From "RP" to "Estuary English":

The concept 'received' and the debate about British
pronunciation standards

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Foreword

This is the original English version of my M.A. thesis, which was written in 1997 and not admitted by the *Fachbereich Sprachwissenschaften* of Hamburg University.

I have not updated or changed it in any way except to bring it into line with the (later) German version by cutting out a report on an empirical study I conducted in 1997, which in German would have made the thesis longer than the permitted 120 pages.

There are two points I would like to add, however. One concerns a feature of speech which would otherwise be considered RP that seems to have gained enormous currency over the last year or so: the pronunciation of the –*ing* ending in. This is increasingly pronounced [-ɪŋk], as in the well-known spelling <nuffink> for *nothing* in popular representations of Cockney speech.

The other is that being relieved of the stress of preparing for exams, I have been reading George Orwell again, who seems to have diagnosed a levelling accent of Cockney origin in the Home Counties as early as in the 1930s:

> In the Thames Valley the country accents were going out. Except for the farm lads, nearly everyone who was born later than 1890 talked Cockney.
> [*Coming Up For Air*. 1939. Penguin edn. 1962, p.98]

But this is not all. He also turns out to be an early champion of what can only be Estuary English, whose adoption as a British English standard of pronunciation he advocates:

> The third thing that is needed is to remove the class labels from the English language. It is not desirable that all the local accents should disappear, but there should be a manner of speaking that is definitely national and is not merely (like the accent of the B.B.C. announcers) a copy of the mannerisms of the upper classes. This national accent – a modification of cockney, perhaps [...] – should be taught as a matter of course to all children alike.
> ['The English People'. Written 1944, published 1947; quoted from *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell.* Vol. 3 'As I Please 1943 - 1945'. Harmondsworth 1970, p.51]

Good old Estuary English! (Or, as one of my teachers used to say: "Es ist alles schon mal dagewesen.")

List of Abbreviations

AmE.   American English

BBC   British Broadcasting Corporation

C   (followed by a number or a phoneme) cardinal vowel

EE   Estuary English

EPD   English Pronouncing Dictionary (v. References)

LPD   Longman Pronunciation Dictionary (v. References)

OED   Oxford English Dictionary

PSP   Public School Pronunciation

RP   Received Pronunciation

StP   Standard Pronunciation

TEFL   Teaching English as a Foreign Language

References in the text: Authors are in small capitals, followed by the year of publication; the form is as in the references. A date refers to References, part B (usually articles which appeared in the daily press on that day).

0. Introduction

The term 'Received Pronunciation' ('RP') has in the course of this century come to designate – at least among linguists and EFL teachers – the British English style of pronunciation that carries the highest overt prestige.   It is generally agreed that it has long lost all associations with its regional origin (London and the South-East of England) and is now purely a class dialect (or 'sociolect'). As such the term is often used synonymously with 'standard pronunciation' or at any rate, taken to represent some sort of standard, at least for British English, at home and abroad.

This paper proposes to look at the phenomenon 'RP' from different perspectives, trying to pin it down. Numerous descriptions have been published of this speech style, and endless material has been produced on its status, significance, and ongoing changes. In spite of this is has not been possible to define it in a meaningful way. Descriptions have almost exclusively been of the segmental order, and it is debatable whether this does justice to any speech style.

Recently, another label was made available to the public: 'Estuary English'[1] ('EE') stands for an accent – or a range of accents – which is definitely regarded as downmarket from RP by a *consensus omnium bonorum* (as they would qualify themselves) but has similar regional origins as the latter (London and the South-East) and which, because of its ever growing popularity, is thought to pose a serious threat to the hegemony of RP as the standard or reference accent for British English.

Every now and again, 'public opinion' goes into an emotional spasm about the state of the language,[2] so 'Estuary English' is a welcome addition to

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[1] The term was coined by David Rosewarne and first appeared in print in his article 'Estuary English' in *The Times Educational Supplement*, 19 October 1984. It did not, however, achieve any wide currency until *The Sunday Times* carried a leader about it in its Wordpower Supplement in March 1994.

[2] 'Public opinion' here stands for the opinion of that part of the public who choose and have the means to publicly voice it (and who may not necessarily be a representative cross-section of the public).

the fuel with which the related polemic is fired. The present topicality of the language debate was demonstrated by the BBC's decision to dedicate its 1996 Reith Lectures to language and language change.[3]

It has not always been clear what exactly the standard is that people have made appeal to, but 'RP' has served as one label among others for a speech style that is considered educated, non-regional and generally desirable, and taken to denote a standard, although officially there is no such standard.[4] Indeed, it is highly questionable whether there can be such a thing as a standard of pronunciation, since a standard must by definition be constant, whereas the pronunciation of any language is subject to fashion and change and thus forever elusive. That which is generically labelled 'RP' in particular is subject to numerous manifestations.

A number of arguments have become stock-in-trade for the pro-RP, pro-standard, faction. They are, not only that it is widely understood, but also that it is the only accent that can be generally understood at all; that it is more universally accepted and less offensive to the majority of people than any other English accent; that it is more articulate, clearer, and even more pleasing aesthetically than any other form of spoken English; conversely, others have maintained that RP is a degenerate and debased form of English, unfit to be a world language. Some of these arguments will be discussed.

The study of accent as a class marker and the evaluation of different styles of speech is really a matter for social psychology, but since so much work has been done on this aspect of RP, and since it is really at the heart of the linguistic debate also, it will be extensively treated in this paper.

In fact it remains to be seen how much weight any linguistic arguments carry in the context of language variation and change. The results

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[3] The lectures were delivered by Professor Jean Aitchison, and the reaction of the public to her approach is an example of this kind of debate (see 'References', part B).

[4] It shall be assumed for the time being that words like *educated, standard, class* have a common every-day meaning; they shall be discussed in more detail later on. While 'standard English' technically refers to the written language, this paper only considers accents with which standard English can be pronounced. Terms like 'dialect', 'sociolect' also refer to pronunciation only, in the context of this paper.

obtained empirically by social psychologists are mostly directly contradictory of the orthodox view of linguistics, that no language/dialect/accent is 'inherently' better than any other. Ironically, linguistic or pseudo-linguistic arguments are often used to give an air of respectability to positions that cannot be supported rationally (or with any degree of political correctness), and this is why none of these arguments ring true. People for some reason do not say, 'I prefer dealing with people who are like myself', 'I have made the experience that people who do not speak some approximation to my own kind of speech are uninteresting, dull, and often coarse', or make similar statements, which at least would give them a chance of admitting that there are an increasing number of exceptions to their empirically derived 'rules'. [5]

The first part of this paper is dedicated to a discussion of RP and the myths surrounding it, of Estuary English and its differences from and relationship to RP. What is RP (in substance – if any), and what does 'RP' refer to? I propose to discuss how recent a development Estuary English is, and whether it is really anything new at all, or just a name. In this context, the development of the most relevant individual sounds is treated in detail in order to provide substance. Chapter 3 looks at the various ideas about a standard of pronunciation and the role of the BBC in particular. Following that, chapter 4 discusses the contributions of social psychology to the accent debate.

In the final chapter, these various aspects will be brought together. I shall discuss the tension which is apparent between the stance that linguistic science takes to the accent question and popular and evaluative (possibly aesthetic) attitudes.

Because I aim to look at the phenomenon RP from as many different angles as possible, many aspects cannot here be treated with anything approaching the depth they deserve. On the other hand I believe that such a treatment, superficial though it must be, is necessary to understand why there is so much debate and controversy about the accent issue. While I cannot realistically hope to resolve any of the

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[5] As KERSWILL (25 June 1995) and COGGLE (4 Nov. 1994) point out, accent prejudice, although no better than racial or sexist prejudice, somehow still seems to be acceptable .

questions surrounding the issue I will attempt to describe the problem and suggest why there are no answers to many questions.

1. Received Pronunciation

The name as well as the substance of RP raise many questions, one of which is: does the fact that the name has been in use for seventy years mean that there is such a thing? Does the very use of the name create the thing, in the minds of those who partake of such a usage, and is this concept the same or a similar one for all those who use the term (until recently mainly linguists, phoneticians and language teachers)?[6]

The questions to be discussed here are *Is there such an accent as RP?, If so, how is it defined?*   Before that, the history of the name itself shall be considered.

1.1. The History of 'RP'

The first use of the epithet 'received' for the polite pronunciation current in the educated classes is usually attributed to A.J. ELLIS (*On Early English Pronunciation*, 1869-1889),[7] but FISHER (1993) traces it back to John WALKER's *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language* of 1791. Walker claims that London pronunciation is 'undoubtedly the best... that is, not only the best by courtesy, and because it happens to be the pronunciation of the capital, but best by a better title, that of being more generally received' (p. xiii). Walker had already made it clear (p. viii) that he had in mind an entirely democratic principle: '[...] those sounds, therefore, which are the most generally received among the learned and polite, *as well as the bulk of speakers*, are the most legitimate' (my italics).

FISHER shows that this pronunciation (of the court and the central administration in London) had always been a class accent, but had also been a regional accent until the 18th century, in other words that it was confined to London and the South-East of England.[8] An early witness for

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[6] This problem will be discussed later with respect to 'Estuary English', where it is more obvious.

[7] E.g., by GERMER 1967, RAUCHBAUER 1974, GIMSON 1984, MACAULAY 1988.

[8] WALKER (1791:xiv) quotes Dr. George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetorick*, where the author says: 'But the language properly so called is found current, especially in the

the prestige of this speech is the much-quoted George Puttenham (*The Arte of English Poesie*, 1589): 'Ye shall therfore take the usuall speach of the Court, and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx. myles, and not much above.'

Although this speech had thus acquired early prestige, it was for a long time still nothing unusual even for courtiers to speak with a provincial accent.[9]   However, as SHERIDAN (1780:preface (p.2)) points out, 'Latin [...] was the general language, in which all people of education both conversed and wrote; and became, for a considerable length of time, the currency of Europe, as French is at this day'. This, he continues, led to 'a total neglect of our own tongue, from the time and pains necessary to the attainment of two dead languages' (*ibidem*).

English writings with an interest in pronunciation began to appear in the 16th century, at a time when the pronunciation, after what was later to become known as the 'Great Vowel Shift', had diverged so much from the spelling that the latter ceased to be a guide to the former and alternative orthographic systems were being sought.

The first systematic pronouncing dictionaries, however, did not appear until the 18th century, which was also the century of the great normative grammarians. WALKER (1791) was preceded by Thomas Sheridan's edition of Dr Johnson's dictionary marked for pronunciation (1780). Dr Johnson himself had refrained from including pronunciation in his dictionary because he found himself unable to 'ascertain' pronunciations that were generally accepted. It may be noted that Sheridan, as other compilers of pronouncing dictionaries after him, based his dictionary on his own pronunciation (cf. FISHER 1993:47); Dr Johnson, on the contrary, had apparently sought the opinion of people who could be assumed to be

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upper and middle ranks, over the whole British empire.' That he is talking about pronunciation and not just grammatical or lexical features becomes clear from the examples that follow.

[9] The best known is perhaps Sir Walter Raleigh, who is said to have spoken with a broad Devonshire accent.

good speakers and had abandoned hope in the face of widely divergent testimonies.[10]

Sheridan and Walker were elocution teachers or, as they were called at the time, orthoepists, a profession that became progressively more important with a particular form of speech. No doubt the Industrial Revolution was instrumental in bringing to fame and fortune 'new men', who were not able to converse and write in any other language than English.

According to FISHER (1993), the speech of educated London ceased to be a regional dialect when London became more important as a centre; this is presumably bound up with increased mobility (physical and social) as a consequence of improved infrastructure and in the course of progressive industrialisation, which created fast growing industrial conurbations, the places that have produced the most notorious accents.

The name 'received pronunciation' was used by ELLIS (1867-97) to describe the speech of educated and polite society. 'Received' here means 'agreed upon by those fit to judge'.[11] The word is sometimes taken to mean 'received socially', as in the leading drawing rooms. This interpretation tempts MACAULAY 1988 to ridicule it as 'a rather absurd, almost comic term, [...] with the implication that lacking it one [...] would not be welcome at court'. [12] This interpretation is the one current today. At the time when it was first introduced, it may be noted, it makes no claim for the accent so described to be a general model.

Daniel JONES at first chose the term 'Standard Pronunciation' (StP), perhaps slightly ingenuously, to describe 'that [type of pronunciation] which forms the nearest approximation, according to the judgment of the

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[10] One of the words whose pronunciation Dr Johnson was unable to ascertain was *great*; Boswell reports that Dr Johnson was told by Lord Chesterfield that it was to rhyme with *state*, and Sir William Young maintained that, rather, it was to be pronounced to rhyme with *seat*, 'and that none but an Irishman would pronounce it *grait*.' Cf. quotation in FISHER 1993:46. Also, for an appraisal of Sheridan and Walker, cf. GIMSON 1989:66f.

[11] Cf. the first meaning of *received* in the OED: 'Generally adopted, accepted, approved as true or good. Chiefly of opinions, customs, etc.'.

[12] It is similarly glossed by SCOTT 1995:40 as 'English suitable to be received by royalty in court'.

writer, to the general usage of educated people in London and the neighbourhood' (1909:v). He also refers to it as 'Standard Southern English pronunciation'.   In his next major work, EPD1 (1917), he not only dropped the term 'Standard' in favour of 'Public School Pronunciation' (PSP), but also dissociated himself from any suggestion that he wanted to set up a standard for the English-speaking world; in EPD2 (1924), he firmly established the term 'Received Pronunciation' (RP), which at this point acquired the dignity of capital letters and has been used ever since, at least as a technical term.

It should, however, be clear that 'received' was originally an epithet that expressed exactly what it meant to express. It has become increasingly unpopular in the last few decades, because it is felt that it is indicative of the sort of class prejudice that modern society prides itself on having shed. WYLD (1927) indicated how the term 'received' was to be understood:

> While Received Standard is also a reality, it is a variable one, and changes from age to age, so that what in one age is elegant, polite, and fashionable in speech, is held, within a few generations, to be old-fashioned, and may thence come to be considered vulgar. Conversely, what the Received Standard of one age considers vulgar, affected, absurd, may gradually pass into the Received Standard of a later day, and become fully accepted, and current among the best speakers. These changes in taste, and in the standards of 'correctness' and propriety, in speech, are due to that shifting of the social structure which, without violent cataclysms, has been constantly taking place, from economic and political causes, during the last two or three centuries.

It is not surprising, however, in view of the interpretation of the word that has become current, that suggestions have been made for alternative, more politically correct appellations for RP. TRIM (1960) opts for 'English Standard Pronunciation', WELLS & COLSON (1971) suggest 'Southern British Standard' ('SBS'), LEITNER (1982) uses 'Educated Southern English'; Windsor LEWIS (1987:140) seeks to parallel 'General American' with 'General British' ('GB'); EPD15 has made the giant leap of discarding 'RP' in favour of 'BBC English'. ROSEWARNE 1989, finally, seems to have a clever idea in keeping the abbreviation 'RP' but making it stand for 'Reference Pronunciation', which is what it effectively is in TEFL, a fact which is borne out by the many descriptions of it.

What is important to bear in mind is that 'RP' was until very recently a technical term with a linguistic definition (specified sounds) and a sociological definition (an ill-defined set of speakers). How the two have been confounded and played off against each other will be discussed in the next section chapter. For the moment I shall assume that RP is a reality, however it is defined.

1.2. The History of RP

It has been agreed from the earliest descriptions that RP is, although regional in origin, no longer a regionally confined accent, but strictly a class accent, to be found in the educated all over the country (England). This view was vigorously propounded by WYLD (e.g., 1914:48), even before the name 'RP' existed.

It is also agreed that the hotbed in which it was nursed was 'the great English public school', which developed on a large scale in the 19th century.[13] Those British parents who could afford to became accustomed to putting their children into social and linguistic quarantine in consecutive boarding schools for the formative years of their lives, so that their speech and manners might not be contaminated by contact with inferior speech and manners.

RAMSARAN (1990) explicitly addresses the questions 'What is [RP]? Does it really exist?' , and preliminarily answers by saying: 'Since RP is the only accent I have ever spoken with, I have a subjective conviction that it exists' (p.180). This is of course, as she immediately admits, 'an indefensibly circular argument'. Later on, however, she comes to the conclusion that 'the accent does exist and is spoken by a sizeable minority of native English speakers' (p.182), and that 'it is not a construct [...]. It does really exist: it is alive and changing' (p.190).

Ramsaran is in a position to make such a statement because she has previously listed the defining features of RP, none of which is diagnostic of any particular regional accent (except that of south-east England?). Her definition of RP is thus based on its non-regional status, 'reserving the identification of speech as RP for an accent that is unaffected by the

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[13] Cf. HONEY 1988.

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speaker's region of origin or residence', thus ignoring its social dimension and adopting a narrow definition of RP.[14]

The problem with RP is a terminological as well as a logical one. What was originally conceived as a description of one accent among many (which recommended itself by being spoken by a certain limited number of people with a highly regarded education in predominantly one region of England, *viz.* in and around the capital) was soon regarded as a prescriptive standard, presumably because it was spoken by the most powerful members of a society that was still ordered in relatively stable categories; its descriptions was also easily available in print, and no number of disclaimers by phoneticians and editors of pronouncing dictionaries could convince the public that there was no national standard of pronunciation.

There are several ways of defining RP, socially or phonetically. ABERCROMBIE (1992) maintains that it 'is difficult, if not impossible, to define phonetically' (p.6); he immediately adds, though, that 'if there is a single defining feature of RP, it is probably creak'. His definition of an RP speaker is 'someone who is recognised as such by other RP speakers' (*ibidem*).[15] This definition is fully in line with Wyld's remarks quoted above, and the only one which makes sense in view of the fact that RP defies other social definitions that have been tried, often when the term was equated with others which clearly are not synonymous, such as 'good English', 'standard English', etc.

Another term firmly associated with good English is education, which, however, turns out to be equally useless in defining any social group which is congruous with the group of speakers of RP. The quality of being educated (whatever that means) does not entail that a person speaks RP; the membership of a particular social class (however that is defined – by family income, occupation of the head of the household?) does not entail that a person speaks RP, etc. The argument may be turned around, of

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[14] In fact, as far as I can see, her defining features of RP apply to Estuary English (to be discussed in chapter 2) as much as to RP.

[15] One of my (linguistically unsophisticated, RP speaking) informants, when pressed, conceded 'I suppose the definition of an RP speaker is "one of us"'. He was also aware that, for other people, it could equally well be 'one of them'.

course, and one could, if one wished to, stipulate that RP is, e.g., what members of the middle class speak (i.e. people with a certain annual family income), but then the term would become completely devoid of meaning, that is, it would not describe one accent but many.

The whole point about RP[16] seems to be that possession of it enables people to suggest to others that they belong to a certain social class or that they have had a superior education and are worth mixing with for those for whom such qualifications are important. The social class which is obviously most in need of such devices is the middle class, especially the lower middle class, whose members are always in fear of being taken for what they are not, or for what they are happy to have escaped.[17] These are the people who are most in need of a reliable standard which they can refer to, and since they have usually worked hard to acquire it, they are also the ones who are most likely to be interested in its preservation. LABOV (1966) has explored the 'linguistic insecurity' of the middle classes. The upper (and upper middle) classes, needless to say, suffer no anxiety about their social manners, including their speech, which does not mean that they readily associate on equal terms with those whose manners differ too much from theirs.[18]

Those who have risen in society are also the ones, according to WYLD (1927:150), who introduce features of their Modified Standards into the Received Standard, thus fashioning a new Received Standard: 'The new men, it is true, learned the speech of the class they entered, but they put,

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[16] I use 'RP' here in the sense of any variety that enjoys more prestige or is considered better, or more correct, than others.

[17] SWEET (1906:vii) put it thus: "The Cockney dialect seems very ugly to an educated English man or woman because he – and still more she – lives in perpetual terror of being taken for a Cockney".

[18] The term 'class' is used here in a rather indiscriminate manner. Some social psychologists make a distinction between economic stratum, social class, status, and prestige. In the context of the present discussion, one of the problems seems to be that 'economic stratum' is popularly confused with 'social class', which latter is probably the term which would be most appropriate to a discussion of the social meaning of RP, and would accommodate the many different styles of RP parallel to the many different classes of RP speakers (aristocracy, landed gentry, professions, civil service, clergy, armed services, etc.). Lack of space forbids a discussion of these concepts, but cf. PEAR 1955, chapter 1.

and left, their own characteristic marks upon it.' [19] We get the impression that it is difficult to define RP socially if not in a somewhat circular fashion, which does not, of course, mean that it is sociologically meaningless. It may just be that the categorisation 'RP' vs. 'non-RP' is far too abstract and not useful at this level. What other possibilities are there?

Some people have tried to tie it down phonetically, or rather, phonologically. Jones did so because he was led *post factum* to call the accent he had described 'RP'. There are indications that he had had a very restricted group of speakers in mind when he first described StP, and also that he in no way equated speakers of RP with educated speakers, or with speakers of 'good English'. This seems to me to be evidenced by the fact that in the appendix (1909; this was dropped in later editions) he gives specimens of the speech of various speakers, who are identified by name and who are, in fact, mainly academic teachers of phonetics. He points out in what way their (in some way or other regionally influenced) speech differs from the standard described by him, and this suggests that what he was trying to do was to establish a real standard, arbitrary in a way, but chosen for the very good reason that 'it happens to be the only type of English about which [he was] in a position to obtain full and accurate information' (EPD1:ix, and later edns.), a commonplace introduced by SWEET (e.g., 1906:v). It seems plausible that Jones wanted to establish nothing but a reference system, in a way like the cardinal vowels, but not, of course, as a theoretical construct. The accent really existed: it was his own, but it was not meant to be a prescriptive standard, it was not suggested that it was better than all other types of speech, or the way educated people *should* speak.

