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Received Pronunciation Group Report

Ella Luzzi

Emma Cramer

Received Pronunciation

By Ella Luzzi and Emma Cramer

Speakers and Region

Emma Cramer

Received Pronunciation is perceived to be Great Britain's standard dialect, but only roughly 3-5% of English speakers from Britain actually speak the dialect natively (Rogers 18). Early media outlets, like the BBC channel, used to cast and feature speakers of RP exclusively in their movies, tv shows, and news broadcasts. Though, in more recent years, British actors and news anchors with a variety of accents have been added, broadening the perspective for viewers. Unfortunately, the perception for the average person from another country was already solidified because of these early actions, so most people associate British people with the Received Pronunciation dialect. Even though very few individuals speak in RP, they live across the entire island of Britain, which means this dialect has little to no regional connection (18). The few that do have relations to a particular region usually "live in, or originate from, the south-east of England" (Roach 1). This observation on the Received Pronunciation dialect can differ because though the author of "British English: Received Pronunciation," Peter Roach, claims that most RP speakers are from one common location. Similarly, a YouTuber, whose channel is called "Learn English with Benjamin," described RP as regionally neutral. He goes on to say that "by hearing this accent I don't know where in the UK the speaker is from" ("The RP English Accent - What is it, how does it sound, and who uses it?"). Essentially, RP may have some basis in some particular areas of Great Britain, but it is not limited by one or few locations, and native speakers live throughout the country.

Since RP is widespread in Great Britain, there are few religious or racial affiliations with the dialect, but many people learning English as a second language speak with a received pronunciation accent because "RP is the British accent usually taught to foreigners" (Rogers 18). Whether it is a positive or negative action to teach ESL using the RP dialect is debatable, but it does create more speakers within other ethnically-diverse groups, outside of Great Britain. One stereotype associated with RP that is agreed upon is its connection with certain social classes. Peter Roach writes, "The great majority of native speakers of this accent are of middle-class or upper-class origin, educated at private schools and (if of appropriate age) university" (240). Received Pronunciation has a long history of association with the wealthy, but, more modernly, this accent has some unwanted connotations. Youtuber Benjamin says during one of his videos that some people attempt to disguise their RP accent, so others do not associate them with the upper classes ("The RP English Accent - What is it,

how does it sound, and who uses it?"). However, Henry Rogers in *The Sounds of Language : An Introduction to Phonetics,* describes RP as a prestigious dialect because it is not only spoken by the upper classes but also by Great Britain's nobles and the royal family (17). The people who speak with the received pronunciation dialect, tend to fluctuate their accent based on social situations, or sometimes as they age. Peter Roach recalls having a distinctly different dialect as a child, "but has over many years of teaching the phonetics of English acquired an accent not far from [RP]" (240). Whereas Benjamin from "Learn English with Benjamin," notices that his dialect can change based on who he is speaking to ("The RP English Accent - What is it, how does it sound, and who uses it?"). Either way, the received pronunciation dialect has a long and rich history that continues today, even if the actual percentage of speakers is not as robust as in the past.

History of the Dialect

Ella Luzzi

Received Pronunciation wasn't always a staple of Great Britain. In fact, "until the end of the eighteenth century, everyone in England spoke a local dialect. Pronunciation was considered an inherited trait" (Fisher 147). Before then, a person's place in society was determined by birth, rather than wealth and occupation. And, education wasn't mandatory and almost unattainable by most people, but eventually, once school was seen as important, reading and writing were taught, and with that came teaching the "proper" way to talk. Then, there was a switch: people were able to rise in class by working hard, earning a lot of money, and having an education. It was obvious as to who the higher class was because they all sounded the same. This is where RP began.

