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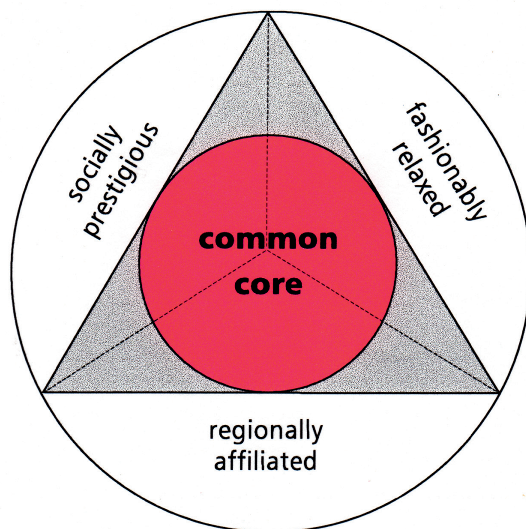

How Educated English Speak English

Pronunciation as Social Behaviour

Ingrid Wotschke

Frank & Timme

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To my Mother
in her great trust and help

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Foreword

The notion of a standard form of English, both spoken and written, has provoked debate for more than a hundred years – a debate which intensified as the twentieth century progressed. The perceived need for a standard form of the language is deeply rooted in the complex history of English which, rather than being a single homogeneous entity, has from the outset comprised several distinct, though closely related, dialects. Add to this a Celtic underlay, the highly influential contributions of Latin, Norse, and French in the Old English and Middle English periods, and its extraordinary receptiveness to borrowings from many other languages across the globe, and we begin to understand the complexity of its development. Today, English can lay claim to be a world language, aided in no small measure by the rapid advances of information technology.

The concept of a standard form of the language emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and, fueled in part by the advent of universal education in this country, with its demands for authoritative textbooks for use in teaching the language, it gradually asserted itself in the academic sphere. Being essentially prescriptive, especially within the education system, it exerted a powerful influence which for many years remained unquestioned. During the decades immediately following World War II, however, the superimposition of an authoritarian set of rules for "correct" speech and writing came under increasing scrutiny. In the emerging cultural and social upheaval, the shift from a prescriptive to a descriptive approach to language, as advocated by postwar linguists whose revolutionary zeal discarded long-established traditional grammar in favour of radical new descriptions of language, had a major impact on perceptions of speech and writing, and on attitudes towards language in general. At a time when established institutions were being challenged by a society which was seeking a more democratic and egalitarian future, concepts such as Standard English and Received Pronunciation became increasingly controversial. In response to these iconoclastic attitudes on the part of both society and of the advocates of the "new" linguistics, there was inevitably a loosening of the tenets and strictures which until

then had characterised the concept of standard forms of speech and writing in England.

It is perhaps unsurprising that dissatisfaction with these concepts centres on the meaning and perception of the terms "Standard English" and "Received Pronunciation", not least because of the inherent ambiguity and potential misinterpretation of their nomenclature. The word standard refers both to a recognised exemplar of correctness (authoritarian, prescriptive) to which one might aspire, but also to what is considered to be normal, usual, customary (egalitarian, descriptive). The sense in which the recondite and somewhat archaic word *received* is used in this case implies "generally adopted, accepted, approved as true or good" (OED), which leaves open the possibility that the speech referred to is both generally used and approved – a latent ambiguity matched by an apparent unwillingness to choose a more explicit word in its stead. Its use inevitably raises the question "Received by whom?"

Against this background, and in view of the rapid acceleration of cultural, social, and linguistic change in the later decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty first, it is surprising that no detailed full-length study of the subject has been published. While it is true that Standard English and Received Pronunciation have received considerable attention in recent years, these topics are generally discussed as part of wider accounts of various aspects of English. One reason for this apparent anomaly may well be the daunting prospect of investigating the totality of this complex and controversial subject. The study presented here is therefore both timely and welcome, notably because it fills a major gap in our knowledge of the ethos of Received Pronunciation and of the spoken language in England at this fascinating stage of its history. Ranging widely over the whole field, Dr. Wotschke provides a comprehensive overview of the subject. Undaunted by the challenges of untangling the intricate interrelationships of the forces currently at work in the spoken language in England, she draws together for the first time an impressive body of evidence on the changing fortunes of Received Pronunciation and its interaction, not only with regional dialects and other varieties of English, but also with social, attitudinal, and linguistic changes in the country at large and in the mass media.

