

## CHANGES IN RECEIVED PRONUNCIATION: DIACHRONIC CASE STUDIES

**MARTIN HINTON**

University of Łódź

mdhinton@tlen.pl

### **Abstract**

This paper sets out to investigate changes and individual irregularities in the Received Pronunciation of a number of individuals over time and to compare them with the changes noted in contemporary RP in the literature. The aim of the study is to ascertain whether accent change affects individuals during their lifetimes or is only brought about by new generations of speakers accepting different pronunciations as the norm and effectively speaking with a different accent to older generations within their social circle. The variations/changes looked for were: CLOTH transfer, CURE lowering, GOAT allophony, R-sandhi, and T-voicing. The procedure of the study was to identify the presence or absence of these features in the speech of certain individuals in recordings made over a period of at least 35 years. The individuals studied were: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Baroness Thatcher, Sir David Attenborough and David Dimbleby. The results of these comparisons suggest that individual speakers are not greatly affected by changes in pronunciation taking place around them and generally stay with the preferred pronunciation of their youth. There are, however, cases where a general uncertainty amongst speakers of the accent, here found in CURE lowering, does influence the speech of individuals over time.

### **1. Introduction**

Like all other elements of language use, accents change over time. Words change their meanings; grammatical constructions go out of fashion; and the quality of certain sounds alters over time until they gradually come to be classed as different sounds altogether. The study of accent change, in comparison with lexical and grammatical change, is made difficult by a number of factors; the most obvious of which is the lack of any sound recordings before the 1860s. Another serious problem, however, is the nebulous nature of accents themselves: while it may be possible to trace the pattern of use of one particular pronunciation of a word, just as the use of a word in print can be followed, accents are made up of a range of features which are not necessarily shared by all speakers who would usually be categorised as having that particular accent.

In spite of these difficulties, a good deal of research has been done into accent change. Much of this work, however, (see Bowie & Yaeger-Dror, 2014) for a full discussion) has relied upon sampling individuals of different ages within the same community to note inter-generational alterations in pronunciation. This methodology assumes, necessarily, that accents do not much change in individuals over time, certainly

after reaching full adulthood; otherwise the older subjects would be just as likely to speak the newer version as the younger ones. It also assumes that the generations studied can be said to have, generally speaking, the same accent: that is to say, that the accent itself has changed and not been replaced with something entirely, or largely, different. This is a very difficult area: how much can an accent change before it becomes a new accent? Part of the motivation for this study is the idea that if accent change is both clear and strictly inter-generational, not affecting individuals during their lifetimes, then the very concept of an accent lasting over a significant period of time may be flawed and we may be forced to consider all accents as fleeting, as much tied to the period of their use as the area of their origin.

This study takes a different approach to the inter-generational methodology mentioned above, following Gillian Sankoff's work on 'life-span' changes (2005, 2007). By conducting four diachronic case studies, I aim to assess to what extent the changes in a particular accent noted by other researchers have affected the speech of certain individuals. To make this possible it was necessary to choose an accent which has already been extensively studied, and recorded, over a period of time, so the form of standard British English accent traditionally known as Received Pronunciation (RP) was an obvious choice. There are a number of difficulties and ambiguities with the terms 'standard' and 'RP', which are comprehensively discussed by Paul Kerswill (2006). However, a great many researchers, as illustrated below, have continued to use the traditional term (see Ježek, 2012) for an example of its recent employment), and, as this study is concerned with changes within individuals, the controversies over labelling need not detain us.

Since the aim of the study is to assess the changes taking place in the accents of individuals over long periods of time, it was necessary to find samples of recorded speech of a number of such individuals and analyse them for the presence or absence of particular features of pronunciation associated with their accent and compare the results at different times to monitor the process of change, if any were indeed taking place. The time frame required was far too long to consider recruiting and recording speakers specially for the purposes of this study. Having decided upon RP as the accent to study, two major decisions remained to be taken: which individuals to study and where to find the recordings.

It was obvious that the best place to look for sound recordings was on the internet, and the greatest store of such material is readily available from the YouTube website. Whilst the site contains a great many contemporary recordings of everyday people with a wide variety of English accents, the archive material needed for a diachronic study is largely from the broadcast media. The study was designed to reach up to the present day and needed participants with fully-formed adult voices, meaning that the earliest recordings needed would necessarily be from the 1950s or 60s. Fortunately, the form of pronunciation dominant in the British broadcast media at that time was RP.

The next stage was to select the individuals to be studied. As these were to be case studies, rather than a mass participation study, I was looking for a small number of individuals and settled on four as an appropriate sample. Again, the availability of materials and the required time frame restricted the choice considerably. The subjects would have to be people who had appeared consistently in the media over as long a period as possible, preferably 40 years or more. Actors had to be discounted as their

speech, when acting at least, could not be considered a genuine sample of their own accent, which left public figures and professional broadcasters. The choice from this point was relatively simple: the two greatest public figures in Britain of the last 60 years both feature prominently in the YouTube archive and both would generally be labelled as RP speakers, although more of that below. The first two subjects for the study were, therefore, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the late Baroness Thatcher. It is a fortunate circumstance that both were female, as the long-term professional broadcasters were almost exclusively male. In order to take advantage of as much recorded material as possible, I chose Sir David Attenborough, world-famous for his nature programmes and also a major figure in the development of television in Britain as controller of BBC 2, and, representing a slightly younger generation, political broadcaster and, more recently, documentary maker, David Dimbleby. These four candidates also represent the various ways in which RP has sometimes been referred to (British Library): the Queen's English, BBC English, Oxford English (Thatcher & Dimbleby) and the English of the Elite or Administration (Thatcher).