However, the matter seems to have gained a momentum of its own. When EPD1 appeared in 1917, well into the First World War, Jones considered it necessary to make it quite clear that he did not intend to set up a prescriptive standard of what was correct or good English:

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[19] Wyld's use of 'new men' is noteworthy: it is a translation of the Latin *homines novi*, the social climbers (or technically, the first of their families to hold high office, but the term is derogatory), of whom Cicero, who shaped the standard of his language as we know it today, was the most famous.

> I am not one of those who believe in the desirability or the feasibility of setting up any one form of pronunciation as a standard for the English-speaking world. [...] To those who think reforms or standards are necessary must be left the invidious task of deciding what is to be approved and what is to be condemned (EPD1:ix).

Alas, too late! There was obviously a need for a written code that reassured people about their speech, so much more after the war, which had shaken the existing social order considerably. EPD2 appeared in 1924, and Jones could but repeat his disclaimers. By this time, he had changed the name of the accent he was describing again: it was now 'Received Pronunciation', possibly under the influence of Wyld's 'Received Standard'.

Apart from acknowledging the fact that RP is a social dialect rather than a regional one, most authors insist that 'the best speakers of Standard English are those whose pronunciation, and language generally, least betray their locality' (SWEET 1906:v). This is an interesting statement, which has become part of the definition of RP. It is interesting in as much as this style of pronunciation does often betray the locality of a speaker's education, especially if it is one of the most prestigious ones.[20]

In view of this definition, it had been usual to state that speaking RP was to speak English 'without an accent' (which sounds like something impossible but just meant 'unmarked by regional features'). WYLD (1914:48) expresses the view which became a stock-in-trade for some decades:

> If we can truthfully say of a man that he has a Scotch accent, or a Liverpool accent, or a Welsh accent, or a London accent, or a Gloucestershire accent, then he does not speak 'good English' with perfect purity.

This was an extreme view, since the 'national accents' of Scotland and Ireland do not now usually come under the non-RP stigma,[21] but it was first insisted upon by ABERCROMBIE (1953) that RP is just one accent,

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[20] One correspondent of PEAR (1931), among others, suggests that 'we can almost say there is an Etonian voice' (p.75, fn.). It is also significant that the British *Who's Who* still does not as a rule give a person's place of birth, but his place of education.

[21] On the contrary it is often said that the best English is spoken by the retired lady teachers who reside in the Morningside district of Edinburgh, the 'Miss Brodies' (from Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*; cf. 16 Oct.94).

among many, with which Standard English can be spoken. Even Gimson
eventually acknowledged this by writing about 'The RP Accent' (GIMSON
1984).   Since then the development has been such that today no form of
traditional RP can be classed as unmarked.

1.3. Descriptions of RP

Although that which came to be known as RP had been described by
SWEET (1885, 1890, 1908 and later edns. of all three), the works of JONES
(1909 and later edns., 1918 and later edns.) became the standard
descriptions of RP, especially for TEFL. Other standard descriptions
(such as GIMSON 1962, ROACH 1983) are firmly rooted in the same
tradition and descend directly from Jones. [22]

It is no accident that several descriptions appear at roughly the same time.
In additon to SWEET 1908 and JONES 1909, the year 1913 saw the
publication of William GRANT'S *Pronunciation of English in Scotland*. The
Scottish Education Department and the English Board of Education had
made the study of phonetics 'practically obligatory for all teachers of
languages' (GRANT 1913:v).[23]

Description is primarily of the segmental order; intonation is given
increasing space, but is treated not as specific to any particular accent,
but to English or Southern English. Articulatory setting, if it is mentioned
at all, is summarily dismissed (e.g. ROACH 1991:132); this is clearly a step
back after its treatment by Sweet, who gave some consideration to voice
quality, too (1908:76ff.).

Jones's EPD was the unrivalled standard pronouncing dictionary for British
English at home and abroad from its first edition until Wells's LPD
(including American variants) was published in 1990. PALMER ET AL. 1927,
which is a foreign students' pronouncing dictionary, is interesting in as

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[22] In EPD 15 (preface, p. iv) this genealogy is made explicit: "[Jones] was still an
occasional visitor to the Department [of Linguistics and Phonetics at University College,
London] in 1967 when Peter Roach went there as a postgraduate student of phonetics,
though he died in December of that year."

[23] SWEET (1908:4) comments that 'many teachers who used to profess not to know what
phonetics was, forthwith announced classes in it. And then came a flood of worthless
publications on phonetics [...]'.

much as it gives American variants at a time when even educated Americans were not at all convinced that there existed a dictionary-worthy American pronunciation different from English RP; in order to justify the inclusion of AE variants, the authors went into lengthy explanations and justifications. The editors of EPD15 have finally (1997) seen fit to include American as well as British pronunciation.

It has become customary to codify RP in such terms as to suggest that it is a discrete entity; it is acknowledged to be subject to some change, since linguists are aware that all living languages change, but they still seem to have succeeded in conveying the idea that any change they described was insecure at the time of description, so that to be on the safe side, one would avoid advanced pronunciations.[24] Since the tendencies they have described have been roughly the same for a hundred years, one might get the impression that it has not changed noticeably at all, that it has achieved the stability of Ciceronian Latin. Yet whoever has had an opportunity to listen to English courses for foreign learners a few decades apart has a strong feeling that even the teaching standard has changed in some considerable way. [25]

However, since there is obviously so much variation in what has been described as StP, PSP, or RP, it has become customary to describe a number of styles of RP. The first descriptions included slight regional and idiolectal variations, without making reference to a social cline, and several situational styles. Jones first described minor regional and idiolectal variants as well as situational styles, which depend on the degree of formality required: "formal style" (or "declamatory") is the most formal style, which is restricted to occasions like some speeches,

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[24] This state of affairs induced WELLS (1990, 1991) to give phonetic updates on books which describe the speech of people born a hundred years ago and are still in use.

[25] There is possibly one area where very little has changed over the last few decades: the English of the classical stage. I have had the opportunity to listen to four renderings of Hamlet that span five decades (Olivier 1948, Burton 1964, Jacobi 1980, Branagh 1996), and have not been able to detect any major change in accent that would be anywhere near what 'real' language has undergone; the language of the classical stage obiviously has far more continuity than there is in real life, which can be noted even in the pronunciation of individual words, e.g. *mourn* als /mʊən/ (which can even be heard from non-British actors in this role). Shakespeare has only recently been brought to the stage in regional accents.

sermons, or the classical stage; the style that is appropriate to most situations is called "careful colloquial", while "rapid colloquial" (or "familiar", "casual") is normally restricted to intercourse with family members and close friends. There is not yet any mention of a social cline of StP.

WYLD (1914:44ff.) was probably the first to speak of class dialects explicitly. He also distinguished differences due to native dialect or age. Different types of RP began to be distinguished; the terms WELLS (1982) uses are 'mainstream RP' (also known as 'acrolect'), 'U-RP' [26] ('hyperlect'), 'near-RP' ('paralect'), and 'adoptive RP' (that which is not learnt as a native accent but acquired later). A different classification is proposed by GIMSON (1989:88):

> the *conservative* RP forms used by he older generation and, traditionally, by certain professions and social groups; the *general* RP forms most commonly in use and typified by the pronunciation adopted by the BBC; and the *advanced* RP forms mainly used by young people of exclusive social groups - mostly of the upper classes, but also, for prestige value, in certain professional circles. In its most exaggerated variety, this last type would usually be judged 'affected' by other RP speakers, in the same way that all RP types are liable to be considered affected by those who use unmodified regional speech.

While the first set of terms may indicate a predominantly synchronic, the second a basically diachronic classification, it should be borne in mind that neither excludes the other. WYLD holds that all change in the Standard is introduced from the Modified Standards,[27] so that synchronic variation influences future diachronic variation; the latter, however, is always present in the former, not only by the presence of speakers of different generations, but also in the form of seeming (synchronic) anomalies which represent remnants of older standards.

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[26] "U" for *"upper class"*, cf. ROSS 1956.

[27] WYLD's (1927:149) 'Modified Standard varies from class to class, and from locality to locality'.

1.4. Summary

RP was originally described as one accent of English, on a phonological basis but with considerable realisational freedom. No claim was made that it constituted a model for English speech. Soon the phonological definition was rivalled by a sociological one: RP became the ideal of good pronunciation and a quality seal of education.

Both definitions encounter certain difficulties; the sociological one more so, since it is more difficult to define a linguistically homogeneous group which can also be sociologically defined, than to define a set of phonemes. The combination of both definitions leads to insurmountable difficulties since the set of RP-speakers is not congruous with any sociologically definable group (except itself). Since 'RP' has passed from technical vocabulary into common speech, it has been used synonymously with certain other names which imply a value judgment.

RP is not a monolithic entity but consists of a variety of speech styles, which can be categorised according to several dimensions: age (conservative, mainstream, advanced), social status (hyperlect, acrolect, paralect), situation (formal, familiar), social class (as defined by various affinities: education, recreation, walk of life, habitat: sophisticated city dweller *vs.* country squire, etc.). It will have to be discussed where and how the new variety, Estuary English, makes contact with RP. First, the two (or several) will be described in some detail.

2. Change and Variation in RP

Most of the changes that are affecting RP at present have been going on for longer than is usually acknowledged. Others have precedents or near-precedents in the past history of the language. Owing to normative influences, developments have been checked – and even reversed – again and again, especially since the rise of a systematic normative tradition in the 18th century. With the advent of universal primary education and widespread literacy in the latter part of the last century, the written language gained an ascendant over the ephemeral spoken word, and spellling became one of the major authorities for 'correct' pronunciation.

However, the mere fact that tendencies which are observed today existed a hundred years ago must not be taken to mean that there has been a slow, steady development. On the contrary, certain developments have, as it were, taken three steps forward and two back. Notable instances are the realisation of /æ/, R Liaison ('linking' and 'intrusive' *r)*, and Yod-Coalescence.[28] They document an interplay between a perhaps natural tendency to simplify articulation, and conservative and prescriptive tendencies, largely influenced by the spell of letters and authoritative bodies which answer the need for standardisation, such as the BBC .

In the following sections I shall discuss some of the more interesting changes that have been commented on in recent and not-so-recent times. It is not meant to be an exhaustive description of the various synchronic and diachronic layers of RP.

2.1. The Vowel System

2.1.1. Diphthongisation of Long Vowels

It seems to be a characteristic of English long vowels that they are permanently hovering between being realised as diphthongs and monophthongs, i.e. homogeneous and heterogeneous bimoric nuclei.

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[28] I use the terminology of LPD und WELLS (1982).

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That temporally spread out phenomenon known as the 'Great Vowel Shift' apparently affected one mora at a time of all long vowels (including diphthongs), either by assimilation to or dissimilation from, the other element.[29]

RP has, according to standard descriptions, at present the following five long monophthongs (on the left), and an equal number of closing diphthongs (right):[30]

iː			uː		
				ei	əʊ
	ɜː	ɔː			ɔɪ
		ɑː		aɪ	aʊ

Consider what has happened so far. Just over a hundred years ago, for Ellis, the MATE and GOAT vowels were still monophthongs, presumably [eː] and [oː] respectively.[31] The other long monophthongs that existed at the time, /iː, uː, ɑː, ɔː/, are still notionally long monophthongs in present-day RP; however, /iː/ and /uː/ were said to diphthongise as long ago as in SWEET 1874, a tendency confirmed by JONES 1909, WARD 1944, MARTINET 1955, GIMSON 1964; in spite of this, their shift to [ɪi] and [ʊu] respectively is still treated as a novelty by, e.g. HUBMAYER 1980 and ROSEWARNE 1996. This may be one instance of non-continuous development.

SWEET (1874) further states his belief that there are no genuine long monophthongs left, not even [ɑː] and [ɔː]: '...although their diphthongic character is not nearly so strongly marked as in the vowels already considered. Nevertheless, these two vowels always seem to end in a

29 It has been suggested that a second Great Vowel Shift is going on in RP at present (BAUER 1979). Bauer, however, bases his arguments (which I find difficult to follow) on the assumption that vowel length is not distinctive in Present Day English, which is at least debatable (cf. LASS 1976, chapter 1). See also MATTHEWS 1981 for a counter-position to Bauer.

30 I leave out the centring diphthongs /ɪə, ʊə, ɛə/ because they seem to behave differently. They are, at any rate, all products of breaking, and derived from other vowels (iː, uː, eː, respectively); /ɑː, ɜː/ and /ɔː/ < /ɔə/ are also predominantly products of breaking. These are the vowels (in addition to [ə]) after which an optional [r] ('linking' or 'intrusive' r) may be inserted (cf. WELLS 1982:222f.).

31 Although SWEET (1874:70) states that he heard Ellis's /eː/ and /oː/ as diphthongs.

slight vocal murmur.'[32] He also notes a tendency 'especially in affected pronunciation', to move the [o] of /ou/ forward to the 'mid-mixed-round position, and from there, by lowering and further shifting forwards, to the low-front-narrow-round position, so that *nóu* becomes *nœu'* (1874:72).[33] This last pronunciation is still regarded as affected (cf. GIMSON 1989:134), but something like the middle one, [əʊ], has been in general use for some time. It has since by a tendency to unround /ʊ/ become [əɯ] (EUSTACE 1967: 'in free position') or [əɪ], especially preceding [ɪ],[34] in the speech of many RP speakers.

We can thus say that there is a general tendency for long vowels in RP not to maintain a steady state for their full length, but to drift off towards the centre of the vocal space, or *vice versa* (as in the case of /iː/ and /uː/). In the half-close vowels /eː, oː/ this development was fully completed about a century ago, whereas it has apparently been checked to some extent until now in the others.[35]

Another two little points which may be mentioned in this context are the change from /ɔː/ to /ɒ/ in words like *off*, and the raising of /ɔː/. WELLS 1982:293 makes the following observations:

> The vowel /ɔː/ has been getting less open over the last half-century. Newsreels from the thirties often evidence a cardinal-6-like quality which now seems dated. Perhaps, though, the important change is not so much in tongue height as in the degree of rounding: RP /ɔː/ has become increasingly closely rounded.

Older descriptions (e.g. SWEET 1906:5) indicate that the /ɔː/ of *coffee* had already experienced some raising when it got to C 6: it is there described as 'low-back-narrow-round' (i.e., presumably /ɒː/ in terms of the IPA),[36]

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[32] 'Murmur' in Sweet signifies 'schwa'.

[33] Cf. also JONES 1909:43, who in this – as in many points – follows Sweet.

[34] This can be heard almost daily in the shipping forecast's *Lowick*. KERSWILL 1996 speaks of 'fronting' of the second element /ou/ (rather than unrounding, which would, of course, also be involved). This feature is also present in the speech of some actors on the classical stage.

[35] This latter tendency may be responsible for the loss of the phoneme /ɔə/ < /or/, which has merged with /ɔː/.

[36] The AmE. /ɑː/ in such words would thus be the unrounded equivalent.

whereas the /ɑː/ of *father* is 'mid-back-wide', i.e. more close. SOAMES 1891:379 remarks that

> Dr. Sweet is undoubtedly right in affirming that *a* is higher than English ɔ [*sic!*] in *Paul* or ɔ in *pot*, but these are particularly low vowels, having nothing corresponding to them in French or German. I myself should say that *a* is low, whilst this English ɔ̄ and ɔ are abnormally low.

This /ɒː/ in words such as *off, cloth* is now outdated in RP, but continues as a low-prestige variant in Cockney. In RP, it has effectively become 'wide' (lax) and short.[37] The raising of /ɔː/, on the other hand, seems to be entailed by close lip rounding.

It is worthy of note what a nice balanced system would result if what are called long monophthongs and diphthongs were amalgamated into one table – especially if one incorporated /ɛː/ ([æə ~ ɛː] v.i., section 2.1.2.) and /oː/ [ɔʊ ~ oː] (v.i., section 2.5.) as marginal phonemes. The only odd one out would be /ɔɪ/, which has a fairly low functional yield.

iː		uː	
ei	əʊ	oː	
ɛː	ɜː	ɔː	ɔɪ
aɪ	aʊ	ɑː	

2.1.2. Fronting of /ʌ/ and Lowering of /æ/

Comparing JONES 1909 and *idem* 1950, one notes that the symbol ʌ has wandered from the position which is its own in the IPA, to somewhere near IPA [ɐ]. According to GIMSON (1989:110) 'the quality is that of a centralized and slightly raised C [a]' (presumably something like [ɐ]); he goes on to specify that this variety is

> that of general RP as used by younger people, especially in the London region. Conservative RP speakers will often use a more retracted vowel, i.e. an unrounded and centralized type of C [ɔ]. Regional speech of the London area has for /ʌ/ an open front vowel very close to C [a].

For JONES (1909:42), [ʌ] was 'half-open back unrounded', and for GIMSON's (1989) conservative speaker it had become somewhat centralized, whereas his general RP has a variety that is still more fronted

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[37] It looks as if this /ɒː/ occurred in the same environments as RP /ɑː/ in such words as *bath, chaff*, which entered RP from Cockney; this is not the place to investigate, though.

and also lowered.[38] JONES 1909, GIMSON 1989, and WELLS 1982 all agree that London speech has [a] or something very near it. It seems obvious that RP [ʌ] has been moving in the direction of London [a].[39]

There is another vowel which is contending for the same position in the vocal space: the phoneme /æ/, or /a/ (thus written by JONES 1956), which is said to be located in English between cardinals 3 and 4 and has recently shown a tendency towards the lower end of the front series, especially in the speech of children and young women (GIMSON 1989:108; ROACH 1991:15). Gimson has it nearer to /ɛ/, whereas ROACH 1991 places it near /a/.

This phoneme /a/ has made an interesting journey up and down the front vowel axis. SWEET 1874:73 observes that

> the short vowels do not seem to have changed much in the last few generations. The most noticeable fact is the loss of œ among the vulgar. It is modified by raising the tongue into the mid-front-wide, resulting in the familiar *ceb* for *cœb*.[40]

He goes on to regret that 'this anomalous raising of a short vowel is gradually spreading among the upper classes'.[41] This tendency continued and spread among the educated, so that Lloyd JAMES 1932:75 could say that one of the characteristics of educated south-eastern English was 'a tendency to make the vowel in words like *man* (æ) too close, that is to say too much like ɛ. This is a characteristic of the brand of English known as "clerical" or "refaned", or "Oxford".'

Although the realisation of this phoneme is usually close to [a] nowadays, it is raised and lengthened to [æː] when it preceeds voiced consonants, in EE it tends to diphthongise ([æə]). This – marginal though it is – may indicate an allophonic split, which produces near-minimal pairs in some idiolects: *madder* ('more mad')*: [æː] vs. *adder:* [a].

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[38] SWEET 1888:275 already describes it as fronted.

[39] Cf. MARTINET 1964 for a full discussion of this development.

[40] I.e., in modern notation, [keb] for [kæb].

[41] SWEET 1890:75 identifies this as a Cockneyism.

2.2. The Consonant System

It has been shown experimentally, and demonstrated in practice,[42] that consonants are vastly more important to an understanding of continuous speech than vowels. It is for this reason that all unaccented vowels can be replaced by the same schwa, and that all vowels can have greatly varying realisations without the fact even being noticed by the many.

Consonantal changes, on the other hand, are usually more salient, and once they have been pointed out can be spotted even by the most unsophisticated listeners. This is presumably why Estuary English is best known for its most prominent characteristic, the glottal stop.

2.2.1. The Glottal Stop

This is the most interesting feature of Estuary English. The popularisation of its name has given 'Middle England' a new shibboleth.[43] Whereas many of the vowel changes are very gradual, hard to identify for the untrained ear and difficult to name without a certain amount of technical vocabulary, the glottal stop in its stronger forms is fairly easy to pick out, especially in the intervocalic position when replacing [t], e.g. [ˈwɔːʔɐ]: *water* or *Walter*.

The strong form of the glottal stop sounds unpleasant to many ears for various reasons. One of them is no doubt that it sounds a bit like a short cough, or momentary choking. Another is that it has been known in this form mainly from accents with very low prestige, like Cockney, Glasgow and other urban working class speech. Strong words have been said in connection with the glottal stop, and it was presumably this sound that the then Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Shephard, was referring to when she stated that 'communication by grunt is not good enough'.[44]

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[42] E.g. in various speedwriting systems, which only write consonants and add diacritics for vowels where there is danger of confusion.

[43] Judges 12:6: The Gileadites could tell an Ephraimite by the way he pronounced the word *shibboleth*: the Ephraimites could not pronounce [ʃ]. It is thus a phonetic segment which allows a speaker to be unequivocally classed as belonging to one group or another.

[44] Quoted in various Sunday papers on 18 June 1995.

Words like 'glottal', 'guttural', etc. have become common in newspapers, and the people responsible for advertising a certain well-known brand of tea hit upon the slogan 'Puts the *t* back into Britain'.

Although the glottal replacement of voiceless stops ('glottalling')[45] is in England mainly associated with the most heavily stigmatised accents, glottal reinforcement ('glottallisation') has been observed in many parts of the English-speaking world, and not necessarily as a low-prestige feature.[46]

The glottal stop is universally condemned by elocutionists (e.g., MORRISON 1977:64 subsumes it under 'Speech Faults'). MCALLISTER (1938:70) rules that the substitution of glottal stops for plosives 'is probably the most marked fault in bad speech, and it is a particularly undesirable one, because it detracts from intelligibility'.