Dr. Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1747) started normalizing cultural literacy and grammar, but it didn't include pronunciation because he felt English was too "diverse to be standardized" (qtd. in Fisher 148). Thomas Sheridan in his book *Course of Lectures on Elocution* (1762) was the first person to talk about "proper" pronunciations and dialects in English. He said, "One [dialect] is current in the city, and it is called cockney; the other at the court-end, and it is called the polite pronunciation" and that the latter couldn't be taught, only learned through "conversing with people in polite life" and proof that a person has "kept good company" (qtd. in Fisher 149). Sheridan then made a new dictionary with pronunciation guides in them. His pronunciation guide was "the age of Queen Anne" where he believed that English was spoken "in its highest state of perfection."

John Walker then produced a new dictionary in 1791, *The Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language*. This dictionary was followed closely for half a century. This dialect at the time was used by the court and bureaucratic Londoners, and as London grew in importance, many people began to mimic aspects of Londoners, especially in speech, shaping the cultural "sound" of Victorian England and southern England.

There is a lot of debate as to who actually coined the term "Received Pronunciation." Some say Walker, but others, including Jonnie Robinson from the British Library, say it was created in "1869 by the linguist, A J Ellis, but it only became a widely used term to describe the accent of the social elite after the phonetician, Daniel Jones, adopted it for the second edition of the *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (1924)" (Robinson). The usage of the word "received" in the title still remains the same: it means approved or accepted.

Walker and Sheridan were both private speech tutors, which were common during this time, giving lessons on elocution. It took well into the 1800s for schools to teach RP. Until the Education Act of 1870, public schools and universities in England were only open to Anglicans, so only high-class people had access to it. Before this, school was intended to train the future ruling leaders, which is why this accent is associated with

the upper class, even to this day. The "Oxford accent" was a very important tool for political leaders. While RP was already on its way, it took until the end of the 19th century, when school was accessible to everyone, that this pronunciation turned into "Public School English" and "Standard British English." Even into the 20th century, when people with many different dialects from all over the UK had access to higher education, "if one [sought] social advancement, he or she [was] still probably obliged to modify his or her accent in the direction of RP" (Fisher 155). RP, as time progressed, has also been referred to as "BBC Pronunciation," "British English," "The Queen's English," and "Standard British Pronunciation."

Received Pronunciation was, and still is to an extent, an important social marker. Even now, RP is still taught to non-English speakers as the proper pronunciation.

Phonological Features

Emma Cramer

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d			k g	
Affricate					tʃ dʒ			
Nasal	m			n			ŋ	
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
Approximant	(w)				r	j	w	
Lateral approximant				l				

Received Pronunciation, like all dialects, has particular phonological features based on the speakers' way of pronouncing words. Their consonants have certain features unique to their dialect, like commonly voiced consonants are very weak to essentially nonexistent (Roach 240). Where /p/ is strongly articulated, /b/ is weakly articulated, and "plosives /p,t,k/ are aspirated before vowels," unless /s/ precedes them in a syllable (240). This lack of aspiration can be seen in words like "stand," "sport," and "skirt." Also, after the previously mentioned plosives, /l/, /w/, /j/, and /r/ are somewhat devoiced (240). This is present for the following words: "plow," "crane," "twin," "prune," etc. When /p/, /k/, /t/, and /tʃ/ appear at the end of a syllable, a glottal stop will occur before or will sometimes replace the /t/, unless a vowel follows one of these phonemes (240). In the received pronunciation dialect, the word "attempt" could be pronounced [əˈtemʔt], with the glottal stop appearing before the /t/ phoneme, but "bitten" may be pronounced [ˈbɪʔn̩], which replaces the /t/ phoneme entirely ("Received Pronunciation"). In the *Journal of the International Phonetic Association,* Peter Roach wrote an article called "British English: Received Pronunciation" where he said, "the fricatives /s, z. Σ, ʒ/ are of relatively high intensity, while /f, v, θ, ð, h/ are of low intensity" (241). Roach continues by elaborating that /ð/ is so weak that it has virtually no friction noise, resulting in /nð/ usually becoming [n̪n̪] (241). For the /l/ phoneme, it can switch between being "clear" or [i]-colored before vowels, or it may be "dark or [u]-colored for other locations (241). General American English varies most distinctly from Received Pronunciation in its pronunciation of the /r/ phoneme. Whereas General American English is a rhotic language, RP is non-rhotic. This means that the "/r/ phoneme is usually realized as a post-alveolar approximant [ɹ] unless devoicing results in a voiceless fricative articulation" (241). In RP, the /r/ phoneme may not be pronounced in many words, particularly when followed by a vowel ("Received Pronunciation"). When a non-alveolar consonant comes before an alveolar consonant in a syllable, it will usually transform its place of articulation to that of the