The title of the book speaks for itself, specifying the central focus on the pronunciation of educated English in England, which in itself invites comparison with all other varieties of speech and their relationship with a per-

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ceived “standard” in whatever sense the latter is interpreted. The work opens with an in-depth discussion of the sociolinguistic relevance of accent in England. It moves on to consider reactions to the traditional language hierarchy, culminating in the author's innovative and carefully considered proposal for defining Educated English English (EEE). The new model centres on a common core of features interacting and overlapping with three principal variants: socially prestigious, fashionably relaxed, and regionally affiliated. The model is usefully summarised diagrammatically to indicate the interrelationship of its components. This leads on to a wide-ranging and highly informative exploration of broadcast English as a mirror and indicator of changing speech and attitudes. The outcomes of the investigation are succinctly summarised in a concluding section, which is followed by notes, a revealing appendix of printed source material, and a substantial bibliography.

By any standards (in both senses of the word!) this is a remarkable study. It traces the development of perceptions of and attitudes to Received Pronunciation in England from the inception of the term to the present day. It documents the cultural, social, and psychological changes which in turn have led to a significant re-evaluation of the concepts of Received Pronunciation and Standard English. Backed by a wealth of primary source material gathered in the process of the investigation by listening closely to a fascinating variety of spoken and broadcast usage, the study offers unique insights into the ways in which the original concept of Received Pronunciation is out of tune with today's more open and egalitarian culture. Above all, it is a balanced and dispassionate account, capitalising on the objectivity of an unbiased observer who has the advantage of an intimate knowledge of recent and current trends in the English language. The host of illustrative examples, accompanied by detailed phonetic transcription, add weight to the argument, and provide convincing evidence in support of the proposed model and of the extraordinary pace of change in English in recent decades.

In summary, Dr. Wotschke's groundbreaking study not only succeeds in charting the progress of the concept of Received Pronunciation and of the changing attitudes to it, but also provides a starting point for further investigation. Although the process of change is of course inevitably continuous, this work is an admirable encapsulation of “the story so far”. As for the future, the author rightly suggests that “the tensions between persisting ‘standard’ notions and liberal attitudes will keep English speakers in Britain

engaged for generations to come", and that "Whatever features will stand the trials of time, new patterns seem to be taking shape, some of which may well leave their traces on tomorrow's educated speech".

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Preface

There was no doubt in the mid-fifties: English was strikingly different from what it had been, and particularly so in its pronunciation. Trendy novelties were infiltrating even the prestigious language of the BBC World Service and, in due course, became successively included in the description and transcription of educated pronunciation, at that time still largely considered identical with RP (Received Pronunciation). On a wider sociolinguistic level, pronunciation habits and criteria of acceptability were changing so radically that, beyond traditional linguistic work, research began to be carried out into the social roles and perspectives of English speech accents as well as into the backgrounds of language variation, in a period when new tendencies were waiting to be interpreted and defined. As, towards the turn of the century, changes in the educated pronunciation of English English had proceeded so far that it could no longer be adequately described on the basis of the traditionally RP-oriented concept, an attempt became worthwhile to reassess its traditional relevance and redefine its current range and functions in the light of recent developments. It was then that an alternative conception of educated pronunciation was first considered and proposed at various academic events in England and abroad and closer investigations were taken up with the aim to illuminate the sociolinguistic backgrounds of the new variability in educated speech.

When, in the following study, educated speech in England is going to be investigated in its historical continuity and current relevance, the evaluation of pronunciation features will rely on early written sources, later linguistic descriptions and recent investigations and as well as on language samples taken from radio broadcasts, all of which are considered to reflect the respective language situation and therefore regarded as documentary in the historical sense. Thus, on the verge of a new century when, at the meeting point of the past and the future, in A. C. Gimson's words the speech of any community may be said "to reflect the pronunciation of the previous century and to anticipate that of the next" (1962: 69), the foundations are provided for an alternative concept allowing for comprehensive description and unbiased discussion of pronunciation features and tendencies in current educated pronunciation in England.