Glottalisation, however, has been a common feature of many RP speakers for some time: the glottal stop as a secondary feature of final voiceless stops /p, t, k/ has been well described[47] for many years, and as long ago as in 1952 it was suggested that it should be taught to foreign learners of English.[48] With respect to the glottalling of /t/ in final position, however, forty years later WELLS (1990:6) still has to say that 'perhaps the day has not yet quite come (nɒʔ jeʔ kwaɪʔ kʌm) when we shall need to teach the glottal stop as an obligatory positional allophone of /t/, but it is certainly approaching'.

The other position in which the glottal stop occurs is (morpheme-) initially before a vowel (a phenomenon that is quite regular in most types of standard German, and an interesting fact about it is that most Germans who use it are quite unaware of its existence). In English it is used mainly

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[45] I follow the common practice of distinguishing 'glottalisation' (glottal reinforcement, i.e. pre- or post-glottalisation) and 'glottalling', which refers to the glottal replacement of oral stop consonants.

[46] E.g. SHORROCKS 1988 (Greater Bolton), BAYARD 1990 (New Zealand), LASS 1987 (New York), SULLIVAN 1992 (Exeter); MILROY ET AL. 1994 give an overview. MEES 1987 describes glottalisation as a prestigious feature of Cardiff English.

[47] Cf. CHRISTOPHERSEN 1952, O'CONNOR 1952, ILES 1960, HIGGINBOTTOM 1964, EUSTACE 1967, L'ESTRANGE 1969, ROACH 1973.

[48] CHRISTOPHERSEN 1952. In the descriptions of BROWN (1977) and GIEGERICH (1992) the glottalised forms are treated as regular positional allophones of /p, t, k/.

in very emphatic speech, e.g. [riʔækʃn] *reaction*, often to avoid a hiatus or a linking or intruding [r] (as in [ðə ʃɑː ʔəv pɜːʃə]), or to add *gravitas* and solemnity to speech,[49] and can thus be regarded as a juncture phenomenon.

Now glottalisation is quite common in RP as an allophonic feature of voiceless stops in final position. This may be related to creak, which is regularly present utterance-finally in RP and which is associated with very low pitch.[50] Since stop consonants in final position are usually unreleased in English, the secondary feature of the glottal stricture can easily become the primary feature of the segment when the oral stricture is loosened, which happens in a general trend towards lenition, which will be discussed later. The same thing happens at morpheme boundaries, when a voiceless stop (which is again unreleased) is followed by certain other stops, in such words as *football, Gatwick*.

The precise distribution of such reinforcing glottal stops is complex and may vary from speaker to speaker (individually and regionally),[51] but it is generally agreed that the plosive element of /tʃ/ is glottally reinforced more often than not, except initially. In certain environments, non-glottalisation of /tʃ/, as it may occur in elocutionally cleansed speech, can even lead to misunderstandings. When I was once told an anecdote about a certain 'W.A. Jordan', I was taken to demonstrate my ignorance by asking whether I was supposed to know this person; when I first heard the cricketing term *pinch-hitter,* I thought that that was an unusually rude word for such a high-class sport. This seems to indicate that there is an important place in RP for the reinforcing glottal stop in counteracting a tendency towards assimilation and coarticulation, e.g. in that it enforces the retention of distinctive segments (/t/ in the second example) or

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[49] Tony Blair read [ʔɪnʔɪnʔˈɪkwɪti] at the recent funeral service for Princess Diana. It is quite a common feature in the speech of the classical stage.

[50] ABERCROMBIE 1992 suggests that creak may be the one distinguishing feature of RP.

[51] Cf. ANDRÉSEN 1958, CHRISTOPHERSEN 1952, O'CONNOR 1952, ILES 1960, THOMPSON 1961, HIGGINBOTTOM 1964, ANDRÉSEN 1968, ROACH 1973. CULIK 1981 has experimental data which generally agree with previously mentioned auditory analyses; his data also suggest that pre- (rather than post-) glottalisation is the normal form in RP.

features of segments (such as voicelessness in a voiced environment, as in the first example).

The glottal stop is not, then, something new; it has been well established in RP for some considerable time. Its distribution, however, is different from that in various regional and urban dialects: 'Intervocalically within a word, it remains firmly excluded from RP' (WELLS 1991:201; cf. RAMSARAN 1990). WELLS (1996, 1997a and c) also excludes glottalling of word-final oral stops for RP.

2.2.2. Vocalisation of [ɫ]

The liquids [l, r] often become (semi-)vocalised, e.g. [ɫ] becomes [ʊ] in Polish (written <ł>), in Dutch (as in *koud* 'cold'), and in French, e.g. *sauter* < Latin *saltare*; [l] becomes [j]: *feuille*, *mouillé*.[52] Breaking before non-prevocalic [r], i.e. diphthongisation of the vowel preceding an [r] which is subsequently dropped, is common in many non-rhotic languages, e.g. (presumably) Old English,[53] and many German accents (realised as [ɐ], e.g. *Kirche* [kiɐçə, keɐçə]).

L-Vocalisation has been in the English language for a long time: words with already vocalised [l] were introduced into English from French, e.g. *cauderon, faucon*, which were later given an etymological spelling: <cauldron, falcon> and, still later, sometimes a spelling pronunciation to go with it: [kɔːldrən, fɔːlkən~ fɔːkən].[54] This tendency affected [l] when followed by other consonants. Just how long this process has been operative in indigenous English can be seen from older pronunciations of words such as *half-penny* [heɪpni][55] and some proper names, e.g. *Ralph* [reɪf], *Chalcombe* [tʃeɪkəm], which must have had silent [l] by the end of

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[52] Cf. von ESSEN 1964. The latter also occurs in some Austrian varieties of German.

[53] There has been some discussion of the exact quality of Old English /r/; cf. LASS 1994:50.

[54] JESPERSEN (1909:295) quotes Alexander Gil, *Logonomia anglica* (1621) as the earliest witness of *'docti aliqui viri'* sounding the [l] in *fault*.

[55] So in SHERIDAN (1780); the derived *hap'orth* [heɪpəθ] is also a fine example of multiple syncope.

the 16th century at the latest[56] for the [aː] (< [ɑl]) to become [eɪ] in the later stages of the 'Great Vowel Shift'. [57]

According to JESPERSEN (1909:294), [l] persisted in final position, although he gives some examples that belie this: Shakespeare rhymes *pole* with *snow*, and an older spelling of *Bristol* is <Bristow>, which seems to indicate that [ʊ] and [ɫ] were not (always) distinguished auditorily. It should be noted, though, that the change [ɫ] >[ʊ] apparently only occurred after back vowels at this stage.

This development, checked for some time by literacy, has now taken a fresh lease of life, and extends to other positions as well, *viz.* pre-pausally and following other than back vowels; [ɫ] is regularly replaced by a back vowel, [o, ɔ, u, ʊ]. [58]

2.2.3. Realisation of /r/

The development of /r/ is conveniently treated in three separate sections:

a. Pre-vocalic /r/

JONES (1909:24) states that 'a semi-rolled r, [which] consists of a single tap of the tongue, is commonly used between two vowels [...] it is also frequently used after θ ð.′

The tapped r has now practically disappeared and can only commonly be heard intervocalically from more conservative speakers .[59] ROSEWARNE 1994:5 says, in effect, that the EE /r/ is characterised by a lowering of the tip, and a raising of the body of the tongue (or, rather, a non-lowering). Thus, the articulatory effort is minimised. If, then, any misguided articulatory effort is put into producing this /r/, it may be that the lips are slightly rounded, which will lead to its realisation as [ʋ]. This is not necessarily a speech defect but occurs also as a mannerism.[60]

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[56] HART (1569) still has some form of /a/ in *same*.

[57] Cf. JESPERSEN 1909:291ff.

[58] WELLS 1994:264 opts for [o].

[59] Also, from classical actors; cf. WELLS 1990:6f.

[60] This is a well documented feature and known from the speech of public figures like Aneurin Bevan and Roy Jenkins, as well as from fictional characters like Hermione in D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*. WELLS (1980:303) notes something approaching this

b. Non Pre-vocalic /r/

R-Dropping before a consonant or prepausally occurred in the 18th century (WELLS 1982:218). The actual dropping of the consonant was preceded by a process called 'breaking', which is the insertion of a schwa between the preceding vowel and the weakened [r], in effect a diphthongisation of that vowel. This process gave rise to a number of new phonemes: /ɪə, eə, ʊə, ɔə, ɜː, ɑː/ (this was at least one of the sources of /ɑː/, cf. SWEET 1908:62).

In some environments, the last vestiges of the /r/ are now disappearing. The /ɔə/ phoneme is considered as lost (WELLS 1982:234), merged with the /ɔː/ of *paw* (WYLD 1914:77), and /ʊə/ (*poor*, *your*) is in the process of joining them (WYLD 1914:77, WELLS 1982:162, GIMSON 1989:145f.). The levelling of /ʊə/ under /ɔː/ is noted by SWEET 1890:75 for Cockney:

> Even in educated speech there is a tendency to lower [ʊ] before [r]: the strong form of *your, yours* is sometimes [jɵə, jɵəz] with the mid-mixed vowels which otherwise occur only in weak forms, but often [jɔə, jɔːz] with the full Cockney form.

Final written <r>, however, is usually pronounced when followed by a word with an initial vowel, *here it is*, etc. When this practice is extended to environments where it is not justified by the spelling, the [r] becomes an intruder:

c. 'Intrusive' R

SWEET (1908:62) observes that the practice of inserting a 'final hiatus-filling r after ə in such groups as *India Office, the idea of it* [...] is frequent even in educated speech'. When such a 'parasitic' [r] is inserted after vowels other than schwa (or even where there is not one in the spelling), it arouses much hostility. SWEET (1908:62) judges: ' The insertion of r after other vowels as in *Pa isn't in, I saw it in the drawing-room* drɔriŋrum is quite vulgar'. At least, Sweet seems to suggest that intrusive r is acceptable after [ə]; JAMES (1935:163) regrets that 'this *r* is firmliy entrenched in what is called Standard Pronunciation' as it is 'used by the

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as typical of the speech of London Jews: 'a dark [ʊ]'. PEAR (1931:18) observes, talking about 'symbolic articulation': 'Not uncommon, too, in English educated circles is a slight maltreatment of "r", making it sound – but only just – like "w".' HONEY (1989:140f.) discusses this feature as an old-fashioned affectation in some idiolects.

majority of those educated at English public schools and Universities, a characteristic that they share with the lowest class Cockney dialect' (p.162). An intermediate witness, WYLD (1914:77f.) records a period of extreme r-loss: the younger generation (aged 10 to 20 years) shows a tendency not to pronounce *r* even between vowels, not only at word boundaries (for ever), but also medially (*fury*, 'fyaw-y'); this seems to suggest the [ʋ], mentioned above, which was apparently a relatively short-lived fashion.[61] Wyld also observes (*ibidem*) that

> this tendency seems directly opposed to that of an earlier generation of speakers to develop an *r*-sound, to avoid hiatus, when two vowels occurred together, and to say "put your umbrella-*r*-up", [...], "draw*r*ing" for "drawing", etc.

This sound has obviously had its ups and downs.

2.3. Other Phenomena

2.3.1. Yod Coalescence

This is the name given by WELLS 1982:248 to the coalescence of an alveolar consonant with a following palatal semivowel to produce a palato-alveolar, as in, e.g. [tj] > [tʃ], [dj] > [dʒ]. The coalesced pronunciation, according to WELLS (1982:247), is felt to be 'rather vulgar' in England.

Wells is presumably talking about the phenomenon in the words he mentions (*situation, education*) and not about those in which it has been the accepted pronunciation for centuries (*nature, verdure, virtue, soldier*, etc.). The change [si, zi] / _V > [ʃ, ʒ] (<ti, si, ci, sci>: *condition, vision, vicious, conscience*) also belongs here but as the oldest of its kind (WYLD 1936:293 dates it back to the middle of the 15th century)[62] it is fully established and does not seem likely to be reversed. Where the spelling is <su>, the pronunciation has varied a lot and is very uncertain. In some

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[61] PEAR (1931:18f.) calls this 'slight maltreatment of "r"' a 'symbolic articulation' (after Sapir), which is 'often heard in certain educational establishments. Since [its] frequency in this selected sample is much greater than that to be expected by chance, the possibility of imitation, not necessarily unconscious, is to be suspected.' (Cf. previous footnote.)

[62] SWEET 1908:61f. dates it back to the seventeenth century, but describes it as the normal usage of his time, also assimilation across word boundaries, as in *don't you* [doʊntʃuː], *would you* [wʊdʒuː], or [çj], [ɟj].

words (*sugar, sure* and derivatives), [ʃ] is fully established, whereas in others it is variable (*assume*, cf. LPD poll) or not coalesced at all (any longer: e.g. *suit, sue*, cf. WYLD 1936:293).

Another phenomenon that is closely related is Yod Dropping. Once a stigmatised feature of East Anglian and Cockney, and a regular feature of AmE., it is now preferred in RP in some environments, notably following /s/: *suit, sewer*, etc. (cf. LPD poll *s.v. suit, assume*): /suːt/ rather than /sjuːt/ is now the preferred pronunciation. While it was common in Cockney after alveolar stops: /tuːn/, /duː/ (*tune, due*) (and still is after /n/: /nuː/, *new*), it has within the last twenty or thirty years been replaced in those environments by Yod Coalescence. WELLS (1982:331) writes that 'it is not known why Yod Coalescence has replaced Yod Dropping as the broad-Cockney norm. This does seem to have been an unusually abrupt switch'.

There was a period of fashionable Yod Coalescing, which seems to have peaked in the 1960s and is no doubt connected with the close lip rounding discussed later in this chapter. It can be heard from many RP speakers of this type and sometimes also affects the sequence [tɹ, dɹ] (where /r/ is realised as a fricative).[63] It is possible that Cockney speakers found it easy to approximate to this fashion (without the lip rounding, however) because their renderings of /tuːn, duː/ would have been [tˢʉːn, dᶻʉː] and thus halfway to coalescence.

At present Yod Coalescence seems to be unpopular with those who try to comply with certain ideas about 'correctness', which tend to make speech as close as possible to the written word. It is not uncommon to hear pronunciations like [ɪntelektjuəl] (cf. LPD Poll 98), which may sound prissy to some.

2.3.2. Unrounding of /ʊ/

There has been a tendency in RP to unround the diphthongs which contain the traditionally rounded /ʊ/, which goes back some time and

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[63] Cf. WELLS 1990:7 - *'train* /treɪn/ sounds fairly similar to *chain* /tʃeɪn/'; this similarity is much intensified by close lip rounding. Striking examples from the 1960s that I have heard recently are [dʒœəɹɪ], *dreary*, and [tʃuːənt] *truant* from what are undoubtedly RP speakers.

which is common in popular renderings of the speech of the Queen.[64] There is also a more recent tendency to unround /ʊ/, which may be heard in such words as [bʉk], [gʉd], [gɹʉm], *book, good, groom*. This is variable in individual speakers and undoubtedly subject to lexical diffusion. It may well be influenced by regional dialects,[65] but occurs in the speech of a sizeable number of RP speakers. EUSTACE 1967 notes this tendency among his informants from Eton College. It is probably associated with fronting, which is the aspect KERSWILL 1994 points out in the variable (ou) (i.e., /əʊ/) in Milton Keynes. This unrounding does not extend to the long back monophthongs /ɑː/ and /ɔː/, the latter of which (*v.s.*) has become more close and, if anything, more rounded, [o̞] (cf. WELLS 1982:293; *idem* 1990:6; KERSWISLL 1994:20). This may possibly be due to pressure from /ɑː/, which at least in Cockney, seems to have been moving in the same direction [ɔ̞].[66]

2.4. Speech Dynamics

Aspects of speech dynamics (prosody) are usually not commented on when current changes are described. Yet they contribute much to the general impression created by continuous speech. JAMES 1935:157f. suggests that sounds are not as important in intelligibility as we think, but that intelligibility is in large measure determined by rhythm and intonation, in addition to context.

Since it would be beyond the scope of this paper to go into detail, I shall simplify matters by assuming that pitch, pitch range and intensity (loudness), in short: intonation, may be taken to be vertical modulations of speech, whereas speech rate (speed), (relative) length (of syllables or segments) and pauses are forms of horizontal (linear) modulation, in short: rhythm. Intonation can have linguistic meaning in that it can indicate (often in conjunction with rhythm), whether the end of a statement has been reached, whether a relative clause is a defining or a non-

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[64] E.g. cf. WALES 1994: /aɪ/ for /aʊ/ *hice* 'house', /eɪ/ for /əʊ/ *hellay* 'hello'. These are examples that have been used in all sorts of publications for many years.

[65] Possibly Ulster: cf. WELLS's (1982:441) description of a similar vowel. [ɯ] is only an approximation.

[66] This is suggested by MATTHEWS 1938:79 and FRANKLYN 1953:256,257. SIVERTSEN 1960:63 does not confirm this, nor do any of the more recent authors.

defining one, and it can mark off sense groups. Other types of modulation usually only have paralinguistic or extra-linguistic meaning, although an excessively fast rate of speech can obliterate any meaning to the listener as much as unrecognisable sounds. However, any type of modulation can affect comprehension (as opposed to a mere recognition or not of isolated lexical units), or rather, the will to comprehend in the listener. (I suspect that these are two very different matters.)

Standard speech (RP, near-RP, etc.) seems to have a fairly wide range of rates of speech, depending on the occasion and the speech style (informal, formal, solemn). RP also has greater pitch modulation, often exaggerated by elocuted speakers. In this it contrasts with American as well as Estuary English. The latter have relatively little pitch modulation and are therefore often described as 'flat', 'boring' (or 'bored').[67]   There is often also considerably less horizontal modulation in Estuary than in RP, sense-giving pauses being avoided. On the other hand, in both American English and Estuary English (accented) vowels are often lengthened, or 'drawled', which adds to an impression of laziness or signals a lack of enthusiasm.

One very prominent feature of all types of RP, as far as I have been able to observe, is a step rise in pitch on the last accented syllable of an assertion, without a previous fall or a following tail-off, before a pause (which is often of minimal duration), which seems to indicate that this is not a point where another speaker may take a turn. It is most noticeable in the 'commanding voice', which uses the 'short, snappy rhythms' which PEAR (1931:17) is told were paid the most attention by Parliament at the time, because they suggest 'that the speaker is just finishing, even if he has no intention of doing so'.

These are just a few observations without any statistical value, but hardly any work has been done on varietal differences in intonation.[68]   In

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[67] PEAR (1931:17, 74, 152) talks about the level intonation of many Americans, which makes them sound unemotional or even unfriendly. Similar comments are often made about Estuary English.

[68] The new edition (1997) of Cruttenden's *Intonation* has a chapter about 'Comparative Intonation'. In his short introduction to the chapter, the author says: ' Regrettably, however, in many of the areas covered, our knowledge of basic descriptive facts is either minimal or disputed' (CRUTTENDEN 1997:128).

discussions about English intonation, stress, etc., reference is usually made to English as such, whereas it might well turn out that between certain varieties of English there is a greater difference in these respects than in segmental matters.

2.4.1. Word-Stress

Of all the defects Robert BRIDGES (1919) saw in South-Eastern British English (and thus, RP), the reduction of vowels in unstressed syllables to a non-distinctive [ə] is possibly, to him, the worst. In this type of English, a lexical unit has one strongly stressed syllable, which – in accordance with Germanic stress rules – is often the first syllable of the lexical stem. Stress-timed languages like English or Russian are typically subject to phenomena like phonetic attrition of unstressed vowels, and syncope. Conversely, phonetic attrition of certain vowels (i.e., a change in vowel quality) may be the chief means by which greater prominence is given to syllables which contain vowels that are not so reduced. LAVER (1995:531) puts it thus:

> Short central vocoids are [...] the most frequent of all English vowels in running speech, and can be thought of as a continually present background against which the less-frequently occurring longer stressed vowels can be perceived as standing out more prominently.

Parallels can be found in pre-classical Latin. Early Latin is said to have had a strong dynamic stress on the first syllable.[69] Short vowels in non-initial syllables were therefore usually reduced to ĕ or ĭ, and often syncopated.[70] Since this happened in a pre-literate age, it has apparently never worried anybody, and the Romans by all accounts continued to communicate with great efficiency.

Latin later developed the well-known penultimate law for stress, i.e. which syllable was stressed depended on the weight of the penultimate. LASS (1987:113-115) has suggested that something very similar may be happening in present-day English. Whereas traditionally, the first syllable of a lexical stem is stressed in the Germanic languages, more recently

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[69] For a discussion of the reasons for and against dynamic stress ('stress-timing') in Latin cf. PALMER 1954:211ff.s

[70] E.g.: *auceps* < **avi-caps*, *afficio* < **ad-facio*, *accentus* < **ad-cantus* – examples are as numerous as in English (cf. PALMER 1954: 211f.)

stress has shifted back to the penultimate or antepenultimate.   Lass thinks that the conspicuous presence of Latin vocabulary (especially among polysyllabic words) in the English language may be responsible for this (1987:117f.). Be this as it may, opinion is still widely divided on how words such as *temporarily* or *formidable* should be stressed. The LPD opinion poll shows 49:51 for the one, and 46:54 for the other, [ˈtempᵊrərəli].and [ˈfɔːmɪdɪbl] exemplifying the more conventional stress pattern, [tempəˈreərɪli] and [fəˈmɪdɪbl] a more recent one. LOUNSBURY 1904:128 observes that

> upon [trisyllabic words] the accent swings backward and forward, from penult to antepenult, and the reverse, according to difference of time or place or person. In every generation the controversy crops up,

which he ascribes to the 'ever-recurring contest between Teutonic accentuation and classical quantity' (p.129).[71]

It has long been observed that phonetic reduction of unstressed vowels is rather more frequent in the colloquial and familiar speech styles than in the formal and declamatory styles, which are those which Daniel Jones distinguishes. WALKER (1791:iv) quotes Dr Johnson as saying that 'as of all living tongues, there is a double pronunciation; one, cursory and colloquial; the other, regular and solemn'. Walker is quick to point out that in 'colloquial pronunciation which is perfect [...], there is no more difference [between solemn and colloquial pronunciation] than between the same picture painted to be viewed near and at a distance', and that the real distinction is between 'accented and unaccented sounds': 'Thus some of the vowels, when neither under the accent, nor closed by a consonant, have a longer or a shorter, an opener or a closer sound, according to the solemnity or familiarity, the deliberation or rapidity of our delivery' (p.v).

