attendant upon the sound.

Shot BATH is a purely regional feature and it is not to be expected in a non-native accent unless the given speaker has certain northern affiliations.

Fronted FOOT/GOOSE and intrusive /r/ may seemingly bring little benefit to non-native learners if one adopts a purely phonetic/phonological stance and views the whole issue solely from the perspective of the crucial non-native category: intelligibility. Admittedly, the same can be said about the other variables studied here. But it has been demonstrated that natives are particularly sensitive to variation in accents and the prestige accent is no exception. While non-natives will not make themselves any more intelligible if their repertoire includes some glottal stops, TRAP [a] and intrusive /r/, these sounds undoubtedly bring other benefits: they do not carry negative social connotations and they signal that the learner has mastered the language (or at least its pronunciation) to a very high degree.

In conclusion, the selected variables are difficult to order in terms of their benefit to non-native learners of English. However, one can hardly step out of line if only what has already been accepted in at least some native models is accepted in a non-native model as well. Therefore, lowered TRAP [a] and intrusive /r/ seem to be suitable candidates. Due to the reasons discussed above, the other three variables are not likely to appear in a non-native model of RP in the near future, although the inclusion of short BATH would be especially beneficial, because it would radically alter the way RP is perceived (as a consequence, it would bring RP more in line with the prestige accents of other languages, which are largely based on supraregional standards of pronunciation).

Native RP speakers undoubtedly benefit from the updated model that includes new sounds and transcriptions faithfully mirroring the linguistic reality. In fact, most of them use most of the innovations anyway and they hardly need any outside incentive (such as a pronouncing dictionary) to adopt these features. In the native environment, the crucial question is not whether to accept particular variables but whether to reflect them in the transcription model offered to the public. As Chapter 6 details, there is still considerable disagreement among native linguists and the models they offer.

The repertoire of RP sounds has changed considerably in the past decades and it seems desirable to change the model in such a way as to reflect the changes.

The ‘hard-won uniformity’ (Wells 2001) of transcription needs to be changed if it does not correspond with the truth any more. While some symbols may only be considered as transcriptional preferences with little impact on the way the accent and its model are perceived (e.g. Upton’s DRESS and NURSE), other symbols may play an important role in establishing a model that, as has been mentioned, ‘looks forward to the new millennium rather than back at increasingly outmoded forms’ (Upton 2001: 352). TRAP [a] is a case in point.

The inclusion of short BATH is also quite revolutionary. I believe that it ultimately does away with the long-upheld axiom of non-localisability. It is hoped that this research reveals the benefits of short BATH as an RP sound. Whether one accepts the sound or not, it does not change the fact that RP now inevitably contains regional elements.

In the future, fronted FOOT/GOOSE may replace the traditional [ʊ] and [u:] to reflect its quality more accurately. On the one hand, the change seems rather straightforward in terms of its practicality. On the other hand, though, it would introduce a new symbol on the RP scene, which would no doubt stir up a heated debate in academic circles—especially since the symbol [ʊ̟] may seem rather abstruse to non-native learners of English.

The presence of the glottal stop in today’s British English is overwhelming. Nonetheless, its appearance in a modern model of RP would entail a number of obstacles. Most importantly, it has been demonstrated that the sound is endowed with a significant amount of social value linked with various phonetic environments, which is a fact that largely escapes non-native learners. It suffices to add, as is the case with most of the pronouncing dictionaries to date, an explanatory note that informs learners of the existence of [ʔ] and briefly explains the complexity of this sound in modern British English.

Intrusive /r/ has already made way into some models of RP (Upton et al. 2003 and Wells 2008). It has now lost much (if not all) of the stigma and its inclusion in more RP models is possibly only a matter of time.

Apart from the concluding remarks that are directly related to the hypotheses, the present publication also tries to establish the present status of RP.

Beal (2008a: 35) demonstrates that we witness ‘in the 20th and early 21st centuries the proliferation and popularisation of a whole range of prescriptive texts’, which makes her conclude that the demand for ‘proper’ pronunciation is as strong as it used to be. She goes on to remark, however, that ‘the ideal being offered in elocution classes today is not RP but a “softer”, “neutral” accent which will offend nobody, by being associated neither with the upper nor the lower classes’ (2008a: 34). It is hard to deny that traditional RP is hardly an option if such criteria are to be met. The present survey shows that in terms of education there is essentially no difference between a soft regional voice and traditional

RP—social connotations are nonetheless completely different. A modern model of RP that puts up an inoffensive set of sounds thus does not seem to make a mistake if it includes a regional sound like short BATH. Recently, Upton has also suggested in personal communication that he is increasingly more and more inclined to accept a ‘fudge’ in STRUT as an RP norm (‘fudge’ is a northern way of realising the vowel where the vowel is only slightly raised above [ʌ] and not rounded at all, thereby producing [ʊ], cf. Chambers and Trudgill 1998: 110). This attitude, however, is not shared in my survey where even ‘fudged’ STRUT (see Sample 10, for example) receives rather unfavourable comments.

Sociolinguistic research has demonstrated that it seems rather erroneous to think that if native speakers modify their speech, it is always in the direction of RP (cf. Wells 1982: 104). As a result, one can hardly blame RP for the erosion of traditional dialect forms (Wales 2006: 171). As Milroy observes, this academic belief ‘may well come from spending too much time in universities’ (2001: 29). Wales (2006: 172–4) reports several studies that notice the disappearance of traditional (i.e. rural or urban) forms in the North. What is immensely interesting is the fact that speakers in these areas do not adopt RP variants; instead, they opt for supra-local norms. FACE and GOAT diphthongs are examples of this: the traditional [ɪə] and [ʊə] have been replaced not with RP [eɪ] and [əʊ] but rather with monophthongal [e:] and [ɔ:]. Watt and Milroy (1999: 26) call this process ‘counterurbanisation’: upwardly mobile middle-class people adopt variants that are prestigious supra-locally (e.g. Tyneside, Yorkshire, etc.), thereby retaining certain markers of regional identity. Such variants have also been called ‘pan-Northern’ (Ihalainen 1994: 260) and in sociolinguistics the process is generally known as ‘dialect levelling’ (Williams and Kerswill 1999). Crucially, although many regional dialects in the North are being levelled, it is not in the direction of RP.

It is obvious that monophthongal FACE and GOAT retain a considerable degree of prestige; in these areas they are considered to be educated and middle-class (Wales 2006: 173). In this respect, they perform the same role as RP forms perform elsewhere. With the two equal varieties of RP in mind, it seems fitting to conclude that in the future it is likely to expect more region-based standard forms that will fulfil the roles previously occupied by one non-localisable prestige accent. No longer do people seem willing to betray their own identity and sever all the linguistic links with their regional background. Instead, they increasingly retain those regional linguistic features that are not stigmatised.

Linguists do not like being prescriptive about their discipline. They probably dislike it even more if they are asked to prophesy what will happen in the future. The fact that RP, under this name or another one, will keep changing seems indisputable. If more regional and social sounds are accepted into it, there will probably be even more varieties of RP than there are today. Whilst this might frustrate a few, I am more than happy to join the authors of *Oxford Dictionary of*

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Pronunciation for Current English in their appeal, which I deem a most fitting ending to my publication:

Finally, we appeal to our readers, the living speakers of contemporary English, whether native or later acquired, to listen to the pronunciation of English around them and to revel in the endless variety of English voices and accents that they will hear. [...] We will join you, our readers, in the appreciation of the multitude of accents and voices [...] and assert as well their own great value for the subtlety and richness of our English language. (Upton et al. 2003: viii)