preceding consonant (Roach 241). The phonemes /m/, /n/, /r/, /l/, and /ŋ/ can become syllabic consonants when in an unstressed syllable, as in “bottle” [bɒtl̩] or “button” [bʌtn̩] (“Received Pronunciation”).

Like most dialects, Received Pronunciation has a great variety in their pronunciation of vowels. Separating short and long vowels in the following chart, highlight their differences (“Received Pronunciation”).

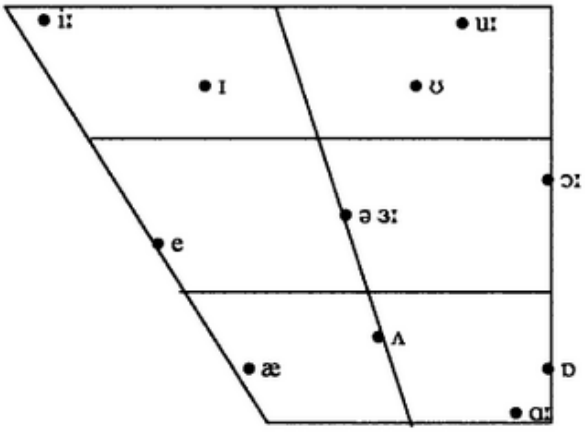


Figure 1 RP pure vowels.

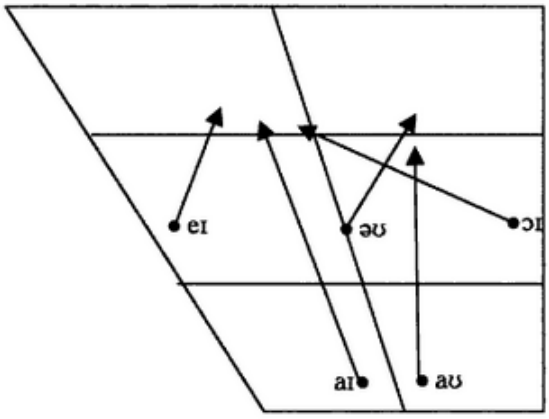


Figure 2 RP closing diphthongs.

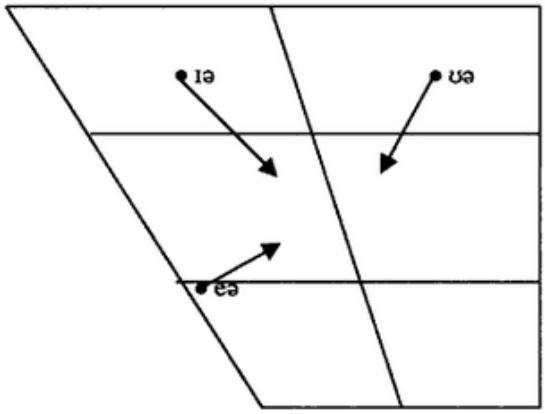


Figure 3 RP centring diphthongs.

Short Vowels	Long Vowels
/ʊ/ in foot or cook	/iː/ in fleece
/ɪ/ in kit, mirror, or rabbit	/uː/ in goose
/e/ in dress or merry	/eəː/ in bear
/ʌ/ in strut or curry	/ɜː/ in nurse or furry
/æ/ in trap or marry	/ɔː/ in north, force, or thought
/ə/ in ago or sofa	/ɑː/ in father or start
/ɒ/ in lot or orange	

There is an even greater variety in combinations of vowels in RP, including centering diphthongs, closing diphthongs, and triphthongs, which are all displayed in the following chart ("Received Pronunciation").