Now the accusation raised against Jones by BRIDGES (1919) is that in his pronouncing dictionary Jones gives, not the formal pronunciation, but the middle, 'careful colloquial' one, thus obliterating certain potential

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[71] The accentuation of trisyllabic words seems to defy any other explanation. It is unlikely that there has been at any time a general tendency towards the one or the other which has lasted more than a generation. Cf. BARBER 1964:65f. and FOSTER 1968:243f. for more views on the matter.

distinctions from the outset. The same objection was levelled by Dr Johnson against some of his contemporary grammarians, who in the Grammar prefixed to his Dictionary states that they have

> generally formed their tables according to the cursory speech of those with whom they happened to converse; and concluding, that the whole nation combines to vitiate language in one manner, have often established the jargon of the lowest of the people as the model of speech [quoted by WALKER 1791:iv].

It may thus be noted that this tendency to weaken and syncopate vowels in unstressed syllables which Robert Bridges so bitterly objects to has existed for some time.[72]

The role of allegro speech (which is what the terms 'cursory' and 'colloquial' seem to stand for) in sound change has long been acknowledged, and today Jones's formal style of 1909 no longer exists.[73]

Word-stress is extremely subject to fashion, and only the initiated know where the less usual words are stressed. Naturally those who use, and habitually associate with people who command, a large vocabulary in speech as well as writing will be at an advantage here, since seeing a word in print provides little clue as to its pronunciation. And since placement of the word stress determines its rhythm and the quality of the vowels involved, a word may be rendered unrecognisable if the stress is wrongly (or unusually) placed.

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[72] WYLD 1936:191 suggests that 'the unstressed vowels of which [Robert Bridges] complains have been in pretty common use for five hundred years'. Cf. SWEET 1908:65ff. on 'gradation' (a term borrowed from Indo-European philology, where it refers to the ablaut series), by which he means the qualitative modification of vowels in English in response to the degree of stress they receive. Cf. FISHER 1993:51f. for some 18th century comments on this English idiosyncrasy from Americans.

[73] It can still be heard in political speeches from the early years of this century; the only recording of W.E. Gladstone's voice (of 1889) was described by H.C. WYLD (in an appendix to SPE Tract 39, 1934), the champion of 'Received Standard', who had analysed it together with Henry Sweet. He says that 'an outstanding feature of Mr. Gladstone's pronunciation in the record is that unstressed vowels are usually not "reduced" or slurred in any way, [...] We must suppose that this mode of pronunciation belonged only to his oratorical style, and did not persist in familiar converse', and comments: 'Mr. Gladstone, from his age, his standing, and his genius was able to carry off habits and mannerisms which would be intolerable in a lesser man'. (The recording is on the compact disc *Great Political Speeches*.)

Since in English it is often quite possible to communicate in mono- and disyllables (if not by grunt), however, this question is largely academic (in every sense of the word).

2.5. Estuary English (EE)

RAMSARAN (1990a) notes that certain current developments may be seen by some as a move 'beyond RP' and asks the question 'Where has it moved to?' (p.186). Estuary English now seems to provide the answer.

WALKER (1791:vi), when discussing the usefulness of a pronouncing dictionary for a language that was constantly changing (as was averred) and where so many words were pronounced differently by different speakers of equal standing, asserts that 'the fluctuation of our language, with respect to its pronunciation, seems to have been greatly exaggerated. Except a very few single words [...] the pronunciation is probably in the same state it was in a century ago'. Wyld puts this into a wider perspective when he says (1927:150) that 'in the actual sounds of English speech, there has been comparatively little change since perhaps the middle of the sixteenth century'.

The same can probably be said today. Although a new variety, named 'Estuary English', was identified in 1984 on the native territory of RP, it is questionable whether this would warrant any changes in pronouncing dictionaries, even if it usurped the hegemony of RP.

The term 'Estuary English' was coined by David ROSEWARNE in 1984 to denominate an allegedly new variety of English observed in the South-East of England, spreading from along the Thames estuary (hence the name). The label has since gained a certain currency, and possibly notoriety, in a popular way, but has so far largely been ignored in the publications of academic phoneticians.[74] It is generally described as holding a middle ground between Cockney and RP (or, as the headline of one newspaper article more popularly put it, 'between Cockney and the Queen', 28 March 1993). It is at once evident why this should be so: the changes that are noted for EE are often associated with Cockney, and

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[74] An exception is WELLS 1994, 1996, 1997a, b, c. I am indebted to Pia Köhlmyr of Gothenburg University for bringing to my attention the papers read by Professor Wells on Estuary English, and to Professor Wells for making this material available to me.

Cockney has always had a notable – perhaps rejuvenating – influence on the prestige speech of the capital. If the region of origin of RP is the south-east of England, then this is as vague as it needs to be, in the same way as 'Estuary English' is equally vague but refers practically to the same area. Standard English itself is said to have its home in the South East Midlands,[75] and this is the area to the north of London. It is thus not surprising that any change in what can be considered the national language should have its origin here.

If Rosewarne coined the name, it is not strictly true to say (as I did above) that this variety of English pronunciation was first observed or identified in 1984. Quite apart from the fact that it is much in line with phonetic developments described for RP by all scholars, EUSTACE (1967) ends his short article about innovative features in the speech of some pupils of Eton College by suggesting that

> Although the new features often seem to resemble Cockney, their origin is rather to be sought in the English of the middle classes, a vast but ill-documented dialect with which the informants have had an increased contact; as a formative influence, the governesses of a former generation have now vanished, and are replaced by the somewhat wider social range of the infant school (p.305).

Eustace's observations (limited though they may be empirically, with only 5 informants) were made at an interesting time. RP was probably at its zenith, just before it started on a slow decline (as public opinion would have it), and his informants are now in their mid- to late forties, the age that typically represents the mainstream variety of pronunciation.

Estuary English is described by ROSEWARNE 1984, 1994a,1996, and by COGGLE (1993), which latter is a kind of recipe book for EE. WELLS 1994 is, as far as I am aware, the only systematic discussion of EE from the phonological point of view. He also makes it clear what section of the middle ground he is thinking of when he refers to EE as 'Tebbit-Livingstone-speak' (p.261).

There are few consonantal features which distinguish EE from RP: glottalisation or glottalling of [t] in non-intervocalic position and L

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[75] It has been shown by RUSCH (1992) that this cannot be strictly maintained, and that Standard English is much more of a *koine* than has commonly been believed.

Vocalisation; both were discussed above as having spread well into RP. The difference between what would still be called 'RP' and what 'Estuary', is a matter of degree. Initial Yod Coalescence (in words like *tune, stew)* is also a feature of EE (ROSEWARNE 1996:15, COGGLE 1993:51f.). Both authors claim that the quality of /r/ is different from the RP sound in Estuary speakers. ROSEWARNE 1996:15 and COGGLE 1993:48 suggest a slightly retroflex variant which according to the authors is close to the AmE. realisation,[76] but Coggle (*ibidem*) and ROSEWARNE 1984 state that there is also another variant, which is not very clearly described by either but is possibly the [ʊ] discussed above, or just a weakening of /r/ without any lip-rounding. It was discussed above that this phenomenon is well known from RP and other varieties and does not seem to be diagnostic of any particular accent. Neither of these realisations appear to be prominent features in the majority of EE speakers.

Vowel changes are more diverse, but they affect long vowels mainly (the change undergone by /ʌ/ was discussed above but may be more advanced in EE than it is in RP). The change [ɪ] > [i] in word final position (which ROSEWARNE 1996:15 mentions) is so well established in RP that it is now recognised in the pronouncing dictionaries (EPD14f. and LPD, and cf. LEWIS 1990). The /æ/ phoneme is more tense (and concomitantly slightly raised) and longer in EE than in RP in those environments where it is subject to lengthening, to the point that it is often realised as [æə] or [æɪ], probably the feature that contributes most to making it sound somewhat like AmE.[77]

The long vowels are generally more advanced towards the Cockney end of the spectrum than in RP, and there seems to be a general tendency to make vowel sounds longer than in RP. In detail, /uː/, which is [ʊu] in RP, becomes [əu] in EE; /iː/, which is [ɪi] in RP, may become [əi], as in Cockney; /aɪ/ may be rendered as [ɑːɪ] or [ɒːɪ]; /ɔː/ becomes [ɔːʊ]; /əʊ/ becomes [ɑːʊ] (WELLS 1997b: ʌʊ); /aʊ/ becomes [eəʊ] (WELLS 1997b: æə~ æʊ); /eɪ/ tends towards [aɪ] (WELLS 1997b: ʌɪ). The centring diphthongs /ɪə, ʊə, eə/ in this form are very much associated with RP, and

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[76] The AmE. /r/ is more commonly described as velar.

[77] The EE speaker in the study mentioned in chapter 4 was taken to be 'a typical American' by 20% of subjects.

are modified in various ways: [iɐ, ɜɪə, ɔː, uː, ɛːɐ]; final [ə] (e.g., in -*er*) is generally likely to be given a more open rendering, [ɐ].   Wells also points to two allophonic splits in EE: the more striking one concerns the GOAT class: in the environment of a following /l/ + consonant or morpheme boundary, /əʊ/ becomes [ɒʊ] (*shoulder*, *goalie*); the other is a new split in the THOUGHT class: /ɔː/ becomes [ɔʊ̃ oː] before a consonant (*lawn, board*), [ɔə̃ ɔː] at a morpheme boundary (*law, bored*).

There are, then, two tendencies: lengthening and further diphthongisation. It is possible that the two are not unconnected, in the sense that the longer the vowel, the less likely it might become that a steady state is maintained for its full length.

Nothing much has been written about other than segmental features of Estuary English. ROSEWARNE (1994:6) suggests that there is a tendency to stress words that are not normally stressed in RP, such as auxiliaries and prepositions.[78] He goes on to make some noncommittal remarks about intonation:

> The pitch of intonation patterns in Estuary English appears to be in a narrower frequency band than R.P. In particular, rises often do not reach as high as they would in R.P. The overall effect might be interpreted as one of deliberateness and even an apparent lack of enthusiasm.

This was discussed above. One could add that Estuary speakers tend to run words and sentences into one another more than RP speakers,[79] avoiding sense-giving pauses, and certainly prefer connecting and linking R to the glottal stop – let alone hiatus – at junctures.

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[78] It has been suggested that this is not a feature of EE, but of radio speak. Various Linguist List contributions (e.g. Paul KERSWILL at http://www.ai.univie.ac.at/archives/Linguist/Vol-5-0500-0599/0034.html) violently disagree with Rosewarne's suggestion. This is an argument that goes back some time: DOODKORTE & ZANDVOORT 1962 and POSTHUMUS 1962 make similar suggestions and are similarly rebuked for the same reasons. Whether or not the origin of such a practice is radio journalism, it has certainly become more common than it was in every-day speech in certain contexts, which are not at all easy to define. The matter cannot be gone into here, but seems less clear-cut than it is sometimes made out to be. However, EE seems to prefer an intonational curve with a steady fall towards the end, and reject a rise on the last lexical word, of an assertion (the latter seems to be common in RP and can have a slightly dramatising effect). In EE, the preposition in *after all* is commonly stressed, but notably *only at the end* of an utterance.

[79] As do Cockney speakers, cf. FRANKLYN 1953:8f.

ROSEWARNE (1994a:6) briefly touches upon the subject of articulatory setting:

> General muscular laxity of the organs of articulation, including the buccinator muscles, is even more marked in EE than RP. EE consonants, having less frequent alveolar contact, make EE less 'English' than RP if the Honikman model is applied.

This will be discussed below in the section on lenition.

2.5.1. The Role of Cockney

Walker (1791:xii) favours his readers with 'a few observations on the peculiarities of my countrymen, the Cockneys; who, as they are the models of pronunciation to the distant provinces, ought to be the more scrupulously correct.'

Cockney has been mentioned again and again in the preceding pages (as it will be in those that follow) as a source of innovations for the most prestigious speech style, and this is of course no coincidence, since it is the speech of the capital, which has also produced Standard English and RP. The term 'Cockney' today refers to one of the most stigmatised urban working class accents, but as the above quotation shows, it once meant the speech of London generally.[80]

London is in the interesting position of having been a capital of some sort since the beginnings of history. It has been the capital of the English nation state for as long as that has existed, so that it has necessarily attracted all those who have been important and powerful in politics, in the arts, in business. It attracted people from all over the country, and this growth reached a peak in the industrial revolution, when masses of people left the land in order to seek subsistance or their fortunes in the cities. In the century following 1750, the population of London quadrupled (from 657,000 to 2,491,000), a development which has continued. London naturally became a huge melting-pot of accents. While WELLS 1997:47 suggests that Estuary English is the

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[80] On the audio tape that accompanies VIERECK 1975, there is a conversation betweeen A.C. Gimson and one Susan (presumably Ramsaran, his successor as editor of the EPD), in which he describes himself as a 'General RP speaker with [...] Cockney tendencies'.

continuation of a trend that has been going on for five hundred years or more – the tendency for features of popular London speech to spread out geographically (to other parts of the country) and socially (to higher social classes),

it is also likely that London speech has taken in and appropriated numerous elements from provincial speech (and also from that of foreign refugees, cf. FRANKLYN 1953:252), retaining those which seemed worthwhile and rejecting others. Some of those features would pass into the speech of the prestigious speakers, which would again influence speech in the provinces. Such a mechanism: a true two-way mixing of accents, could in my opinion account for the almost simultaneous rise of certain features (*v.s.:* the glottal stop) in many parts of the country, the explanation being that they were already present, but in disuse, dormant and waiting for a catalyst in the form of acceptance from the model accent (or perhaps they just had not been recorded).[81]

Easy acceptance by popular London speech of features from different parts of the country may have led to statements like the following from *A Conference on the Teaching of English in Elementary Schools* (1909, quoted by FRANKLYN 1953:221ff.):

> There is no London dialect of reputable antecedents and origin which is a heritage for him to surrender in school. The Cockney mode of speech, with its unpleasant twang, is a modern corruption without legitimate credentials, and is unworthy of being the speech of any person in the capital city of the Empire. [...] We have to face an importation or a corruption in the form of Cockneyism which has been in use for several generations and which, notwithstanding the Education Acts, appears to be still flourishing. Most dialects have their own distinctive charm and historical interest; but Cockneyism seems to have no redeeming features, and needs only to be heard to be condemned...

2.6. Articulatory Basis and Voice Quality

The preceding sections have described changes that have affected individual segments of English 'Received Pronunciation' in recent times. In practice it is difficult to understand why apparently isolated changes should be taking place at the same time, and as a theoretical principle of

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[81] Cf. SCHRÖER 1912 for a discussion of how regional speech had already been modified by that of the capital to such an extent that he finds it difficult to identify traditional, autochthonous regional dialects.

language change, such a description is unsatisfactory. One would like to have a model which is abstract enough to explain concurrent changes on the basis of a single principle. On a supra-segmental level one would look for a dynamic principle or a change in some higher-level conditioning of the realisation of individual segments.

It was realised early on that there was more to the description of different types of speech than segmental features or suprasegmentals of the type of stress and intonation. SWEET (1908:58) used the term 'organic basis' or 'basis of articulation' to describe a certain quality (that component of speech) that is present over and above a set of segments, and the idea surfaces in expressions like 'the Oxford voice', which is more than an arrangement of segments as they occur in what is described as 'RP'.

HONIKMAN (1964) has been instrumental in establishing the term 'articulatory setting' (after Sweet) for a general constellation of the articulatory organs that is typical of an accent. She shows, for example, that the articulatory setting of English (not specifying type, but presumably RP) is different from, e.g., that of French or German, in such a way that native speakers of those languages will never acquire a likely English mode of speaking by just learning how to pronounce the sounds of English and by mastering English intonation. Rather, they should first acquire the appropriate articulatory setting and then superimpose segmental features onto it, or rather, let them superimpose themselves. This was elaborated from the TEFL teacher's point of view by JENNER (1992), who summarises the articulatory features which produce 'the English voice' (he explicitly refers to RP) thus (p.42): neutral or slightly lowered larynx, low laryngeal tension, neutral and relaxed supralaryngeal tract, very active tongue-tip, loosely closed jaw, lax lips, with slight rounding and spreading but no tension. One is inclined to think that Jenner is describing his own voice, being perhaps too specific about some articulatory features. It has often been observed that there is a variety of different voice qualities for what would without hesitation be labelled 'RP', not only in time, but also in different professional environments: the Oxford voice, BBC English, clergymen's English, the commanding voice, the elder statesman, all use different voice qualities (as would be expected: an army officer and an elderly clergyman, both typical speakers of RP, would hardly have identical voices. A number of factors can influence the

development of a certain voice quality, but (the place of) education is certainly one important one.[82]

SWEET 1908:58 gives this description of the 'organic basis' of English:

> The general tendencies of present English are to flatten and lower the tongue, and draw it back from the teeth, the lips being kept as much as possible in a neutral position. The flattening of the tongue makes our vowels wide ['lax', in modern terms], and favours the development of mixed vowels. It also gives a dull character to our sounds, which is especially noticeable in the l. The retraction of the tongue gets rid of point-teeth consonants. The neutrality of the lips has eliminated front-round vowels.

Sweet is of course talking about RP; Irish English, for example, does not have the same setting and does not consequently have the 'dull l' or 'mixed vowels' to the same extent, whereas it does have 'point-teeth consonants'. The description is again presumably of the author's speech or, at least, that of his time. Other styles of RP differ considerably, e.g. the 'Oxford voice' – that type of English which is often described as 'mincing' or 'affected' and which has so few friends outside its own group of speakers.[83] There is also a now old-fashioned variety of RP in which the lips are not strictly neutral, but often rounded and slightly protruded, which makes certain consonants (e.g. [t, ʃ]) rather prominent, especially when preceding back rounded vowels; this is particularly noticeable in the *-tion* suffix.[84]

Although the concept of articulatory setting has not been very prominent in mainstream phonetics (let alone in teaching), it has often been

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[82] E.g. Stanley Baldwin, Lord Halifax, Lord Hailsham, Anthony Eden and Hugh Gaitskell, who all went to major public schools (Eton, Harrow, Winchester) and Oxford or Cambridge Universities, all had very similar voices. Recordings of their voices can be heard on the compact dis*c Great Political Speeches.* This is presumably the speech style caricatured by Peter Sellers in the sketch 'Party Political Speech'.

[83] This is certainly the most marked form of RP. PEAR (1955:96f.) reports that the speech of some British envoys who were sent to the U.S.A. during the Second World War were perceived as 'sissy'. Cf. also CHAPMAN 1932, which is an answer to an attack on 'Oxford English' in the *Atlantic Monthly* of February 1931, where it is described as a 'debased, effete, and inaudible form of speech'.

[84] This can be heard in the speech, e.g. of politicians Roy Jenkins, Denis Healy and Kenneth Clarke, and is very pronounced in the author Anthony Burgess. I have also heard it from the speaker of an English course of unknown provenance and age (possibly BBC, 1950s or '60s).

commented on under a variety of names by a number of authors, implicitly and explicitly.[85]

LAVER (1980) is the most elaborate and systematic description of articulatory settings and voice quality and is meant to serve as a model for such descriptions, with the aim of ultimately incorporating voice quality in a theory of general phonetics. In order to achieve this, he sets out to develop a more stringent scientific terminology, to replace the impressionistic labels that have been current ('plummy', 'rich', 'thin', etc.) (LAVER 1968:147f.).   Since I will use Laver's terminology in what follows, I give a brief summary of it in the following paragraphs.

2.6.1. Voice Quality

Voice quality is a major vehicle of indexical information[86] about characteristics of the speaker himself (as deduced[87] from his voice, rather like personal characteristics are deduced from a person's handwriting). It is defined as 'the quasi-permanent quality of a speaker's voice', which derives from two main sources: the anatomical and physiological condition of the speaker, and particularly his vocal apparatus (including the regular differences between men and women), and secondly, the long-term muscular adjustments ('settings') acquired by the speaker (both unconsciously and consciously), which latter concern the larynx and the supralaryngeal tract. Those features which can be consciously controlled are the main interest of the phonetician and the language teacher. Any description of voice quality thus makes reference to a laryngeal setting and a supralaryngeal setting.

A 'neutral setting' serves as a point of reference. It is characterized thus by LAVER 1980:14f.:

- the lips are not protruded
- the larynx is neither raised nor lowerd
- the supralaryngeal vocal tract is most nearly in equal cross-section along its full length
- front oral articulations are performed by the blade of the tongue

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[85] FRANKLYN 1953:243 gives a description of the articulatory setting for Cockney.

[86] 'Indexical' was used in this sense by ABERCROMBIE (1967).

[87] I should say 'taken to be deduced': in reality, of course, they are inferred.