Ingrid Wotschke

Preface to the Second Edition

Just as its predecessor of 2008, this new edition of the book is on educated pronunciation in England as set against varying historical backgrounds, with its main focus on the decades around the turn of the millennium.

As language evidence from the relatively short period between the compilation of data and the present day cannot be supposed to yield sufficient information in order to allow for the further conclusions on educated pronunciation change, the body of speech data and its discussion have remained largely untouched. Consequently, revision here only means, beside correction of errata, the inclusion of a small number of additional items considered worth mentioning in the running text and their corresponding sources in the References.

Within coming decades, time will show wether or not, how far-reaching and in what way current educated pronunciation tendencies, such as those discussed in this book, will prove to be of lasting effect on the educated pronunciation of future generations in England.

Ingrid Wotschke

Acknowledgments

Looking back over the years to the time when the foundations were laid for the project, I am thinking with gratitude of the understanding support I received from the late A. C. Gimson (London) in the 1980s. I also feel grateful to Ch.-J. N. Bailey (Kea'au, Hawaii), Crawford Feagin (Arlington, Virginia), Gerhard Leitner (Berlin, Germany) and Anna-Brita Stenström (Kristianstad, Sweden) for their very helpful correspondence, while I am deeply indepted to J. D. A. Widdowson (Hope Valley, England) for his great encouragement and scholarly advice. Among those who kindly contributed to the provision of language samples I would particularly mention Mary Grover (Sheffield, England) and John Slattery (Lewes, England). Further, the wide range of materials provided by the BBC World Service and Radio Authority information departments as well as by BBC Radio Leeds, Capital Radio London and Sunrise Radio London were highly appreciated. Last but not least, thanks go out to Gebhard Engelmann (Magdeburg, Germany) and to Sylvia Macey (Elkton, Florida) for their expert assistance in the technical preparation of the manuscript. It is the helpful generosity of all those mentioned here that has made work possible on an issue as complex as this.

Introduction

Post-War tendencies in educated pronunciation in England have led to its widening articulatory range and social relevance, exceeding the borders of anything so far considered to comply with educated standards, let alone a generally accepted “standard” of pronunciation. As a considerable number of novelties may be related to English regional accents, an analysis of the socio-linguistic relevance of speech accents in Chapter One will serve as a basis for a closer investigation of pronunciation habits and criteria of acceptability in the new situation of cross-cultural influence on the educated language, as analysed by sociolinguists such as David Abercrombie, Howard Giles, Peter Trudgill and the Milroys. On grounds of the sociolinguistic situation in the late twentieth century, social, educational end ethnic issues will be taken up and regional accents investigated in their significance to the individual speaker and to the speech community as a whole. Regional speech will be conceived in its role as social marker and language judgements traced back to their socioeconomic roots and psychological implications. Reactions to traditionally prestigious RP (Received Pronunciation) are going to be discussed on the levels of the individual listener, of wider public opinion, and of contemporary linguistic criticism including recent assessments in the columns of leading dictionaries.

In order to assess the sociolinguistic relevance of traditionally prestigious pronunciation, historical investigations in Chapter Two will trace it back to its origin at the medieval Court, in the Capital of London and in aristocratic Southern England, in connection with the growth of an emerging standard language. The disputable conception of the prestige variant as a “standard” of pronunciation for England, Great Britain and the whole English-speaking world will be discussed on early written sources, on later scholarly descriptions including the works of Daniel Jones, and on more recent conceptions such as those by Charles Barber and Randolph Quirk. With regard to the general image of the prestige accent, the traditional relations between RP and the BBC will be investigated in the light of their mutual influence and recent criticism. Basing its arguments on linguistic research by A.C. Gimson, Susan Ramsaran, J.C. Wells and others, a discussion of twentieth-century changes in

the articulatory pattern and the social validity of RP will reflect the accent's changing role in a time when its relative uniformity was giving way to an unprecedented variability within the variant.