Centering Diphthongs	Closing Diphthongs	Triphthongs
/ɪə/ in beer	/eɪ/ in bay	/aɪə/ in tire
/ʊə/ in boor	/aɪ/ in buy	/ɑʊə/ in tower
	/ɔɪ/ in boy	/əʊə/ in lower
	/əʊ/ in beau	/eɪə/ in layer
	/aʊ/ in bough	/ɔɪə/ in loyal

Examples of Received Pronunciation Speakers:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwhvJU2JMT4
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfqdgMqtuEY&feature=related
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrXdgTEMpVs

Database of Received Pronunciation Speakers:

- https://www.uv.es/anglotic/accents_of_english/01/examples_of_rp.html
- https://www.dialectsarchive.com/england-1

Morphological Features

Ella Luzzi

Many people consider Received Pronunciation an accent rather than a dialect because it uses Standard English with a British flare. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Standard English is defined as, "the English that with respect to spelling, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary is substantially uniform though not devoid of regional differences, that is well established by usage in the formal and informal speech and writing of the educated, and that is widely recognized as acceptable wherever English is spoken and understood" ("Standard English"). Because of this, RP doesn't have a lot of unique words/slang. As the YouTuber "Learn English with Benjamin" says, "If someone is using a lot of slang, a lot of abbreviation, mixing where their words are from, from rap music and stuff, that wouldn't be Standard English. It avoids slang." The only unique/slang words that RP has is the type of words that are normally used in the United Kingdom. An American example would be that everyone, regardless of dialect or accent or location, calls chips "chips" (as in potato chips) but, in England, chips are called "crisps." Other examples would be Brits calling trash or garbage cans "bins," "toilets" instead of bathroom, "holiday" instead of vacation, "lorry" instead of hand cart, "chips" instead of French fries, and many more. Additionally, there are many words that are heard more frequently in the UK—such as whinge (meaning to whine), mate (meaning friend, bro, etc.), and to have cheek/be cheeky (meaning smart-mouthed)—but since a lot of these are more informal slang words, they are not considered unique to RP.

Similarly, Standard British English, which is what RP is based off of, to reiterate, has a lot of intensifiers and interjections that are not normally used by Americans. Some intensifiers include bloody, right, proper, jolly, and quite. Some interjections include aye, blimey, bloody hell, brilliant, bugger, cheers, "come on then", eh,

er/erm, mind/mind you, and oi. Some of these interjections and intensifiers are considered rude, improper, and slang so, again, these are not unique to RP, but since the UK has grown culturally, so has RP. Native RP-speakers might use any of these to fit in with other British accents a bit better.

Another morphological feature that is extremely common among RP speakers is the way they structure their contractions. "When one of the personal-pronoun subjects (I, you, we, or they) is followed by have/had and not (e.g., I+have+not), two patterns of contraction exist: contraction of the verb with the subject (e.g., I've not) and contraction of not with the verb (e.g., I haven' t). The second pattern is more frequent in common-core English; however, it is only 2.5 times more frequent than the first pattern in British but is almost 26 times more frequent in American" (Algeo 19). In America, it is standard to say "I haven't" rather than "I've not." In general, RP treats negative auxiliary verbs differently than standard American English when it comes to contractions. While an American might say "I don't have a pencil," someone who speaks in RP might say "I haven't a pencil." Additionally, RP contracts "have" when it precedes an infinitive form of a verb, such as "I've to turn in a paper." RP does this with most auxiliary verbs. Some examples would be will ('11 / 'll not), would not ('d not) and would have ('d've). Some other cliticizations, which are a part of a contraction that abbreviates a word and sticks it to a base, in RP are daren't, mustn't, and needn't.