- the root of the tongue is neither advanced nor retracted
- the faucal pillars do not constrict the vocal tract
- the pharyngeal constrictor muscles do not constrict the vocal tract
- the jaw is neither closed nor unduly open
- the use of the velopharyngeal system causes audible nasality only where necessary for linguistic purposes
- the vibration of the true vocal folds is regularly periodic, efficient in air use, without audible friction, with the folds in full glottal vibration under moderate longitudinal tension, moderate adductive tension and moderate medial compression
- overall muscular tension throughout the vocal apparatus is neither high nor low.

This describes a 'standard' neutral setting, quite apart from any particular language (including English). Specific settings for any particular language (dialect, accent) will have to be defined. Voice quality is to a large extent a function of articulatory setting, but admits of idiolectal variation (dependent mainly on its non-manipulable components), which may be very important for the general impression one gets of a person's speech.[88]

2.6.2. The Principle of Lenition

Lenition is a process which occurs when a consonant is pronounced with less effort: less tension, less firm closure of the articulators, less air pressure. Thus 'fortis' (usually voiceless) stops may become'lenis' (usually voiced) stops; they may become affricated before turning into their homorganic fricatives, and thence to approximants; they may finally be lost to the ear altogether (as a residual [h]). Other consonants (l, r) may become (semi-)vocalised (*v.s.*). All of these processes are well documented for many languages.[89]

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[88] For example, Harold Orton says of H.C.K. Wyld: 'His pleasant reverberating voice enhanced his excellent pronunciation of English' (DNB 1941-1950), which suggests that the two, accent and voice, are not perceived separately.

[89] To give but a few examples, one could mention the Spanish voiced plosives /b, d, g/, which are pronounced as fricatives in some positions: [ß, ð, ɣ]; in Old French, intervocalic [p, t, k] were successively lenited: > [b > ß, d > ð, g > ɣ] and finally disappeared (e.g. Latin nata > Mod. F. née). In Modern French, final [t] is no longer pronounced. Lenition has also played a major part in producing the present forms of some Italian dialects and of Portuguese. The term 'lenition' is used mainly in Celtic linguistics.

JENNER (1992) suggests that the setting most characteristic of RP is an exceptionally mobile tongue-tip. The opposite seems to be the case in EE, where consonants are realised in a reduced (lenited) form because the tongue stops making contact with the alveolar ridge, or the soft palate, or the teeth (as the case may be), i.e. a loosening of the stricture between the articulators is involved. CATFORD (1988: 63ff.) gives the following hierarchy of stricture types: stop, fricative, approximant (there is also a stage of affrication between stops and fricatives). All of these stricture types occur for phonological stops in English accents, with a final stage of complete loss of oral articulation.   Let us look at the consonantal changes which have been discussed.

Of the stops, /t/ has undergone the most salient changes in present-day English. In word-final position it can be encountered as [t], [tʰ], [t˺], [ʔt],[90] [tˢ], [tʼ],[91] [ʔɹ],[92] [ʔ], or ø.[93] In Irish English, it also occurs as [ṱ], an alveolar slit fricative (and an extreme form of [tˢ])[94].

The forms we are interested in are [ʔt], [ʔɹ], [ʔ] and ø. The second and the third forms are successively lenited forms of [ʔt], whereas ø looks like nothing, but might well be [h] (as a lenited form of [tʰ]), which pre-pausally is difficult to perceive even for trained phoneticians, and thus another lenited form of [t], as in Irish.

Other changes are analogous. The tongue again loses contact with the alveolar ridge when [ɫ] (which is what JONES 1909:23 described as lᵘ for StP, lᵒ for London) is pronounced vocally, which leaves the respective vowel. Even the broad Cockney peculiarity of pronouncing the dental

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[90] Which has been wide-spread in RP for some time, cf. e.g. CHRISTOPHERSEN (1952), ROACH (1973) and was discussed above.

[91] As a very emphatic variant.

[92] This is presumably the phonetic sign for [t] opened to an approximant and reinforced by a glottal stop. It occurs in the speech of the EE speaker in the study mentioned in chapter 4.

[93] This variant occurs in Cardiff English, cf. MEES 1987.

[94] WELLS (1982:429) describes it as an intermediately lenited form of [t], the end product of which is [h], 'the phonologically lenited form of /t/ in Irish', which latter also occurs in Irish English.

fricatives [θ, ð] as the respective labio-dentals [f, v] may be a result of not raising the tongue.[95]

Vowels are not lenited (terminologically), they are laxed. But the principle is the same. SWEET (1908:71) notes that [ɪ] is often confounded with [ə] in some environments in rapid speech, a development which was picked up again in the 1970s (cf. GIMSON (1989:104), e.g. for the morphemes *-ed* and *-ness.*[96]

In unstressed positions, all English vowels tend towards the centre of the vocal space [ə], where it is not necessary either to raise or to lower the tongue (the neutral setting). Sweet uses the terms 'narrow' and 'wide' for vowels (which are tense and lax vowels, respectively, describing the shape of the tongue rather than its state of contraction) and points out that in narrow vowels, the tongue is contracted (and thereby narrowed) and raised; conversely, when the lingual muscles are relaxed, the tongue is widened and lowered.   This is one example of how the realisation of segments is not independent of other factors: in this case, certain settings (state of contraction of an articulator, height of tongue – which again interact) modify the quality of all vowels which occur in an environment.[97]

2.6.3. Implications for the Description of RP

Several descriptions have been given of the articulatory setting of English (Sweet, Jenner, Honikman, *v.s.*), and they all seem to refer to what we call RP. One suspects that they describe the articulatory settings of the authors, and that there are many more among speakers of RP. The 'Oxford accent', for example, has more muscular tension, a more forward and raised tongue, a more closed jaw than the average type of RP, whereas some forms have distinctly protruded lips, and others have

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[95] This, incidentally, has a parallel in archaic Latin: IE dental fricatives became labio-dental fricatives, as in L. *fumus* = Gk. *thumos*, Skt. *dhuma*-. I keep mentioning Latin, not to supply gratuitous information, but to show that this language, which is popularly considered as dead, fixed and perfect, was once just as alive, changing, and perfect or imperfect as Modern English, and that change does not entail ruin.

[96] For GIMSON, however, maintaining the opposition between /ɪ/ and /ə/ in such morphemes is diagnostic of RP.

[97] A basically regular complex change like the Great Vowel Shift might usefully be viewed as deriving from a change in articulatory basis, rather than a change shift.

marked nasality (whereas some nasal resonance is probably typical of all forms of RP). According to ABERCROMBIE (1992:6) creak is the only common feature of all types of RP. If every accent has its specific articulatory setting, then this would either mean that 'RP' refers to a variety of different accents, not to a unitary one, or that the articulatory setting is not part of the description of an accent. If the articulatory setting is left out of the description of an accent, and the latter is based on segmental characteristics alone, this would presumably make the term 'RP' linguistically meaningful and sound, but socio-linguistically (and social-psychologically) almost meaningless, which to all intents and purposes it is not.

It is clear that the name 'RP' is much more vague than is usually implied. The range of segmental and voice-related realisations is wide, and it does seem difficult to draw a clear line between RP and EE. If such a line is to be drawn, a definition like RAMSARAN's (1990) is possible; aternatively, the principle of elimination can be applied, which would involve statements like 'if an accent does not distinguish between /ʌ/ and /ʊ/, it is not within (current) RP'. It is still more difficult to define EE, and the question arises whether it is really an accent in its own right or a more or less recent development of RP. WELLS (1994:262) finds it easier to draw a line between EE and Cockney than between EE and RP because Cockney, unlike EE, is not standard English, which means that EE is not just a more formal variant of Cockney. He does not say so explicitly, but seems to distinguish EE from RP on the basis of its localisability in the south-east of England (whereas it is part of the definition of RP that it is not local). However, EE has since spread to large parts of the country. All considered, it seems to be sensible to avoid too clear-cut a polarisation of RP and EE because EE may well be seen as modern form of RP in a more relaxed mood.

Descriptions suggests that the 'extremely mobile tongue-tip', which according to JENNER (1992) is a prime characteristic of the 'English voice', is not characteristic of Estuary English, and not of RP to the same extent as it perhaps was. The contrary is the case: not only the tongue-tip, but the whole tongue, is less mobile, the over-all articulatory effort is reduced,

which is probably the origin of such terms of endearment as 'slobspeak' and 'slack-mouthed patois' for this variety.[98] This carelessness, if you will, of articulation is offset by increased care taken over the pronunciation of words in the way they are written in some other respects, such as the gradual loss of Yod Coalescence in newer RP.

The unrounding of back vowels in some contexts seems to me to be connected with a changing fashion in the setting of the lips. If it was fashionable at one time to speak with slightly rounded, or protruded, lips, the opposite seems to be the fashion now: a usually neutral to spread lip setting almost entails the unrounding of vowels, and also helps to produce a slightly higher pitched, 'thinner', head voice.

However, the point seems to be that the changes that have variously been described for many years do not take place in isolation. There is an overall tendency which causes consonants to be lenited and vowels to drift towards the centre of the vocal space; other changes observable above all in some diphthongs (unrounding of back vowel elements) are also due to modifications of the articulatory setting. This would presumably suggest that changes due to modifications of the articulatory setting are fairly easily reversed when the associated type of voice becomes unfashionable. Permanent change would then take place if an articulatory setting is well enough established for certain sounds to have become associated with certain environments to the exclusion of others.

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[98] Cf. COGGLE (28 Aug. 1994). Other colourful names for Estuary English include 'yobspeak', 'Mockney', 'crypto-Cockney', 'grunge-speak'. 'Mockney' seems to have acquired a Scottish counterpart in 'Jockney'; there are indications that EE has hit Glasgow (29 Mar. 1998). However, this impression that non-RP makes on unsympathetic listeners cannot be imputed entirely to sloppy or careless articulation. Informal observations I gathered in the refreshment rooms at Paddington Station some time ago indicate that a genuine RP speaker can be recognised as such even in a state of advanced inebriation (of the speaker, not the observer). This suggests some interesting possibilities for empirical research (possibly sponsored by a brewery or a distillery).

2.7. Summary

SWEET (1874) was in no doubt that 'the imagined uniformity of "correct" pronunciation is entirely delusive – an error which only requires a little cultivation of the observing faculties to be completely dissipated'.

RP is not a unitary speech style, but a collection of such speech styles within a south-east English phonological system, rooted in and influenced by, the speech of the capital. It admits of diachronic, synchronic, situational and class (in the sense of PEAR 1955) variation. Estuary English is not phonologically different from RP, but has moved further away phonetically from the standard descriptions of RP than any variants previously described for RP. In this sense it is not a new accent but a recent development of the nationalised sout-east English speech to which forms of RP also belong.

The segmental difference between speech that would still be perceived as RP and speech that would be called Estuary English is a matter of degree. It has been shown that features of EE have been present in the speech of RP speakers for a long time, and the transcription in pronouncing dictionaries is not so narrow as to preclude an EE rendering of the words.[99] We also saw that RAMSARAN's (1990:181f.) definition of RP does not seem to exclude EE. Yet there is a strong feeling that EE is different from RP. This feeling is reinforced by the existence of the two names.

The only really marking segment is the morpheme-final glottal stop which replaces the oral articulation of /t/. It can therefore be regarded as a shibboleth. The main differences, however, are not segmental but concern paralinguistic aspects, such as speech dynamics and voice quality. These are the aspects which have received least attention so far.

Estuary English has already obtained a much broader base than RP has ever had and much acceptance in many walks of life in England. It is a demotic variety of Southern British English, RP with its hair let down.

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[99] WELLS (1994:263) seems to take this view, too: 'We should aim to make the notation [for EE] as similar as possible to that used for RP.'

3. The Question of Standard

O'DONNELL & TODD (1980:41) aver that 'RP is not a standard pronunciation; there is, in fact, no such standard'.

In spite of this not being in any way a heretic or revolutionary statement, there has always been a temptation to associate RP with an English standard of pronunciation, which has invariably led to problems, since there is no official standard for the pronunciation of English, no-one authorised to set one up, and no appointed body to guard such a standard. Yet RP has effectively been the British English standard of pronunciation at least for E.F.L. teaching since Daniel Jones's works on *The Pronunciation of English* ([1]1909), *An Outline of English Phonetics* ([1]1918) and *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (first published in 1917) became widely used; all of these are essentially descriptions of RP, even if at first different names were used (cf. chap.1). In fact in the early decades it was quite common to talk about 'Standard English' rather than RP (SWEET *passim*, JONES 1909). RIPMAN (1933) defines it thus: 'Standard speech is ... southern English as spoken by educated speakers. Whatever jars on the ear of such a one is not standard.'

Most modern textbooks either tacitly assume or openly assert that there is such a standard. When the general public talks about 'standard English', 'the Queen's English', 'proper English', 'good English', etc., more often than not they mean (or are assumed to mean) something similar to what is technically called 'RP'. 'Standard English' refers to the written language or to the grammar and lexis of the spoken language and, as Abercrombie and others never tired of pointing out, there are many ways of pronouncing standard English. The very fact that there is a need to reiterate this again and again indicates that some people are hard to convince. The new National Curriculum requires all pupils to acquire spoken as well as written standard English, which is usually taken to include a standard pronunciation.

There is clearly a demand for a standard pronunciation from those sections of society who form 'public opinion' A number of questions arise

at this point: *Why do people want a standard of pronunciation? What advantages are there in a standard of pronunciation?*

Both questions are relatively easy to answer in a superficial way. The linguistic insecurity of the middle classes was mentioned. But the main responsibility seems to lie with prescriptive attitudes acquired in school. I mean the fact that children are not taught to use language (or anything else) with thought and understanding (i.e. given the knowledge to develop their own judgment and discrimination), but that they are fed with the idea that certain things are right or correct, and all that which is not right is wrong (or bad) – categorically and for all times. Those who are properly socialised within this system later form the backbone of society (no matter at what level), and public opinion. They will not accept anything that they were taught is wrong or bad, irrespective of how much or how little they themselves comply with the conceptual ideal.[100]

The second question is usually answered by appealing to a need for mutual intelligibility. Its alleged universal intelligibility has become a commonplace argument in favour of RP, but some writers (BRIDGES 1919, GREIG 1928) have rejected RP because it is allegedly less intelligible than other varieties. Since people always understand that variety of a language best with which they are most familiar, RP will be widely understood internationally if it continues to be one of the two major teaching standards.

3.1. What RP Is Not: Phoneticians' Disclaimers

However well RP is established as a model or reference accent for teaching purposes, it has become customary to justify this choice or even apologise for it. There seems to be some sort of ritual that authors are expected to go through in a preface to aver that no claim is made that the described variety is in any way 'intrinsically' superior to any other, or that it represents a model or a standard.

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[100] Labov in particular has shown that speakers often consider their own speech as 'bad' (because it does not conform to the imagined standard) or have an unrealistic idea of their own speech.

Jones, in the first edition of his EPD (1917:ix) (and in good tradition), simply states that it 'happens to be the only type of English about which [he is] in a position to obtain full and accurate information'.

In the introduction to the second edition, EPD2 (1924: ix), Jones inserts the following disclaimer (possibly bearing in mind BRIDGES 1919):

> I wish to state that I have no intention of becoming either a reformer of pronunciation or a judge who decides what pronunciations are "good" and what are "bad". The proper function of a phonetician is to observe and record accurately, to be, in fact, a kind of living phonograph.   I would add that I am not one of those who believe in the feasiblility of imposing one particular form of pronunciation on the English-speaking world. If the public wants a standard pronunciation, I believe that a standard will evolve itself without any interference by phoneticians. If there are any who do not share this view, it must be left to them to undertake the invidious task of deciding what is to be approved and what is to be condemned . [101]

ROACH (1991:5) goes further:

> There is, of course, no implication that other accents are inferior or less pleasant-sounding; the reason is simply that RP is the accent that has always been chosen by British teachers to teach to foreign learners, and is the accent that has been most fully described and has been used as the basis for textbooks and pronouncing dictionaries.

The argument seems somewhat circular: because so many descriptions of RP have been produced, let's have another one![102] RP has become self-perpetuating. Incidentally, according to BRIDGES (1919), it had originally been chosen by German teachers to teach to German learners, in collusion with Jones, who had provided them with the systematic material that enabled them to do so.[103]

It has been shown (in chapter 2) that 'RP' can refer to a number of different types of pronunciation, so that Roach's argument may be

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[101] It is quite striking how certain commonplaces are carried from one author to the next. SWEET (1906:v) says that 'the object of this book is to give a faithful picture – a phonetic phonograph – of educated spoken English [...]', and 'all I can do is to describe that form of the London dialect with which I am sufficiently familiar to enable me to deal with it satisfactorily' (p.vii).

[102] This is of course only true of the tradition that Roach works in. As mentioned in chapter 1, other varieties (such as Scottish and American English) were also described in textbooks and pronouncing dictionaries almost at the same time as RP.

[103] He practically accuses Jones of treason in saying that he provided the Germans with the means to train their spies to speak English like natives.

rephrased thus: 'Whatever pronunciation has been taught (by British English teachers) to foreign learners, it has always been called "RP" since that name was first used for the purpose'.

LLOYD JAMES (1935:109) writes of 'the fiction called Standard English', and specifies that 'Standard English is all things to all men'. That the same is true of RP can easily be verified by asking native speakers' opinions on whether certain named persons speak RP. The answers will depend on the judge's own accent, position, background, and a number of personal prejudices, as well as on the speaker's accent (in the widest sense), of course; it will be influenced by what is known about his person, his politics, his background (whether these are known, made known, or derived from certain external characteristics); it will in any case be a complex judgment, and it will confirm SPENSER's (1957) view that 'accent is in the listener', at least as much as in the speaker.[104]

3.2. An Artificial Standard: BBC English

Another common argument is that RP 'is most familiar as the accent used by most announcers and newsreaders on serious national and international BBC broadcasting channels' (ROACH 1991:4).

'RP' as a name for the most prestigious British English accent is and has been little used outside English linguistics and language teaching. In popular speech other names are more common, of which one of the most popular is 'BBC English'. This name, which has replaced 'RP' in the 15th edition of the EPD, is taken from the style of pronunciation that was once commonly and almost exclusively heard from 'serious'[105] broadcasts of the British Broadcasting Corporation. I give a brief sketch of the history of the

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[104] Several of my (linguistically naive) informants, when pushed, spontaneously confirmed that 'accent is in the listener', though not in those words. LEWIS 1985:247f. reports similar informal experiments and concludes that 'no two British phoneticians are likely to agree where the line between RP and non-RP is to be drawn'.

[105] Another word that is commonly used in this context. Contrary to what one might expect, 'serious' broadcasts can be extremely entertaining, even outrageously funny. Much of classic BBC radio and TV comedy uses accent and accent prejudice to achieve its effect. It is not 'serious' in the sense of 'earnest', but just another value judgment. I suspect that in this context the accent determines what is to be called 'serious'.

BBC to indicate what positon of power was held by this institution for several decades.[106]

The first regular broadcasts in Britain were made from Chelmsford in 1919. There were transmissions of 30 minutes' duration twice a day, comprising speech and music. After an interval in which no transmissions were allowed for fear that they might interfere with other communications systems, the Marconi Co. was licensed to broadcast for 15 minutes per week in 1922. The British Broadcasting Company Ltd. was established as a private corporation on 18 October 1922, at a time when there were nearly 600 licensed stations in the USA. In 1925, this became the British Broadcasting Corporation, a public body answerable ultimately to Parliament. It was controlled by a Board of Governors, chaired by John (later Lord) Reith, who had been chief executive of the original company.

In order to appreciate what influence the BBC was able to exert it is well to remember that it held the monopoly for television broadcasts until the Independent Television Authority was licensed in 1954,[107] and that for sound broadcasts, until the Government permitted local commercial broadcasts in the 1970s. In other words, for fifty years the BBC was the voice of Britain. It brought news, information, entertainment into almost every home; and not only into the homes: between 1927 and 1940, it developed a sophisticated system of broadcasts for schools, to which by 1939 over 9,000 schools were listening regularly. By 1938, nearly 9 million wireless licenses had been issued in Britain (11 million in 1946), which is more than in any other country in Europe (in proportion to the population).

3.2.1. The Advisory Committee on Spoken English

Reith, who was at the head of British broadcasting from 1922 until 1938, evidently had clear ideas about the responsibility of the BBC as a monopoly holder. He conceived the BBC as an 'instrument of public service' (BRIGGS 1965:295). He defined policies and set out the aims of

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[106]   All facts and figures in the following paragraphs are from *Encyclopedia Britiannica*, 3:310, *s.v.* 'Broadcasting', and from BRIGGS 1961, 1965, 1970.

[107]   At a time when television broadcasting had only just started in Germany, over 1 million TV licenses had been issued in Britain.

the Corporation. Early on, he set up advisory committees of experts for various purposes. Among them, as one of the later ones, was the Advisory Committee on Spoken English, which was established in 1926 as an offshoot from the Central Educational Advisory Committee. It originally consisted of six eminent, mainly elderly,[108] linguists and men of letters, among them Robert Bridges, the poet laureate (82), Logan Pearsall Smith (61) (both of the Society for Pure English) , George Bernard Shaw (70), Daniel Jones (45), the actor Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson (73), and Arthur Lloyd James (42), who was Professor of Phonetics at the London School of Oriental and African Studies, as Secretary (cf. JAMES 1935:33). Lloyd James reported to the BBC and Reith, to whom he had acted as linguistic consultant before the Committee was established.