Relying on both traditionally and non-traditionally educated speech, Chapter Three will discuss characteristic post-War tendencies under the conditions of social mobility and resulting contacts between the classes. Important consequences of the post-War language situation will be encountered in various forms of upward convergence, in the emerging regional standards and in the new prestige of socioregional speech in the educated language. With regard to more recent decades, outward-looking tendencies among the young generation of regionally accented speakers are going to be discussed, in connection with Southern fashions culminating in the recent variant of Estuary English. The much-debated issue of a possible "standard" in pronunciation will be reviewed against the background of late twentieth century linguistic discussion and public opinion, and an alternative conception of current educated pronunciation standards is proposed with the term and model of *Educated English English*, allowing for the representation of the wide range of current educated pronunciations in England and thus offering an alternative to previous conceptions exclusively representing traditionally prestigious speech.

With its wide reach and traditionally high prestige, the language of radio has proved to be of particular interest with regard to its relevance to ongoing pronunciation change. When, in Chapter Four, novelties in broadcast speech are linked to matters of programme presentation in a period of profound reorganization of the broadcasting services, special weight will be placed on revolutionary changes in the presentation of news broadcasts, on the new significance of entertainment programmes with regard to young speech as well as on the sociolinguistic peculiarities and functions of local radio stations. Pronunciation features as exhibited by newsreaders and announcers, presenters and correspondents between the early seventies and the present day will be compared to the characteristic articulatory tendencies encountered in the wider educated language. Finally, the issue of a possible influence of the radio on current educated pronunciation is going to be reconsidered on the basis of recent opinions and arguments, in a period of dynamic change when traditional values are most seriously questioned and new ones are as readily taking their places in the minds of the public.

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Chapter One
The Relevance of Speech Accent in England

1.1 Regional accent as social marker

1.1.1 Traditional accents and dialects

It has long been an acknowledged fact that most English people are not speakers of what is commonly called Standard English but have various degrees of dialect forms in their speech, depending on their social background, education and profession. In the second half of the twentieth century, regional pronunciation was to be found in highly educated and less educated speech, and even the majority of those who by birth or education or both had had the chance to acquire a widely acceptable grammar and usage overwhelmingly had a local accent, except for the tiny tip of the traditionally educated who had acquired RP together with upper (middle)-class speech in their early lives (cf. Robinson 1973: 435). In spite of reduced dialectal differences through the standardizing influence of some schooling, the media, traffic and industrialization on nearly everybody since the 1950s, regional accent was considered to permeate a pronunciation cone or pyramid[1] from bottom to top. Gimson noticed "a great number of gradations" in popular London speech and in the varying mixtures of regional and RP as typical of suburban districts (cf. 1962: 84 f.), and, in Barber's description, nearly everybody from the millhand to the lawyer or company director spoke a local variant or "subvariant", corresponding to a certain degree with the local social structure (cf. 1964: 17). As anywhere else in the world, the social seclusion of the remaining rural areas and the traditional cohesion of some urban communities were securing a relatively strong survival of traditional forms in popular speech. When grammatical and lexical distinctions were increasingly lost under the influence of standardization, what seemed to remain of broadly regional speech were largely strong accents regarded as "dialects" by Halliday in 1968 (cf. p. 147f.; cf. Giles/Powesland 1975: 26), and later described by Kellett (2002: XVI) as "'regional speech', distinguished from Standard English mainly just by accent and intonation". In

spite of substantial loss of dialectal vocabulary, however, dialectal lexis and distinctive grammatical forms, along with a few aspects of syntax, still remained in the final quarter of the last century (special features cf. Widdowson, 1999: 16 f.). Modern times had changed but not exterminated regional speech, which was living on in various forms and degrees in the speech of the younger generations.