RP also has special rules for inflection. Grammatical categories are expressed through inflection by the use of affixes. For verbs, RP takes and adds morphemes where Standard American English might not. Examples include burgle instead of burglarize, pressurize rather than pressure someone, and to sculpture rather than to sculpt. Further, some verbs aren't made past-tense the same as American. RP says betted, bidded, catched, sneaked, while Americans would say bet, bid, caught, snuck. Sometimes, there are words in the English language where the spelling stays the same regardless of tense/plurality, but RP does this much more than Standard American English. For example, "he broadcast this afternoon" instead of "he broadcasted this afternoon."

Some nouns are "formed by adding affixes to a verb to form a related noun. One frequent affix in this use is the suffix -ing." (Algeo 73). And a lot of time, RP speakers will add -ing/-ed to the first word of a compound word; examples include the following with the American version paralleled second: dialling tone/dial tone, driving license/driver's license, extending ladder/extension ladder, sailing boat/sailboat, soured cream/sour cream. It adds the description to the head of the compound instead of portraying it as something that happened to the head. Additionally, words in American that sometimes have -ing/-ed are taken away in RP, such as punch bag/punching bag and kidnap girl, stab girl, hijack car instead of kidnapped girl, stabbed girl, and hijacked car. The suffix -ed is generally used a lot in RP to form adjectives. And although RP usually avoids slang, another productive suffix is "-er(s), which began as public-school slang, added usually to the first syllable of a word" (Algeo 75). Examples would be fresher (freshman), brekkers (breakfast, starkers (stark naked).

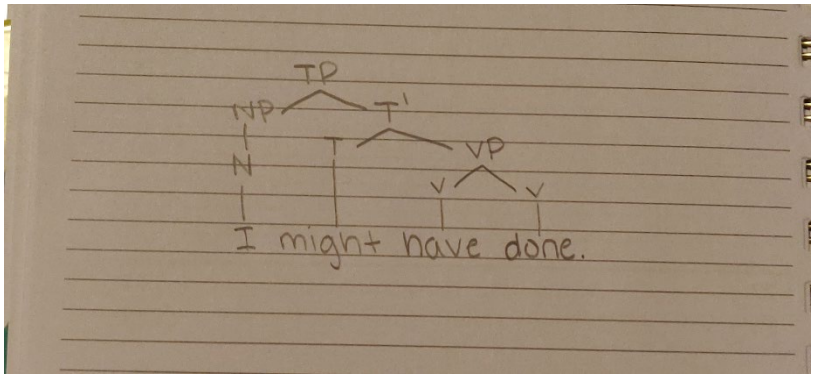
Mass nouns in RP are a bit inconsistent, too. Most mass nouns in RP are used as countable nouns, and using an indefinite article to the noun is very British. Examples include bought a bread, taken a heroin, ate a lasagne. Also, in some cases, RP "uses the plural form of a count noun for which American customarily uses the singular" (Algeo 76). "Maths" instead of "math" is a very popular example of this. "The suffix -ing can also be added to a noun, and the resulting construction is typically a collective mass noun" (Algeo 74).

Articles in general play a big role on how speakers of RP treat words. For nouns of time, speakers of RP add the word the before the noun, such as, "all the morning/afternoon/night/week/etc.," "all the day long," "in the night," "just the once," and "all the year." RP does this with nouns of place, too: "the Ukraine" "the Argentine" "the Yemen" "the Broadway" "the Grammar" (instead of Grammar School). In the same vein, RP also takes away "the" for certain mass nouns that normally would have it, like hospital; "He's in hospital right now." Also, since RP is a dialect that holds prescriptive grammar near and dear, it uses the indefinite article "a" with h-words, such as hallucination, historical, horrendous, and hotel, because h isn't a vowel.