BRIGGS (1965:292) sums up Reith's ideas with regard to the style of newsreaders:

> In March 1924 [...] it had been decided to insist on a 'standard form of announcing' in the provinces as well as in London. In November Reith urged Station Directors to think of announcers as 'men of culture, experience and knowledge'. Anonymity and formality were to present to the public a sense of the BBC's collective personality, a public image or corporate identity, which was for the most part, an image 'drawn from upper-class or upper middle-class life'.

3.2.2. Feedback: BBC English as RP

Thus, the BBC exerted an immense and exclusive linguistic influence on Britain (and internationally, through the World Service and its cooperation with the Linguaphone Institute) for half a century.

Lloyd James has been accused of making RP the accent of broadcasting (e.g., by SPENCER 1957), but again I think that it would be useful to rephrase that and say that the accent that came to be known as the 'BBC accent' became the RP of its time. LEITNER 1982 suggests that the BBC had little influence on the development of RP since certain tendencies

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[108] I give their age in 1926 in brackets. BRIGGS (1965:469) quotes G.B. Shaw summing up the shortcomings of the committee thus: 'The new Committee so far is a ghastly failure. It should be reconstituted with an age limit of 30 and a few taxi-drivers on it. The young people WONT talk like the old dons, and Jones and James, who are in touch with the coming race, are distracted by the conflict. And then, are we to dictate to the mob or allow the mob to dictate to us? I give it up.'

existed before the BBC; this was discussed in chapter 2, but surely preventing and reversing change is also a form of influence.

LEITNER (p.100) is puzzled by certain principles agreed on at the Advisory Committee's first meeting because they diverge from general educated usage as described by Jones. These include keeping a hint of the original quality of vowels in unstressed syllables, not levelling /ʊə/ and /ɔə/ under /ɔː/, giving /r/ some sound value in all positions, and several others. This seems to suggest that the presence of Bridges on the committee made itself felt (cf. BRIDGES 1919, *passim*), but it does not necessarily mean that such recommendations as were made by the Committee were closely adhered to, since it had no executive powers. JAMES 1932 in fact complains that certain mannerisms in the speech of announcers arouse listeners' hostility, but admits that even careful coaching of speakers, who are selected from hosts of public school and Oxbridge educated applicants, cannot ensure universally accepted speech in all of them.[109] All of these speakers, of course, would have typical RP backgrounds and, being young, often speak an advanced variety.

It has evidently never been the policy of the BBC to promote RP as a standard accent. On the contrary, Lloyd James, who was secretary of the Advisory Committee on Spoken English for the entire time of its existence (1926 - 1940, from 1938 with the official title 'linguistic adviser') and responsible for selecting and coaching newsreaders from 1929 onwards, was well aware that RP as it was known was far from being accepted nationally.[110] He concludes that 'the average speech of young University men and women is not particularly acceptable to the majority of listeners in the country' (1935:162). His aim was not to raise anything – let alone RP – to a standard, but to devise and divulge a style of speech that could indeed be widely accepted: 'The efficacy of the standard is not in the standard itself, but in the extent to which it is accepted' (1935:170). He had a vision of improving social standards by helping to remove the 'last class barrier' (1935:159f.), i.e. socially marked accents.[111] To achieve this

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[109] Cf. WARD 1939:15f.

[110] JAMES 1932: *passim*; JAMES 1935: 107, 162.

[111] It was apparently a widespread belief at the time that social standards could be raised by raising standards of pronunciation, and *vice versa*; cf. PEAR 1931.

he proposed to use the acoustic averages (however he established them he does not say) of sounds in social and regional varieties known to him for weekly broadcast lessons of English: 'Speech that is up to this standard is seldom criticized' (1935:167). This in fact seems to be a reasonable demand on a standard of pronunciation in a country with a central government and a well-organised infrastructure and communications network: it must be generally intelligible and as inobjectionable as possible to as many people as possible (to eventually refute the famous dictum of George Bernard Shaw that 'it is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman despise him').[112]

James was apparently a believer in progress, social and otherwise, and he also believed in the power of broadcasting. Attitudes to language, however, are notoriously conservative, and discrimination will be made by speakers between their own standards (which is often their own – imagined – speech) and other types of speech, and rationality does not really come into it, except apologetically.

All this leads to a seemingly contradictory situation: although Lloyd James did not intend to champion RP as understood from the descriptions of phoneticians like Jones, RP selected itself by being the accent spoken by any successful broadcasting candidates, which were naturally selected from those who had had the best education. However, it seems probable that recommendations made by the Advisory Committee and James's coaching combined to attenuate the more advanced characteristics of their speech so that a model emerged which was undoubtedly RP, but stripped of its more marked traits. Lloyd James stated that 'the BBC very definitely concerns itself with checking ultra-modern tendencies in the language, and in carrying out the injunctions of the Committee with regard to the purity of the English vowels'.[113]

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[112] In the preface to *Pygmalion* (first published 1916).

[113] 'Statement on the History of the Advisory Committee', 20 Sept. 1934, quoted by BRIGGS (1965:468).

The influence of the BBC's broadcasting on received speech has now been acknowledged by Roach & Hartman in EPD 15, who have discarded the name 'RP' in favour of 'BBC English'.

3.3. *Consensus eruditorum*?

Pinpointing RP is such a difficult business because, as we have seen, other terms are often substituted for it; assertions which are made with those other terms as arguments are then taken to be valid for RP, too, and eventually it is impossible to unravel the intricacies of multiple fallacies and *non-sequiturs*.

Phoneticians and linguists may talk about 'RP', but speech concerns all speakers, and most people have an opinion about it and will make value judgments. The easiest way of approving of something is by calling it 'good', a word without a precise meaning: it just refers to what the speaker personally (or as a member of a group with corporate value judgments) approves of. Speech communities are usually such groups, irrespective of whether there is an official standard or not.[114] Corporate value judgments are instilled in the course of education and, and it is perhaps because education teaches a person what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' that 'good English' is often defined, and almost invariably thought of, in terms of (the quality of) education and similar meaningless terms: meaningless, that is, unless their meaning is specified, which it is not usually (except in the case of PSP, which in turn reduces the number of speakers to an almost meaningless minority). KENNEDY (1935:23) tells us that

> it is not difficult to distinguish between good English and bad English. Good English is characterized by clear and pleasing pronunciation which conforms to that of the majority of thoughtful and well-educated people using the language. [...] The other, namely, bad English, is slovenly in pronunciation and indifferent to the practice of others.

Some other epithets which, according to Kennedy, describe the speaker of good or standard English are 'intelligent', 'self-respecting', 'careful', in short, 'people of education and understanding' (p.24).

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[114] BLOOMFIELD 1927 reports that such value judgments about language are made in pre-literate societies, too.

There is a long tradition of relating eduation and good speech which goes back to antiquity. HART (1569) actually cites QUINTILIAN, the first officially appointed elocution teacher of ancient Rome, who says (I.vi.45):

> To say nothing of the language of the uneducated, we are all of us well aware that whole theatres and the entire crowd of spectators often commit barbarisms in the cries which they utter as one man. I will therefore define good usage in speech as the agreed practice of educated men ['*consensum eruditorum'*], just as where our way of life is concerned I should define it as the agreed practice of all good men.

Eruditus means 'learned', literally 'freed from roughness', 'polished', and is used in opposition to words like *stultus* ('foolish', 'inept'), *imperitus* (as in the quotation above, 'inexperienced', 'ignorant'), *barbarus* (basically, 'foreign') and *agrestis* ('belonging to the country', 'rustic', 'coarse').

These contrasts are valid today. People whose speech is unfamiliar to others are viewed with suspicion. [115] The contrast town/country is of particular interest, especially in view of the extreme stigmatisation that urban working class speech is subjected to in our time. This was not always the case. Rural speech, which is now often thought of as quaint and homely in certain contexts, was traditionally regarded as inferior, whereas towns and cities, and especially the capital, were centres of administration, culture, learning, and elegance. People living in towns partook of the glamour of town life, presumably even lower class people. The stigmatisation of urban speech seems to have begun with the rise of a large urban proletariat. It is interesting in this context that from this time, in addition to an older adjective that referred to townspeople, 'urbane' (with connotations of the elegant and polite), a new coinage, 'urban', gained currency, with neutral to negative connotations.

3.4. Reprise: What is EE?

Londoners speak Cockney, or RP, or something on a continuum between the two. This middle ground has been called 'Popular London' by WELLS (1982), and as such is distinguished from other south-eastern accents (e.g., Essex or Kentish). EE is something much more vague; it might be a modification of several south-east English regional accents in the direction

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[115] Cf. the English *uncouth*, which etymologically means 'unknown'.

of what is perceived to be the standard, or diluted Cockney spreading outwards from London. But the facts are never as simple as all that. It is much more likely that the situation is a dynamic one, with local forms and immigrated forms influencing each other.

If such a levelling of accents is taking place in the whole of south-east England, the home territory of RP, or if such a levelling is perceived, because people cannot tell the difference (bearing in mind that 'accent is in the listener'), then EE will indeed be in a very strong position to oust RP, which is what has been predicted by ROSEWARNE (1996 and earlier).

He suggests that the comprehensive school system is the origin of EE (just as 'the great public schools' were that of RP) and that it is the result of mutually accommodating pupils from different social (hence linguistic) backgrounds.

Such a tendency towards 'linguistic dilution' in the wake of social dilution had been observed by GIMSON (1989:86). But it must be remembered that the changes involved were well on their way within RP before comprehensive schools were introduced. As was mentioned, EUSTACE (1967) observed similar tendencies in pupils at Eton College some time ago.[116] EE is not innovative, and it evidently was not born in comprehensive schools. What is possibly new is that all South-Eastern regional and social accents have been converging towards one relatively well defined variety. Heterogeneous though it may still be, it is not diagnostic of any particular place within that area or of any particular social group. This levelling (cf. KERSWILL 1996) may have been accelerated by the introduction of comprehensive schools, but this is itself indicative of general social change.

Estuary English presents a similar problem as RP: it is rather vague. Within what would be called EE, there are so many varieties that it seems difficult to consider it as a unitary accent; in this it is much like RP. The press delights in pointing out EE speakers among the well-known and locating them within a spectrum that ranges from Cockney to hyper-RP.

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[116] The objection that the adoption in the 'sixties of more demotic accents by public-school children was a short-lived fad does not change the fact that the accent was there and had spread into the middle classes.

ROSEWARNE 1996, for example, mentions the Essex Girls from the television series *Birds of a Feather* as typical speakers of EE, and they are probably associated in the public mind with the less inspiring sides of EE.

Among others who are regularly cited as EE speakers of various degrees are Ken Livingstone and Ben Elton, to give but two examples. WELLS (1994) has usefully indicated what he regards as typical of EE by alternatively referring to it as 'Tebbit-Livingstone-speak'. Livingstone describes his accent as 'London' rather than 'Estuary', and if Elton's stage accent is EE, where does this leave Popular London? Ben Elton, interestingly, uses some very vulgar language, is rather loud, and yet manages to get his messages across. I recently heard a Baptist service from a town in Surrey on the radio. The preacher's accent and voice were at the Popular London end of the spectrum, and it was an unusual experience to hear the Lord's Prayer said at breakneck speed, but it did not seem inappropriate, nor was it irritating, and certainly not dull. These speakers have something in common: they are successful public speakers; they do not speak the way they do because they have never had an opportunity to speak any other way, or because they have never thought about the way they speak. They have 'cultivated' their speech, just as much as any RP speaker; they have a sense of rhetoric, and they can hold an audience. This seems to me to be an indication that it is more than accent in the traditional sense that determines the acceptance of a speech style.

3.4.1. Feedback: EE as RP

ROSEWARNE (1994) suggests that EE may be supplanting RP as the most accepted accent of British English and may eventually become so accepted even in an international context (as the language of international business and for TEFL purposes).

The results obtained by Scott, GREEN & ROSEWARNE (1997), however, indicate that although EE may be already fully accepted in most walks of life in the United Kingdom, it is not so internationally, and especially not in the international (here: U.S. American oriented) business world. Rosewarne's research (1985 and 1990) also indicates that EE is not too well received by foreign learners of English. Although my own data (of 1997, cf. chapter 4) have somewhat different implications, it is certainly

worth bearing in mind that this important sector of English language use appears to judge EE so negatively. RP, as we have seen, has deep historic roots in TEFL. Should the epithet 'received' be extended, not only to English social judgments, but to English as a world language? Does this mean that the English language has ceased to be exclusively the language of the Anglo-American speech community? The answer is probably: yes, it has become something more important: the language of global communication, and as such will be subject to influence from wider quarters than it has been.

At present RP is still the pronunciation standard for TEFL, but soon there may be no TEFL teachers left who are both willing and able to divulge it.[117] However, while in England itself Estuary English has gained so much presence that it is probably 'received' already, and traditional RP may just quietly pass away with its last speaker, English speakers and learners in the rest of the world have been accustomed to the idea that English received speech sounds like traditional RP, and that anything else is sub-standard. This, SCOTT, GREEN & ROSEWARNE (1997) point out, raises the question of British business interests abroad. If business partners abroad prefer not to deal with English business people because they do not like the way they speak, will this not result in economic drawbacks for Britain? The authors suggest that either the foreign business world should be made familiar with Estuary English, or the English should mend their ways and return to a pronunciation that is more acceptable internationally.[118] It is to be expected that such questions will in time answer themselves.

'Estuary English' has become popular as a name for the middle ground between Cockney and RP, but gets its name from being spoken anywhere near (or not so near) the Thames estuary. It is thus regional, whereas if it is to be considered a modification of RP, it must be supra-regional. Only

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[117] One of the reasons why WELLS (1994:262) considers it necessary to systematise the transcription of EE is to give an alternative teaching tool to 'EFL teachers disenchanted with RP'.

[118] One of my RP informants conducts telephone interviews with leading business executives in all parts of the world. He told me he had discovered that when he made his accent slightly more marked (by 'articulating more to the front of the mouth') his interlocutors would be more forthcoming with information.

time will tell. For the time being, the tide of Estuary English has been stemmed by that ancient linguistic bulwark, the Humber.[119] Since there are no boarding comprehensive schools, there are no supraregional breeding places of Estuary English; but there seems to be no need for this, if EE grows on the substrate of RP.   If at one time in the future EE should invade the last strongholds of RP, the old boarding public schools (possibly because there will be no more teachers who speak anything else, or because pupils will refuse to be 'branded on the tongue' by speaking anything else)[120], then EE will be the New RP.[121]

3.4.2. Corrective Propaganda: RP vs. EE

In chapter 2 we saw that EE is not linguistically different enough from RP to be excluded from a wider definition of RP, such as is common today. It has also been shown that the set of educated speakers no longer excludes speakers of EE, since this type of speech can be found in people who are without doubt well educated, and 'even university professors have adopted the cockney habit of making "l" into a vowel'.[122] This state of affairs may be deplored by orthoepic autocrats, but their very attitude proves the truth of the matter.

Yet there is a strong feeling that EE is not RP, that RP is recognisable, distinguishable. This may in part be due to recurrent juxtapositions of the two names in the press, and it may be said that the term 'RP' has only become public property with the popularisation of the other, 'Estuary English'. Description and discrimination, however scientifically detached they may be, will always influence judgment by creating cognitive entities, *'signifiés'*, and where two such entities are juxtaposed and delimited

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[119] Apparently, certain signs of EE (or even Cockney) features settling into Glasgow speech have been observed lately (29 MAR 1998).

[120] If this is not already the case. I have no doubt that EUSTACE 1967 refers to what is now called Estuary English in his study of some boys at Eton College. I have some first-hand evidence of EE having spread to public schools, too, but am not in a position to say how wide-spread it is.

[121] I capitalise 'New' because 'new' seens to be the epithet of the moment. After 'New Labour', why not New RP? Cf. <http://clever.net/quinion/words/n-new1.htm> for more uses of the word 'new'.

[122] Quoting John Honey in *The Observer*, 3 Aug. 1997, p.11 ('We need help to speak right').

against each other, one will be perceived as better than the other. That which is judged to be better is usually that which is closest to the norm the judge himself perceives himself as complying with.

When linguistic criteria, social criteria, educational criteria, are no sure pointers as to whether a person's speech can be considered as 'received' or 'good', then what is there left? I think that the mention of the three – out of many – highly regarded speakers of Southern British English which is not RP in the last section, may give us a clue.

Without wishing to become discursive in a philosophical vein, I consider it worthwhile to just remember what place is usually accorded to language and speech in the definition of humanity. It is generally considered the one distinguishing quality of human beings, intimately related to the faculties of the mind. SACKS 1990 puts it thus: 'Language [...] is not just another faculty or skill, it is what makes thought possible, what separates thought from nonthought, what separates the human from the nonhuman' (p.61). 'To be defective in language, for a human being, is one of the most desperate of calamities, for it is only through language that we enter fully into our human estate and culture' (p.8f.). If language is our most valuable gift, is it not natural that, even unconsciously, preference should be given to those of its vocal renderings which have been looked after, which have been, and are, 'cultivated'?

Speech is often compared to other aspects of social behaviour: manners, clothing, personal hygiene. Some of the epithets used of speech bear witness to that: 'polite', '(in)elegant', '(un)refined', '(un)courteous', '(un)polished', 'rugged', 'rough', 'sloppy', 'slovenly', 'unkempt'.[123] Lloyd James is particularly fond of such metaphors:

> You may show a fine independence by wearing Harris Tweeds on occasions that are generally regarded as unsuitable, but you dare not wear brown shoes with a morning coat. So you may scatter your intrusive *r*'s as you please, but you had better not call the *brown cow* a *bre-oon ce-oo*, or ask for a *cap of cowcow*. It isn't done, and that is the end of the matter. [1935:163]

The dress code is not as strict as it once was, social manners are less rule-bound, and the same is true of speech styles. Less attention is paid

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[123] Cf. OED, *s.v.* 'unkempt', no.2. The word was used of language around 1600.

to these matters, but punk speech is as unacceptable to many people as punk dress. By the same token, over-cultivated speech, especially in men, is often considered dandified or effeminate. That which in England is referred to as 'Oxford English' or 'affected RP' and is often called 'mincing' or 'sissy' usually triggers an even greater antagonism than Cockney (cf. GILES 1970). An EE speaker can cultivate his speech as much as a speaker of any other accent. Lenition of sounds on its own cannot be regarded as 'slovenly' (although it may sound so to people who are used to a different kind of speech).

There is the question of fashion. Fashions come and go, like the mini-skirt and Yod Coalescence, like G Dropping and platform heels. One does not know with Estuary English. On the one hand, it is not so far removed from RP that the tide could not turn, e.g. with compulsory elocution lessons for everybody. On the other hand, it is not an out-of-the-way accent adopted by a tiny minority. It is Southern British English, just like RP, and widely accepted already. It may eventually be a question of whether speech that sounds like machine-gun fire will be felt to be in tune with a new national character (which gives free reign to its emotions, so much commented on in the media recently), New Labour, the Caring Society, etc. The romantic sentiments expressed by the protagonists of the 1945 film *Brief Encounter* now seem difficult to take seriously, in view of the accent with which they are expressed.[124]

3.5. English in the Former Colonies

One of the reasons why a standard of pronunciation is regarded as so important by the English – more important, that is, than for speakers of other languages, who of course also make judgments about how their languages are spoken by others – is that they have always been aware that English is spoken by very many people all over the world and could conceivably become the most important language in the world.   It is perhaps no coincidence that pronunciation manuals become progressively more numerous as the British Empire collapses.

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[124] This casts an interesting light on the use of the local vernacular by the game-keeper in the erotic passages of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. *Brief Encounter* was not, apparently, appreciated by working class audiences, as Gavin Lambert relates in a documentary on the British cinema, *Typically British*.

The British, not unlike the Romans, introduced their own administrative system into their colonies, conducted by colonial officials in their own language. When they were forced to leave, they left behind the system they had built with an administrative language that was not native to the various countries, but which continued to be used for official business and as a *lingua franca* in countries and regions with a number of mutually unintelligible autochthonous languages. These languages, mainly Indian and African of various types, have very different phonological and intonational systems from English.

Guardians of the English language are increasingly worried about the development these new types of English may take, because the phonological features of the native languages are superimposed onto their Englishes, so that they become virtually unintelligible to someone who is used to English or American English.[125] What is more, even geographically contiguous African Englishes are apparently less well understood among each other than RP is by all of them. These Englishes are also developing grammatical and lexical features all of their own, which makes them even more divergent from the mother language.

The situation is vaguely reminiscent of the status of Latin in the more romanised ex-provinces after the Sack of Rome, only that the English mother country is still going strong and its language still alive and under control. In the early Middle Ages, the former Roman provinces developed their own vernaculars on the basis of a Latin that was much modified by indigenous features, which later achieved the status of national languages, while Latin continued to develop as the international language of the educated, of the Church, and of science.

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[125] GIMSON 1980 cites a study by B. Tiffen (an unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1974) to the effect that the mean intelligibility of English as spoken by native speakers of Yoruba to natives of England was approximately 65%. This seems a low percentage, but the intelligibility of the Cockney speaker in my experiment mentioned in chapter 4 to German subjects was of a much lower order.

One might argue that we live in the age of communication, but how many of the ordinary people in Africa or India do communicate with England, or even with speakers of English standard varieties?[126]

The British Council seems to acknowledge this possibility in describing one of the possible futures of the English language thus: 'World English develops as a special "controlled language"; the number of (mutually unintelligible) "natural" Englishes multiplies.' [127]

This situation is another argument in favour of a standard pronunciation of English, this time an international standard. GIMSON (1980:65f.):

> [I see] clear signs of a dangerous widening of the gaps between these various forms of spoken English. It seems to me urgent that active steps should be taken to provide a remedy and that the remedy could take one of two forms: either the pronunciation of a mother-tongue form of English should be strictly prescribed as a model in the training of teachers of English or an international 'neutral' pronunciation of English should be devised which will contain the dominant features of the main mother-tongue English accents. [...] The obvious choice for model would lie between a British or an American English accent.