It was the kind and degree of dialect features that distinguished speakers of different social status and pretensions through what was considered but "a question of relatively more-or-less" along a regional and social dialect continuum, running from the North to the South of England, with regional and social aspects closely interwoven (cf. Giles/Powesland 1975: 21; Trudgill 1975: 22; Hughes/Trudgill 1979: 6). On grounds of geographical distance from the capital and of special historical developments and regional characteristics, the North was preserving a particularly large number of original dialect features and, consequently, continued to show the greatest deviation from *RP* in a number of vernacular forms, such as [hiem] or [(w)ʊm] for *home*, [hiç] for *high* and [kʉ:] for *cow*, or in conservative dialect words and expressions as *fleffs* for *fleas*, *loup* for *jump* or *switch t'leycht on* (cf. Wright 1978: 48; Köppl et al. 1983: 40, et al.), sounding "most outlandish in modern ears" (Ellis 1972: 878) with their historical Anglo-Saxon or Viking features. In the early 1990s, a Yorkshireman's *ax* instead of *ask* was still close to Anglo-Saxon *āxian*, the historical pronunciation was kept in [hu:s] for *house* and [lang] for *long*, and in *Ah'm starved ter deeath* the verb was used in its original sense of *suffer intensely*, in the sense of the Old English verb *steorvan* meaning *to die* and not necessarily connected with being hungry as in modern standard usage (cf. Kellett 1991: 5, 11 ff.). Once referring to the three parts of the territory around the Viking town of Yorvik (later York), the Scandinavian word *thridding*, meaning a *third*, continued to name the North, East and West Ridings up to the present day (cf. ibid. 2).

In the nineteenth century, popular forms of dialect literature had been initiated with the early urban broadsheets of the West Ridings, distributed in dialect and standard between 1800 and 1850, as well as with dialect pamphlets. Almanacs and paperback annuals had followed since the 1830s, accompanied by an uprising dialect literature as part of working-class culture in a language "so vivid and forthright, and to some ears so loud and strident, associated with the mills and mines of the industrial revolution" (ibid. 1991: 6, cf. 14 f.). In the rural North and East Ridings, where speech had remained "quieter and

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gentler, more associated with shepherds, farmers and village folk" (ibid. 6), a strong popular poetic tradition was surviving the times. When, in 1963, Bill Cowley's *Cleveland Anthology* with the subtitle of *Dialect Poems from Cleveland and the North Yorkshire Moors* presented recent dialect poetry and similar collections from the Ridings could follow, this proved the survival of traditional language and cultural values in the minds of the local people. While, however, the relatively flexible dialect of the industrialized West Ridings largely remained "the language of everyone" well into the 1960s on grounds of its adaptability to modern idiom and context, the traditional dialect of the rural North East had by the time become "a forgotten language" to the majority of inhabitants, as its more static and historical pattern "just [did]n't go" with industrialized agriculture (cf. Cowley 63: 10). In Cowley's words, "Near the hills the younger generation can still speak it, with a limited vocabulary. Ten miles away on the plains it is already one generation and on Tees-side two generations away" (ibid.). As pure dialect literature in its historical dimension had ceased to be fully intelligible to everyone, writers recently began to avoid overuse of archaic words in order to remain accessible to their audiences (cf. Widdowson 2005:14).

Although, in comparison to the North of England, articulatory differences between Southern dialects and standard forms were found to be relatively small on all levels, there were clearly noticeable vernacular characteristics, as H-dropping rendering *heat* and *eat* homophones, word-initial [d] for [ð] in *that*, surviving late medieval long [i:] for [aɪ] in *hide*, an open diphthong [ʌʊ] in *home*, and the glottallization of intervocal and final /t/ in *water* and *hot* (Barnickel 1982: 157; Wells pt. 1 1982: 252 ff.). In spite of their relative linguistic triviality, however, features like these were judged "socially very significant" by Trudgill in 1979 (p. 11 f.) and are still considered strong enough to cause problems of comprehension in the South West and perhaps other southern counties, such as Sussex, Kent, and East Anglia (inform. Widdowson 2003). Even in the capital of London, which had become a vast city sixty kilometres across by the twentieth century, the working-class accent of *popular London* had preserved a large number of South Eastern regional features. In Wells' description of 1982, these peculiarities included, among others, a wide range of diphthong shifts, as raised [æʊ] for RP [aʊ] in *mouth*, lowered and diphthongized [ɪ‿i] for RP [i:] in *fleece*, and [ʌɪ] for RP [eɪ] in *face* (p. 308). T-glottalling was also found to be "widespread in all kinds of popular London speech" (ibid. pt. 2: 327), although the use of glottal stop for other