Syntactical differences from Standard American English

Emma Cramer

Even though General American English and Received Pronunciation were originally the same dialect, they have grown to be very distinctive from one another. For subject and verb agreement, there is some discrepancy between the two dialects. General American English treats nouns representing multiple people or things as singular when it comes to the verb, so while talking about a graduating class of high schools, for example, the verb used would probably be in singular form despite the word "class" representing multiple individuals ("American and British English grammatical differences"). Whereas in RP, their verb choice for plural nouns may vary depending on what the speaker is emphasizing: the group or the individual(s) in the group ("American and British English grammatical differences"). Also, the two dialects differ in their treatment of verbs in the past tense. General American tends to add -ed to the ending of verbs to indicate past tense with the occasional exception for words like burn or dream that have a -t ending in the past form ("American and British English grammatical differences"). Although, in RP there is a greater tendency to end verbs with -t instead of -ed ("American and British English grammatical differences"). Specific words appear more in one dialect than the other, for instance, the use of "shall" over "will" is much more common in RP than General American. Speakers of RP tend to treat the verb "go" differently than speakers of General American. In RP, it is common to say, "They go and…" ("American and British English grammatical differences"). Yet in General American, indicating the where or what connected with the verb "go" is more commonplace. Something almost nonexistent in General American English is Received Pronunciation's use of the "do" verb. In RP they add done behind the main verb of the sentence, like in the sentence, "I have done" ("American and British English grammatical differences").



Reception and Future

Ella Luzzi

Language has always been a distinction of class, especially when it comes to English. Dating back to 1066, after the Norman Conquest, French was considered better and more distinguished than English and used by the ruling, higher class. Over the course of history, English made its way back into normal use, but even still, French words that most people don't even realize are French are still used today—and these words still connotatively sound fancier. Beverage instead of drink, petite instead of small, and much more. While this isn't directly related to Received Pronunciation, it shows how class structure and history affect one's perception of language.

Received Pronunciation, as stated before, used to be the accent of the well-educated upper class, and a lot of people tried to mimic it in order to come across as more affluent. It used to be called "Oxford English"

because all staff and students had to use it. It also used to be called "BBC English" because news reporters were forced to have the accent. This has changed. The BBC and Oxford University's staff and students come from all walks of life. Because all Brits are represented in media, academia, and more, people don't feel the need to change their accent to sound "better."

While RP still sounds very posh, the dialect now comes with condescension. Those who speak other British accents might judge someone with an RP dialect because they think it's pretentious and old-fashioned. Members of the ruling and privileged class had this accent, so RP "soon came to be associated with 'the Establishment'" (Robinson), which became bad during the lower-class uprising after World War II. And so the tables have turned: people are now trying to hide the fact that they have the RP dialect. "In fact, some people like to disguise an RP accent, so they'll start trying to speak a little bit like this, and start dropping their t's, and say 'lil' and 'innit' and stuff. ... It does have negative connotations, the RP accent, so some people try to change their voice to fit in" ("The RP English Accent …"). This is interesting because even now non-Brits think RP is the "typical British accent," and yet those who have the accent don't want it. To reiterate from the beginning, only 3-5% of the UK speaks RP. And, RP is in competition with General American in terms of what is taught to English as a second language learners.

Because of all this, it can definitely be argued that RP, as it is traditionally known, is shrinking in use. But, as culture and societal attitudes changed, so did RP. There is more than one RP accent. There are actually three different RP accents: Conservative RP, Mainstream RP, and Contemporary RP. "Conservative RP refers to a very traditional variety particularly associated with older speakers and the aristocracy. Mainstream RP describes an accent that we might consider extremely neutral in terms of signals regarding age, occupation or lifestyle of the speaker. Contemporary RP refers to speakers using features typical of younger RP speakers" (Robinson). But, Laura Barton from *The Guardian* thinks, "Perhaps these days we are seeing not so much a decline in RP as a growing accent fluidity. True social mobility should allow us to move in all directions; to know and welcome all people, to speak and listen to everyone."

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