At this point, it may be well to remember that language is much more than just a means of communication: it is a very potent political and economic factor. Lenin recognised this when he said that 'the demands of the economic factors will, of their own, *determine* which language of a given country the majority would *profitably* learn in the interests of trade'.[128] This is not an insight exclusive to the Bolsheviks, for when the Prince of Wales launched the British Council's 'English 2000' project in 1995, he said: ' We must act now to ensure that English – and that to my way of thinking means English English – maintains its position as the world language.' An article by Henry Porter in the *Guardian* of 6 April 1995 takes a critical

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[126] It should be mentioned, however, that the BBC has committed itself to providing all African countries with 'BBC English' courses, and the mass production of the new dynamo-powered radios in Africa is to ensure that these programmes can be received in all parts of the continent.

[127] English 2000 Alston Hall Seminar July 14-19, 1996 (from the programme). Another possible future is: 'English continues its reach until everybody in the world speaks it; 90% of the world's stock of languages cease to be used within 50 years' (*ibidem*).

[128] Quoted by GOODMAN 1972:718.

attitude to this and in turn releases an avalanche of letters to the editor, including one from a leading British Council administrator, who states that 'the British Council's English 2000 initiative promotes the English language because it is central to the UK's commercial, development and cultural objectives' (note the order).[129]

The English language is, among other things, itself a premier export commodity, and means big money.[130]

3.6. English as a Foreign Language

While there are 322 million native speakers of English in the world, the number of people who speak English as a second language is again of the same order. The number of those who learn English as a foreign language worldwide is hart to estimate, but may be anything up to one billion.[131]

One of the reasons that Daniel Jones's descriptions of English pronunciation and his EPD were so successful was that he collaborated with foreign teachers of English right from the beginning,[132] which caused BRIDGES (1919:37) to assert that 'the field is now strongly held by the Anglo-Prussian society which Mr. Jones represents' and that 'no Englishman could obtain employment in Germany as teacher of English unless he spoke the English vowels according to the standard of Mr. Jones' dictionary' (p.32).

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[129] The British Council (<http://www.britcoun.org/english/engfaqs.htm >) says that the English language is "fundamental to Britain's export-led recovery".

[130] The following data illustrate this: "British English language products are worth 500 million pounds a year to Britain; – the total expenditure of the 750.000 visitors to Britain annually to learn English is over 800 million pounds" (<http://www.britcoun.org/english/engfaqs.htm>).

[131] These figures are takenfrom the Ethnologue Data Base (13th edn., 1996: <http//www.sil.org/ethnologue>). Different figures are available from the British Council brochure *The Future of English. English 2000* (published by The English Company (UK) Ltd.), and in *The United Kingdom – 100 Questions Answered* (published by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London 1998).

[132] Cf. the predecessor to EPD, MICHAELIS & JONES 1913.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is one area where it is generally agreed that a standard of pronunciation is desirable,[133] even if the precise nature of such a standard is a matter for debate. There is at present really only a choice between British and American English, and traditionally, for those countries in which British English is taught (notably Europe), the standard is RP.

RP has by no means remained unchallenged as a TEFL model, but in this context it is attacked for different reasons than as a national standard. Bridges had grave misgivings about its suitability for foreign language teaching, strangely because he thought that because of its many homophones and the neutralisation of unstressed vowels, RP was difficult to understand for non-native speakers. 'Strangely', because its alleged universal intelligibility is usually one of the arguments in favour of RP. Another argument that is often used against RP is that its phonological system is quite different from 'standard average European' languages (ABERCROMBIE 1992). One form of British English that is sometimes suggested as being more suitable for this purpose is Scottish English, its vowel system being much closer to those of other European languages. Both Bridges and Abercrombie (*opp. citt.*) are inclined to favour a Scottish standard. But GIMSON (1981:64) mentions an experiment in an unspecified 'European institution' of teaching Scottish English, which 'had to be abandoned when the students discovered that they were not learning the usual Southern English model'.[134]

TRIM (1992) points out some of the difficulties that result from the double status of English as a native and as a world language for foreign learners. Whereas linguists declare that no native dialect or accent can be regarded as superior to any other, no status is accorded to non-native varieties: they have to conform to native English – but to which?

The problem has resulted from the interpretation as a social standard of that which was originally intended (by Jones) to be a functional standard, and the subsequent discreditation of that social standard, which has in

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[133] Cf. CHEVILLET 1992, CHRISTOPHERSEN 1987, TRIM 1992 (among others).

[134] Cf. GREIG 1928:43, who favours the Irish accent of Dublin for teaching purposes and rejects 'Public School Standard [as a] gross travesty of English speech'.

turn invalidated the functional standard. To quote TRIM (1992), who seems to be the only one to have explicitly addressed this problem:

> Othodox linguistic theory has been almost entirely relativistic. No one language (or dialect, sociolect or idiolect) can be regarded as inherently superior to any other. This principle, central to the assertation of the modern (post neo-grammarian) paradigm against the classical paradigm may in fact be questionable if seriously investigated. It has, however, been assimilated into orthodox educational modernism. In the absence of any serious attempt to evaluate carefully the advantages and disadvantages of a standard pronunciation [...], the adoption of RP by, say, a university student with some acquaintance with linguistics could only be seen as replacing one accent by another of no greater value, as an attempt (not likely to be fully successful) to deny one's provenance and to pretend to a membership of a higher social class than the rest of one's family (p.267).

3.7. The Aesthetic Aspect

The passage just quoted leads directly on to a much neglected aspect of speech: that of aesthetics. Linguistic scientists have been drumming into the general public their notion (which is of course the only possible notion from a scientific point of view) that no accent (or dialect, etc, *v.s.*) is inherently better than any other. Words like 'good', 'bad', 'better', 'worse', as well as 'beautiful', 'ugly' etc. are not part of the scientific vocabulary. The qualification 'inherently' or 'intrinsically' is to be noted. As soon as a context is defined, one variety is likely to become, if not 'better', then at least more appropriate or more likely to achieve the desired results than another. The French language, for example, is usually much 'better' for communicating with French people than the English. In some ways (other than situationally), one accent may well be better than others. The National Theatre voice coach is quoted as saying that RP is 'very healthy for the voice' (24 Nov. 1996), and a drama teacher told me that 'Oxford English' is very efficient because it allows a speaker to go on for longer on the same amount of breath than other ways of speaking.[135] I cannot say whether this is true, but such statements are presumably susceptible of verification.

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[135] It makes sense for people who talk a lot to make the most economical use of the available breath. Many German stage actors seem to use a pharyngalised voice to that purpose. Lenition, although it reduces the effort of articulation, seems to counteract such an economic principle.

When, however, it is claimed that an accent (etc.) is more beautiful or aesthetically more pleasing than another, verification becomes impossible and can only be approximated by statistical methods (cf. chapter 4). Yet there is a strong feeling that the speech of some speakers is aesthetically more pleasing than that of others. I have a strong feeling that the classical sculptures in the Braccio Nuovo of the Vatican Museums in Rome are more beautiful than the near-by Fascist sculptures in the Foro Olimpico, which represent similar subjects, but I would not like to argue the objectivity of my feelings. I could not be sure how my judgment was influenced by the time, place and nature of my education.[136] But if I were receptive to that kind of argument and told that the one has certain identifiable features, or the artists who created one had certain superior techniques or tools, I might be persuaded that that is so. On the other hand, an expert of cultural theory might try to tell me that all that which is not nature is culture, and that a nuclear reactor is an expression of culture as much as the Apollo of Belvedere, and that neither is intrinsically better than the other, and I might be hard to convince. Linguistic relativism possibly has a similar effect on the community at large.

In other words: theory and practise are two different things where aesthetic judgments are concerned. Linguists should in fairness admit that such judgments exist and that for all their subjectivity have nothing intrinsically reprehensible.

3.8. Summary

The term 'RP' has been confounded with several other terms, such as 'good', 'educated', 'BBC English' among others, which has led away from any clear definition of it and to many unsupportable ideas about its status. Whereas 'RP' is in origin a linguistic name for an accent, all the others imply value judgments about the social and educational status of its speakers, which have been extended to the accent itself.

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[136] Wilhelm Müller (of *Die schöne Müllerin* fame) in *Rom, Römer, Römerinnen* (p.245, diary of 25 February 1818) tells an anecdote that has always intrigued me, of how two peasants from the Abruzzi come into the room with the Apollo of Belvedere in the Vatican Museums; when they see the statue, they stop in awe and take off their caps, saying: 'This is not for us; this is only for the Pope and his cardinals.' I am almost (but not quite) convinced that he made it up in order to make a point.

The BBC has been very influential in shaping the prestige accent for most of this century, but its influence is in decline since it lost its broadcasting monopoly. The last three decades have seen major changes in the shape of the national accent, concomitant with the media becoming less middle-class dominated and oriented.

Labels exercise a strong influence on our perceptions. It is thus that Estuary English has come to be seen in opposition to RP. It could alternatively be seen as a modern, demotic variety of RP: 'People's RP' might be a good description.[137] If EE were seen as a style of RP it would be easier to convince people that on occasions a more formal style could be appropriate. Rather than insisting that learning how to pronounce English the RP way is to acquire the standard accent, it could be more useful to remember that the human voice has more possibilities than any musical instrument and can be used to accommodate to any situation, and that it is worthwhile and possible to explore its capacities[138] without compromising one's social status. Every accent can be cultivated – the mere substitution of strings of sounds by other strings of sounds does not lead to more aesthetic speech, although it may lead to greater social conformity. Much could be learned from drama voice techniques. Some linguists maintain that modifying one's accent means losing one's identity, but the point made here is that one would not have to lose one's accent at all, just cultivate one's speech, with the accent, cultivate one's personality.

Overseas and TEFL English are increasingly important domains. This is where the functional question of intelligibility is of prime importance.

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[137] Michael Quinion in his World Wide Words site (<http//cleverlhet/quinion/words/wordsof97.htm>) cites the epithet 'People's' as one of the new words of 1997.

[138] The only author who makes this point strongly enough seems to be NIHALANI 1988.

4. Accent as a Personality and Social Marker

There is an intuition that voice, like handwriting, affords us clues about the personality of its owner. Since the 1960s, such intuitions have claimed the attention of empirical research in the context of bilingualism and the social meaning of speech varieties.

4.1. Information Gained from Voices

All of us derive information about a speaker from his speech and make judgments about him on the basis of such auditory impressions. We have all made the experience of speaking to some person unknown to us on the telephone and forming a certain image of him or her; if by chance, we later meet this person face to face, we are often disappointed or surprised, because he is not as we had imagined him. The same thing happens when we listen to people on the radio: the picture we form is not always conscious, or associated with an optical image, but there is usually some idea of what a speaker is like: whether he has a sense of humour, whether he is intelligent, easy-going, fastidious, intellectual, or friendly. They give us pleasure, they annoy us, or they leave us indifferent.

The information we may gain about a speaker from listening to his voice can be categorised into three areas:[139]

    a. biological (physical)
    b. psychological
    c. social

Judgment of biological or physical facts tends to be the most accurate, because it is usually determined by unmanipulable anatomical and physiological facts, such as size of the vocal apparatus, which is normally in some direct relation to the size of a person's body. It is unusual for people to go wrong in judging a speaker's sex, at least of adult speakers;

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[139] Cf. LAVER & TRUDGILL (1979); cf. LAVER (1968) for the following paragraphs.

age can also often be determined with fair accuracy,[140] and a person's voice is often a guide to the state of his health.

Certain aspects of one's voice can change (according to a person's affective state) or be consciously manipulated according to individual situations. In our northern European culture, a loud, harsh voice is usually associated with aggressiveness; combined with very high pitch, it indicates a tendency towards hysteria, whereas a soft, breathy or whispery voice is a signal of meekness and submissiveness (such a voice is also associated with eroticism) – to give but two examples. This information is usually available to all members of a cultural sphere.

Social information can only be derived from a person's speech by competent speakers of the same language.[141] It may concern regional origin, social status, education, but also social values and attitudes (i.e. conscious choices on the part of the speaker) and, quite generally, group membership. Some professions and occupations form such groups and are characterised by a particular speech style.[142]

4.2 Voice and Personality

Most people are also very confident, unconsciously or consciously, in making judgments about a speaker's personality, i.e. something which is usually a short-term disposition, a person's *persona*, his mask, as opposed to the more set nature of a person's character (cf. PEAR 1931:37ff.). It is a social skill to be able to manipulate one's personality according to individual situations. When dealing with one's superior one may wish to appear serious, attentive, reliable, formal and polite, whereas one would probably try to convey a different kind of personality to one's friends, children, pets, etc. And yet in our society, it is often regarded as a sign of a weak character, of deceitfulness, or of any number of

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[140] But cf. PEAR 1931:174ff., in whose 1927 radio experiment the age of the older speakers was often underestimated, whereas that of the younger ones was overestimated.

[141] This may have to be qualified in that some markers of social class may be the same or similar in different languages within the same cultural sphere (cf. GILES ET AL. 1974 and v.i.).

[142] The stereotypical voice quality of Church of England clergymen has received some attention. Cf. e.g. PEAR 1931:79ff.; JAMES 1932, CRYSTAL 1969.

despicable qualities, to project a different personality in different situations. People will go to great lengths and through years of hardship, PEAR (1931 :41) points out, in order to secure for themselves a position in society (e.g. in a university) where they are relieved from having to adapt to a variety of people and situations.

Linguistic accommodation (cf. GILES ET AL. 1973) is one form of adapting one's personality to the exigencies of a shorter or longer-term situation, and the attitudes towards it are complex. On the one hand, some societies expect speakers to adopt the standard speech in order not to offend the ears of those who count, or think they count; on the other hand, speakers who are not able to adapt completely (or those who over-adapt) are despised by those they try to imitate because they are not the genuine article; they are rejected by those who for reasons of covert prestige or for lack of ability or opportunity have not adapted, because they betray their roots.[143] Negative attitudes to linguistic adaptation are reinforced by the opinion expressed by some linguists that changing one's accent means losing one's identity.[144] (Interestingly, this debate seems to be exclusively about upward accommodation.)

PEAR (1931) is an early example of a predominantly qualitative study investigating judgments about personality derived from speech. Pear, who was professor of psychology at Manchester University, invited radio listeners to comment on the voices of nine speakers which were broadcast on three evenings in 1927. The idea of investigating the association of voice and personality had been suggested to Pear by an article by Edward SAPIR, 'Voice as a Personality Trait'. Listeners had to

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[143] This ambivalent attitude is apparent on almost every page of HONEY (1989). LAMBERT 1967:105f. writes: 'The bilingual encounters social pressure of various sorts: he can enjoy the fun of linguistic spying but must pay the price of suspicion from those who don't want him to enter too intimately into their cultural domains and from others who don't want him to leave his "own" domain. He also comes to realize that most people are suspicious of a person who is in any sense two-faced. [...] The conflict exists because so many of us think in terms of in-groups and out-groups, or of the need of showing an allegiance to one group or another, so that terms such as own language, other's language, *leaving* and *entering* one cultural group for another seem to be appropriate, even natural, descriptive choices.'

[144] Early experiments with sparrows (CONRADI 1905) suggest that accommodation is a survival strategy rather than anything else.

make extensive comments about the speakers' personalities and make certain required judgments as to their sex, age, occupation and accent on a form printed in the *Radio Times*. Over 4,000 listeners from all walks of life responded, often with astonishing detail and confidence.

4.3. Accent and Prejudice

This and other investigations have shown that judgments are indeed made about people on the basis of their speech alone and that such judgments can be quite at variance both with the speakers' self-assessment and the judgment of others. It is assumed that they are often based on association with things known, i.e. someone's voice is associated with voices known from certain other people or with certain environments; PEAR (1931:51) calls this 'transference of affective reaction'. Judgments of this kind are thus properly pre-judices. The detection of a shibboleth (such as the glottal stop) usually triggers instant categorisation. Since in England a certain accent is associated with social prestige, and others are not, social prejudices are involved.

It would be interesting to speculate on why this particular kind of accent prejudice is so strong in England and practically unknown in other countries. It is not that accent prejudice does not exist elsewhere. In Germany, strong regional accents are as much associated with vernacular comedy as in England and, e.g., the Saxon accent is as strongly stigmatised in Germany as any English variety is in England. There are also probably socially marked accents in all regions, but there is no such social cline of accents supraregionally.

However, there are certain circumstances which are likely to have influenced the development of a single prestigious accent in England. The country has been politically unified for many centuries, with the political and administrative as well as the economic and cultural centre in and around the capital, in the South-East. This has not been the case in Germany or Italy, for example, which have been nations for little more than a hundred years. In addition to all this, the public-school system has played its much-cited part in creating a nation-wide linguistic division on a social base. And last, but not least, it has a long history of broadcasting, with a central, nationwide and nationally controlled broadcasting system.

This may serve as some indication why accent prejudice in England is social prejudice, and why empirical studies of accented speech in England have been so prolific – not to mention the use that comedians have made of it.

4.4. Empirical Studies on the Evaluation of Accented Speech

Another paradigm was developed in the 1960s to investigate the social significance of certain types of speech. Methods were taken from sociology and were strictly quantitative. The method was first developed by the social psychologist Wallace E. Lambert and his associates at McGill University, who devised an instrument to measure the relative prestige of the English and French languages to Canadians (LAMBERT ET AL. 1960). Their aim was to find out what social and personal judgments were made about a speaker on the basis of the language he used; this first study involved English and French Canadian speech judged by English and French Canadian subjects. A French prose passage and its English translation were read and audio-taped by four bilingual speakers. These recordings were used as stimuli for subjects to rate for a number of personality traits on a six-point scale. Statistical processing revealed (among other things) that the English varieties were rated more highly by both francophone and anglophone subjects on traits such as kindness and intelligence.

This study is notable for the introduction of several important experimental parameters, which dominated this type of study for many years. The first is the so-called 'matched-guise' technique (MGT): in order to minimise the influence of paralinguistic and extralinguistic features, such as prosody, voice quality and anatomy, stimuli in both languages were read by the same speakers (whose credibility as native speakers of each variety had been ascertained previously). Subjects, of course, were left to believe that the passages were read by different speakers. Another feature of this study was the use of a standard reading passage in order to exclude content influencing subjects' judgment. Standard semantic rating scales (cf. OSGOOD 1964) and the 'paper and pencil' instrument also became an integral part of this type of study. The traits to be rated typically fell into three groups: personal integrity (with traits like 'dependability', 'sincerity', 'character', 'conscientiousness', 'kindness'), social attractiveness

('sociability', 'likeability', 'entertainingness', sense of humour', 'affectionateness'), and competence ('intelligence', 'ambition', 'self-confidence', 'leadership', 'courage'). GILES 1970 investigated the three dimensions of 'aesthetic content', 'communivative content', and 'status content'.

Everything was designed to measure a particular variable – English language *vs.* French language in this case – to the exclusion of all other potential influences on the judgment of subjects.

An additional feature was introduced into a study of Jewish and Arabic attitudes to Hebrew and Arabic speech.[145] One group of subjects was presented with conceptual stimuli (the names of the varieties to be tested) and asked about their attitudes towards the respective speakers (Ashkenazic Jews, Arabs, and Yemenite Jews) before having to rate vocal stimuli (tape-recordings). The results showed that there was little correlation between the results obtained with the two types of questioning,[146] suggesting that conscious and unconscious attitudes to language varieties differ quite considerably. This is an insight that was gained time and again from studies conducted by Labov. It seems to provide some sort of validation of empirical methods in studying attitudes to linguistic variation.

Statistics are available for the ratings of a number of linguistic varieties.[147] In one study, subjects were exposed to different varieties of a language they had no knowledge of.[148] As it turned out, they did not attribute any particular aesthetic value to any one variety; nor were they able to identify the prestige variety among them. This was taken as a part-validation of

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[145] LAMBERT, ANISFELD & YENI-KOMSHIAN (1965).

[146] Results from a number of studies suggest that vocal stimuli elicit the more 'private' judgments.

[147] BRADAC (1990) gives a synopsis of the history of such studies and discusses the theories which developed from them, notably speech accommodation theory. Cf. LANHAM (1985) for South Africa; LAMBERT (1960) for Canada; LAMBERT ET AL. (1965) for Jewish and Arabic youths in Tel Aviv and Jaffa. Similar studies conducted in German-speaking countries (notably by Scherer) are described in ECKERT & LAVER (1994).

[148] GILES & POWESLAND (1975) had French and Canadian French rated by Welsh subjects (cf. WILLIAMS 1989).

the 'imposed norm' hypothesis, that is the hypothesis that the prestige or status as a standard of a variety depends on external, i.e. non-linguistic circumstances, rather than on its inherent value (cf. GILES ET AL. 1974). There is, however, some evidence that within the same cultural sphere listeners are able to differentiate between the relative social status of varieties of a language they do not understand, possibly on the basis of voice quality and prosodic features. This was suggested by a study involving (real) Franco-Canadian speakers and Anglo-American listener judges (BROWN ET AL. 1975).

This technique has been used in many studies hence, but much criticism has been levelled against it. Criticism of the matched-guise technique has been conveniently summarised by GILES & RYAN (1982), WILLIAMS (1989) and BRADAC (1990). Important points are that matched-guise stimuli are said to be unrealistic because they are taken out of interactional and situational context (BROWN & LEVINSON 1979), and because they try to abstract from features which may well be of prime importance for the subjective evaluation of speech:

> It is entirely possible that so-called extraneous variables (e.g. speech rate, pitch and lexical diversity) in accent studies, for example, can alter what may have been erroneously regarded previously as the *fundamental* social meaning of accents (GILES & RYAN 1982:210).

The weakest point of the matched-guise technique seems to be in its attempt to be scientific by trying to ensure objectivity and reproducibility. To this end, investigators have tried to isolate a putative variable 'accent' to the exclusion of the features mentioned in the quotation above. However, I have not found 'accent' defined anywhere in the literature about such empirical studies, but presumably it is in practice defined segmentally, or perhaps intuitively. It seems to be taken for granted that 'accent' has a well-defined meaning. In addition to this, the particulars of the accent used are not given anywhere; it is left to the reader's imagination to find out just what 'English', 'RP', 'Scottish', etc. sound like in a particular case and a particular study. Even a label like 'London' may mean all sorts of different accents, voices, personalities. Later studies did differentiate to some extent, e.g. GILES 1970, who tested for 'affected RP' as well as just 'RP', and GILES 1972A, who explicitly investigated the influence of 'stimulus mildness - broadness'. In addition to this, there is

the possibility that guise readers – especially if they are good voice imitators – 'might project a particular type of personality when they assume an accent', as STRONGMAN & WOOSLEY (1967:165). point out, quite apart from the fact that they will in all probability imitate prosodic features of the target accent since otherwise they would not sound authentic. WELLS (1982:91) furthermore suggests that some regional and social varieties are also associated with certain voice qualities. Rather than achieving objectivity, then, this kind of abstraction – if it is at all possible – may lead to unrealistic specimens. [149]

Another area of criticism is the recurrent theme of accent being in the listener (SPENCER 1957): listener characteristics are almost completely ignored in such studies. Factors that could influence judgment are group affiliation (of any kind), experience, 'cognitive complexity', and sense-giving strategies of listeners. Some of these factors are obviously very difficult to assess and quantify.

Subsequent studies have tried to take into account some of these points, especially the lack of situational context. Some very elaborate and imaginative investigations were undertaken by Giles and his associates (reviewed in GILES 1979) involving real life situations, which showed that people not only make stereotypical judgments when confronted with taped speech, but also react diffently to different accents. Such experiments usually involved requests for cooperation made in a variety of accents in a variety of situations and showed that responses will be better (more numerous, more detailed, involving more effort) when the request is made in a prestige accent.

The cognitive aspects of accent processing are complicated and very little is known about them, but it is assumed that top-down processing, which is based on prejudice and categorisation, is largely involved (cf. WILLIAMS 1989:63ff.). However, the factor of experience ('cultural competence', corporate value judgments) – that is the availability of a number of suitable categories – will obviously be essential. Once categorisation has taken with the cognitive image established earlier (WILLIAMS 1989:67). I

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[149] SCOTT, GREEN & ROSEWARNE 1997, who use the MGT, nevertheless found that their six guises were rated differently for intonation and voice quality .

The factor 'experience' ('cultural competence', corporate value judgments) – that is the accessibility of suitable categories – will be of prime importance in this. There are two dimensions to this: age and acculturation. That both influence judgment was shown by GILES (1972), who for processing purposes split subjects' results up into two age groups. While his 12-year old subjects displayed less sophistication in judging accents on the mildness-broadness scale, they were more extreme in assigning values to the different accents than the 21-year olds, who had become better judges of what constitutes a mild or a broad accent but showed more tolerance of speech styles that diverged from the standard. The older subjects also showed more realistic reactions towards their local accent than the younger ones. This can be interpreted to show that part of the process of socialisation is to internalise more general stereotypes;[150] the fact that the older subjects were college students also suggested that part of the process of receiving a formal education is to internalise the stereotypes of the educated classes.

In face-to-face interaction, speech cues are not the only ones available. Other factors, especially visual ones, will be integrated in the general picture. GILES (1979:125) reports that dress style had a similar effect on people's responses as speech style. WILLIAMS (1989:67f.) describes an experiment which involved showing video-tapes of three different children (one white, one black, one Mexican-American), dubbed with the same standard English speech: judgments regarding their speech were – surprisingly or not – different.

The difference in cognitive processing schemata seems to be important for understanding the endless discussions about the nature and value of RP. Whereas a trained phonetician may have learnt to use the bottom-up schema and listen for detailed phonetic cues (especially in a professional situation), the average listener will behave quite differently and base his judgment on subconscious categorisation and intuition. LEWIS (1985:247) relates an interesting anecdote of how he once asked Professor Abercrombie whether, in his opinion, a certain BBC newsreader was an

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[150] Cf. the remarks about corporate value judgments in chapter 3.

RP speaker.   The answer was in the affirmative, and when the author pointed out to him that

> this reader displayed regularly certain features which would traditionally be described by any English phonetician as non-RP, [Professor Abercrombie] remarked that, listening to him for content rather than as a professional observer of speech, he could well have overlooked such things.

Lewis concedes that he or any other British phonetician would be equally likely to make such a mis-categorisation 'without careful attention to the speaker's phonetic characteristics', i.e. without (evidently artificial) bottom-up, analytic processing.

Without wishing to go into a controversial topic rather remote from the subject matter in hand, it seems to be suggestive that dichotic listening experiments indicate that the left ear (and the right hemisphere) is at an advantage in recognising tunes (SPRINGER & DEUTSCH 1998).   Further experiments involving epileptics who had had one temporal lobe removed indicated that tune, intensity, duration are perceived and processed in the right hemisphere (i.e. the non-verbal one), whereas absolute perception of pitch (as found in trained musicians) involves the left hemisphere (SPRINGER & DEUTSCH 1998:221).   All in all, the general consensus seems to be that the right hemisphere processes auditory impressions holistically, whilst the left hemisphere (which appears to be dominant in musically sophisticated persons) perceives and processes a tune as a structured sequence of elements, i.e. analytically (if the listener has been trained for it).   Numerous observations and experiments suggest that the right hemisphere plays an important part in the perception and production of speech, too, in that it processes and controls the melodic and rhythmic aspects of speech (SPRINGER & DEUTSCH 1998:179f.).

Since the right hemisphere is generally associated with holistic, intuitive, synthetic perception, these observations are – in the absence of any systematic research – offered for what they are: associations, ideas, which might or might not bear any significance in relation to the evaluation of speech.   At all events, top-down processing seems to be related to holistic perception, whereas bottom-up processing appears to be translatable as analytic perception.   If it is permissible to make such associations, then this indicates why there is such a strong intuition that voice quality and prosodic features, especially intonation, play a significant

part in the spontaneous evaluation of connected speech. It also suggests why it is so difficult to adduce convincing linguistic arguments in this context.

No satisfactory experiments have been designed, as far as I am aware, to test this intuition. In the 1970s, computer-synthesised speech was used to manipulate one parameter at a time of rate, pitch, and intonation (cf. BROWN, GILES & THAKERAR 1985). These experiments were criticised on a number of counts, but since rate of delivery always had the strongest effect, experiments were repeated with real speakers subjectively modifying their rate of speech. Results strongly suggest that competence ratings (for such attributes as 'intelligent', 'confident', 'ambitious') linearly increase with increased rates of speech, whereas benevolence ratings ('kind', 'sincere', 'dependable', etc.) are highest for medium speed and lower for very fast as well as for very slow rates of speech.

4.4.1 Studies of British-English Accents

Early studies in Britain (London *vs.* Yorkshire,[151] and English *vs.* Scottish English,[152] rated by the relative natives) provided clear examples of the distinction between status and solidarity judgments: subjects rated speech of their own variety more highly on traits like friendliness, whereas judgment about competence traits was not necessarily related to this. Competence traits were always found to be rated more highly in what was perceived to be the standard or more prestigious variety.

While early studies in this paradigm were concerned with linguistic varieties that were associated with cultural differences, later ones conducted in the 1970s laid more stress on social varieties. In Britain this research is firmly associated with Howard Giles, who in 1970 conducted an important study in which ratings were obtained for English spoken with 15 different native and foreign accents, and for 18 different conceptual stimuli (i.e. the names of the accents) of English spoken with an accent; RP comes out top for aesthetic, communicative, and status content both for the vocal and the conceptual stimuli, with the exception that 'an accent

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[151] STRONGMAN & WOOSELY (1967)
[152] CHEYNE (1970)

identical to your own' is rated above RP on the communicative content scale for the conceptual stimulus. For the conceptual stimuli, Cockney and Birmingham are rated last on all three scales. Among the vocal stimuli, interestingly, Cockney is rated more highly than English spoken with a German accent and Affected RP on the aesthetic content scale.

This study was still cited as evidence of the superior status, intelligibility and aesthetic quality of RP as recently as in 1993 by the *Sunday Times*[153] and it might well be suggested that things have changed in the last 25 years. However, to the best of my knowledge, no further studies of this nature have been undertaken involving native listener judges. David Rosewarne conducted similar studies with non-native teachers (1990) and learners (1985) of English who had been resident in London for a year. His intention was to test reactions to the variety which he had dubbed 'Estuary English'. The results were, I think, quite surprising in that RP was rated significantly more highly than any other variety on all traits, whereas EE turned out the unequivocal loser on all counts.

In the study of SCOTT, GREEN & ROSEWARNE 1997, which used the matched-guise technique (one speaker for six accents) in order to eliminate any possible influence from – among others – 'voice pitch, speech speed and emotional reactions of subjects to different voice qualities' as well as 'paralinguistic factors' (p.38), the qualities of intonation and voice were explicitly rated. In fact, the mean ratings for these two scales showed the greatest difference of all between Estuary English (which was ranked fifth out of six) and the two front-runners, General American and RP (SCOTT, GREEN & ROSEWARNE 1997:39). Whether this was so because the intended elimination of prosodic and paralinguistic features was unsuccessful or because such features were perceived although they were absent, the figures reported indicate that they play a major part in such evaluation.

A similar study which I conducted with German learners of English in Hamburg in 1997 did not fully confirm the tendency of those results. It involved four RP-speakers of different types and one EE-speaker of the type specified by Wells. Whilst on the whole preference was given to the

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[153] 28 March 1993, 'Wordpower' supplement: 'The accent league'

speaker of (moderate) General American and those of neutral to attenuated RP, the type of RP which was called 'upper-crust' by English control subjects was flatly rejected, as was the type 'commanding voice' with respect to all traits but competence. Although with respect to the majority of traits the EE-speaker could not compete with the ratings for the preferred speakers of those varieties which are still perceived as standard, all his ratings were above the neutral value and usually well above those for the marked varieties of RP. With respect to aesthetic content, he came near to the top-rated RP-speaker and well above the other three. It should also be mentioned that the EE-speaker was judged to be a 'typical American' by 20% of the subjects.

This seems worth noting in the context of remarks about the 'flat' intonation of American English and EE (v.s., section 2.4) as well as ROSEWARNE's (1996) remark that EE is 'imitative of changes coming from America'. While the latter refers mainly to lexical peculiarities, the influence of American on British English has been noted by more scholars than one. Paul Coggle (28 AUG 1994) believes that there is a process of world-wide convergence towards uniformity under way, and that American English will be the winner in the end:

> Urban speech is being preferred to rural speech. There is likely to be a battle for supremacy between these various urban dialects and, as in the past, the influence of London is likely to win the day. This same process is almost certainly taking place on a worldwide scale, and at some point in the more distant future, there will be a battle for the supremacy within the English-speaking world and the victor in this battle is likely to be North American English.

The fact that American English already has considerable influence in Europe and that Britain no longer leads a life apart from continental Europe seems to make it likely that 'Euro-English', too, will contibute to the eventual levelling of the English language.

4.5. Summary

Since the 1970s, a great number of studies have investigated how British-English accents are perceived by whom and in what circumstances, and what variables can have a bearing on such judgment. Many original experiments have been devised to exclude what was deemed extraneous influence and to reduce the field of enquiry to what was its object: accent.

All these studies have always assumed that the meaning of *accent* is common knowledge. The object of investigation has thus never really been defined in a rigorous manner. Prosodic and voice variation was excluded wherever possible by using the matched-guise technique.

All studies led to the conclusion – banal in itself – that with respect to competence criteria, members of a linguistic community tend to rate those varieties highest which are considered as standard or prestige varieties in that community. The realisation that those varieties do not necessarily also command the greatest sympathy is perhaps less banal: the best liked variety is usually the judge's own native variety. This led to a distinction between status and solidarity judgments.

With respect to the linguists' thesis that no accent (etc.) is inherently better than any other, such studies showed that so-called prestige accents – as long as they are not particularly marked – are not only higher rated with respect to status, but are also more likely to lead to the action desired by the speaker. The effect of EE has so far only been investigated with non-British subjects; the results are not umambiguous.

All results must be regarded with some caution. It has been shown again and again how difficult it is to create experimental situations which approach natural conditions. Another point is that owing to the lack of a workable definition of accent it has never been possible to exclude so-called external influences.

It has not so far been possible to say what it is that makes higher rated varieties 'better' than others. Although there is some evidence that prestige is not inherent but conditioned by extra-linguistic factors ('imposed norm') it is impossible to say what features function as prestige markers. It cannot be excluded that they are – at least among others – those features which experimenters have tried to eliminate as supposedly irrelevant variables: intonation, voice quality, and prosody in the wider sense.

5. Conclusions and Outlook

This paper has looked at RP from the terminological, phonological and phonetic points of view, as well as under the aspects of prescriptivism and the social psychology of this variety which is still regarded as the standard of British English pronunciation in many environments.

A discussion of the new variety Estuary English (whose existence as a distinct variety is suggested by the existence of the popular name) and its status and significance has led to the suggestion that it is to be located within the same phonological system as RP, but shows distinctions from the latter mainly in rhythm and intonation; this remains to be investigated, as indeed all accent-specific prosodies. In view of the large area it has covered and the wide acceptance EE has achieved in the British isles (even in established circles) one is perhaps justified in speaking of a new RP, for 'RP' is not (as has been shown) a term which has a specific reference. It is, rather, like e.g. 'the president', a term with a temporally and locally variable reference. Since it is a sociolect, its meaning changes mainly in connection with social changes. The important realisation that 'accent is in the listener' (SPENCER 1957) illustrates this.

The question of what is received in English speech is extremely complex and rendered more problematic by the confusion of a number of separate issues. The message of linguistic science, that 'no accent is inherently better than any other', is perceived by the non-expert, language-using, school-educated public, as 'anything goes'. By some this is accepted as a *carte blanche*, by others as an assault on common sense. JAKOBSON (1960:352), who distinguishes (as do most others) between the descriptive and the prescriptive tradition, concedes to each of them its place by pointing out that the descriptivist position of science "must not be mistaken for the quietist principle of *laissez faire*; any verbal culture involves programmatic, planning, normative endeavors".

People will make value judgments where differences are perceived, and spoken language is no exception. There is a habit of justifying one's judgments, presumably because it is felt that objectivity (which is scientific

and 'a good thing') can attach only to that which is well reasoned and 'logical' – science teaches us that. So naturally, judgments will have to be derived from observations which can be verified, but these are useless unless there are standards in relation to which observations can be classified. The criteria as well as the standards which are applied are often those learnt at school in the form of relatively simple rules about grammar, punctuation, and certain easily identifiable aspects of pronunciation, and usually turn out to be extremely long-lived. These attitudes are regularly strengthened by stagings of public opinion in its organs, aided and abetted by figures of authority (like Mrs Shephard) who set up a catalogue of criteria and 'attackables'.

It is very unfortunate that several issues are confounded in the process. Standard English and Received Pronunciation are presented as Siamese twins; good English is that which conforms to the rules of schoolmasters; Estuary English is the enemy of a love of letters and the national culture. If it is the declared aim of Trevor MacDonald to instil in the young a love of the English language and its literature, this is surely a noble aim. If, however, this automatically makes him a front-row fighter against Estuary English, this is simply a *non sequitur*. By associating 'good English', RP and culture, and at the same time opposing RP and Estuary English, Estuary English – as an enemy of RP – becomes an enemy of culture.

We have seen that 'good English' as well as 'RP' are extremely vague terms which do not refer to anything very specific in reality. They are far too abstract to admit of any kind of useful discussion, and in the end are expressive only of value judgments, most commonly prejudices. 'RP' is useful as a technical term in phonology, but out of place in a discussion of the aesthetic qualities of spoken English. This does not mean that statements about such aesthetic qualities are not valid. Neither does it mean that linguists are, as it were, *ex officio* qualified to condemn such value judgments; they may be non-scientific, but science is not competent for all areas of life. A statement like that of art critic Brian Sewell (10 Sep. 1998) that 'one could never make love to a woman with a glottal stop' cannot be countered with any arguments, let alone scientific (assuming that by 'one' he refers to himself).

Aesthetic judgments are certainly culture-specific and never absolute, just as other value judgments are always relative. Nothing is 'inherently' better or worse than anything else. We acquire the basics of what is regarded as good or bad in a culture in the course of education, socialisation, acculturation. There can be no question that such judgments are modified with time. At the same time, it is not just and proper to negate the existence of such judgments or to deride them because they lack scientific rigour, as long as they do not use pseudo-scientific argumentation in order to appear more 'objective'. The fact that they do just that a lot of the time does, however, invalidate them on this level.

The scientist keeps aloof of value judgments of this kind. For practical purposes, however, something like language – with which we are all familiar individually and as a community, and which is part of our intellectual and emotional self-expression – cannot be reduced to its scientific definition. In trying to rid us of prejudice, science drives us to another form of irrationality: rather than admit that there is no difference where so clearly there is one, we try to argue our convictions by all means. Among these are terms which are on the same level of differentiation as 'white' and 'non-white' would be if they were the only ones available to describe the colour spectrum. With the help of these terms, propositions are formed, and while it is customary to discuss the acceptability of propositions, the validity of terms is rarely questioned. This seems to explain why categories which are set up – such as RP *vs.* EE – are eagerly lapped up to be used as arguments in propositions which could otherwise not be made.

Every empirical study that has been conducted about the evaluation of speech has shown that judgments of this nature are extremely complex, and yet arguments are reduced to the simplicity of stating that somebody speaks sloppy English because he uses a glottal stop. It is like saying that someone is a bad pianist (just) because he occasionally hits the wrong key.

There is evidently more to what is regarded as good speech than hitting the right sounds. It has been shown that in the vast continuum of southern English speech, which includes all forms of RP, Estuary English, Popular London and Cockney, that which is labelled RP is as likely to be rated

lower as well as higher than that which is labelled EE.   The term 'RP' may be meaningful in the abstract discipline of phonology; in the social sciences or in a discussion of aesthetic merits, however, it is useless.

If there is to be a linguistic discussion of the subjective perception of spoken varieties (and since the subject is language, there should be), phonetic science will have to investigate what (measurable) features of speech this perception is based on and create categories for describing its parameters. LAVER (especially 1980) has made a beginning.[154] Scientifically irrelevant (mainly anecdotal) material as well as some of the studies cited in chapter 4 seem to suggest that such perception and such judgments are not based on analytic processing but use strategies that can be described as holistic or top-down. This would mean that segmental features are irrelevant to such judgments, unless they represent a shibboleth.

Spoken as well as written language has a pragmatic (functional) and an aesthetic aspect: it can be useful (not only to the listener, but also and especially to the speaker), and it can delight (or not, as the case may be). Only the functional aspect of spoken language (or rather, those features of language which only occur in the form which is perceived aurally) has been investigated by sociolinguists and social psychologists and has – among other things – led to accommodation theory. Its other aspect, which touches us on a subconscious level and leads us to judge, leads away from linguistics but approaches traditional philology, which however has not so far shown an interest in spoken language. The discipline which frees the written language of linearity is poetics (JAKOBSON 1960). Such an approach would be desirable for the spoken language, too, for it, too, is not sufficiently described in one dimension. Form and content cannot be separated in a real situation, but neither can they be abstracted from the situation itself, as has been shown again and again in the empirical studies. JAKOBSON (1960:354) speaks of 'emotive' (or 'expressive') elements of language, which also transport information, and turns against the 'emphatic requirement for an "expulsion" of the emotive elements

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[154] The fact that phonetic science is indeed keenly interested in other than segmental features of speech is shown in the *Proceedings of the XXIIIth International Congress of Phonetic Sciences*. Vol. 3. Stockholm 1995 (e.g. LOCAL 1995).

"from linguistic science"', which he calls a 'radical experiment in reduction – *reductio ad absurdum*'. An investigation of this function in spoken language on the phonic level would be interesting.

On returning to the question posed initially, *what is RP?*, we can now say that there is not one answer but many. This will depend on whom we ask, and on the context in which the question is put. Only the phonologist's anwer will more or less be shared by others of his discipline. In this sense RP also has a meaning as a reference accent in TEFL, although the usefulness of an almost exclusively segmental description must be questioned in this context, too. All other answers are ephemeral.

It has been suggested that there is no standard pronunciation of British English, but that appeal is made from time to time to perceived standards which represent that which is regarded as received at the time. 'Received' in this context is to be understood as in Walker's definition of standard English, as 'those sounds [...] which are the most generally received among the learned and polite, as well as the bulk of speakers'. For some this may be a form of traditional RP, but for an increasing number of speakers it is already a moderate form of EE, which thus becomes a new form of received pronunciation. For the purposes of this paper, however, this is said with the proviso that it is as yet unknown what exactly constitutes receivedness, since it is unlikely that this is determined by the mere presence or not of certain sounds. The term itself seems obsolete in view of the fact that it is apparently no longer understood.

It is to be expected that the further development of experimental methods will ensure that the analysis of prosodic characteristics of spoken varieties – particularly in units beyond the speech act – will in future command the attention it no doubt deserves.

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