There are, it seems, two points of possible objection to the validity of these choices which need to be addressed. Firstly, the question might be asked 'on what basis are they categorised as RP speakers?' It is a difficulty of a study such as this that any criteria of pronunciation imposed on the candidates for case study will inevitably involve screening them for the very characteristics which the study proposes to analyse. One would also have to ask when the criteria would be applied: at the first sampling, the last or all the way through? If the last option were chosen, then the study would become self-defeating as cases would only be selected in which no change took place! This problem, however, can be resolved if we keep in mind the fact that all accent names are general labels and not precise descriptions of a particular individual. If the subjects for study demonstrate several of the key markers described in the literature in their earliest recordings, it is reasonable to treat them as speakers of RP. It is also worth considering the social and cultural aspect to the definition of RP: if the country's monarch, Prime Minister and most respected broadcasters don't speak the 'prestige' accent, then who does?

The second objection to these individuals might be based on the fact that they are public figures, often recorded giving formal speeches or in broadcasting situations where a particular type of speech is required and, thus, may not be employing their natural accent. To a degree this objection must be allowed and the difficulty accepted as inevitable: people did not record their private conversations in the 1960s in order to upload them to social media websites for the convenience of researchers 50 years later. However, there are reasons to think that this objection is not of particular importance. The first lies in the nature of the subjects themselves: while a novice broadcaster may feel obliged to put on an accent which he feels is required, both Attenborough and Dimbleby have thousands of hours of television work behind them (in Dimbleby's case most of it live) and are very much at ease in front of the camera. Some of the samples, described more fully below, are from relaxed interview situations, where the speakers appear to be behaving very naturally. It is also worth noting that while in the very early days of BBC broadcasting the corporation may have imposed strict standards on its presenters' pronunciation and diction, even in the 1960s such standards were more relaxed and recent decades have seen a complete reversal with 'old-fashioned' RP speakers becoming the exception rather than the norm.

As a politician, Baroness Thatcher is obviously more careful with her speech, even in interviews, and the samples of the Queen are taken from her annual set-piece Christmas Message where both style and content are carefully controlled. It is difficult to say how this may have affected the results, however. It might be thought that formal speaking would tend towards a more conservative pronunciation and, therefore, show greater resistance to change. The political reality of modern Britain, though, makes it very unlikely that either lady's advisers would suggest trying to sound 'posher', and rather more likely that pressure would have been applied to modernise their accents. This remains an unknown and unpredictable factor in the study.

Before describing the samples and their analysis in detail, it will be necessary to determine what possible changes in pronunciation should be sought. This necessitates reviews of recent research into accent change in general and Received Pronunciation, its varieties and the alterations which have been noted in its execution.

## 2. Accent change

Like other elements of language, accents are in a constant process of evolution. No two people speak exactly alike and individual speakers demonstrate a degree of variation in the precise sounds of certain words depending on a number of contextual and physical factors. It is no surprise, then, that alternative pronunciations may become more or less widespread over time and either die out or take over as the norm.

There is no space here for a detailed discussion of the processes by which accents change, but a few points of relevance to this study should be made. Trudgill discusses why it should be the case that even prestige accents are affected by contact with other varieties and suggests that 'the biggest explanatory factor involved here is surely demography' (Trudgill, 2008, p. 7), by which he means simple force of numbers. Speakers of minority accents will have many contacts with speakers of more common ones and possibly be affected. He also notes that for a prestige accent, where change is not internal, it can only come from below.

The question this study is concerned with, is to what degree are speakers affected by changes so that they would alter their own established pronunciation. Movement towards a prestige accent might be explained by social pressure (see Evans & Iverson, 2007 for a study of university students losing their regional accents) but change within speakers of the prestige accent would presumably reflect change in the accent itself. The majority of studies have compared the speech or attitudes of different age groups in order to assess the process of change. Wells surveyed around 2000 British native speakers of English and found, among other things, that while more than 70% of respondents born in the early 1930s preferred the pronunciation of *delirious* with an [ɪ] in the middle, a mere 20 % of those born since 1973 felt the same way, with [ɪə] having almost completely taken over. Similar patterns are repeated throughout (Wells, 1999) and the principle of inter-generational differences well established.

There is a troubling side to this view of accent change, however. If the suggestion is that accents mainly change because different generations accept different standards, we appear to be left with a situation where young and old speakers of the same families, circles or areas are not actually speaking the same accent at all. Any accent labelling,

then, would require a date of birth, if an accurate picture were to be achieved of the speaker in question. It is the aim of this study to investigate patterns of change within individuals to see to what extent accent change is a communal process where the group, young and old, move together in one direction.

### 3. Received Pronunciation

The origins of the Received Pronunciation accent are generally thought to be found in the 16th century speech of the educated class of London and the surrounding area (Nevalainen, 2003). Given that it was the speech pattern of prominent people in the dominant part of the country, it is no surprise that it soon became recognised as the most socially acceptable and indeed superior accent of the British Isles. A number of dictionaries and other guides produced during the 18th century which gave advice to the socially upward mobile, for example John Walker's 1791 work 'A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language', promoted the idea that this form of pronunciation was correct and that to be different was to be vulgar (MacMahon, 1998). The accent really spread its influence around the country, however, via the development of the public school system. Rather than being educational hot-houses, these institutions were focused on the production of 'gentlemen', and the accent of the gentleman was RP. Since the public schools were also the recruiting ground for Oxford and Cambridge universities, the Army officer class, the civil service and the Church, the establishment of RP as the accent of the elite was soon complete. Daniel Jones whose 'English Pronouncing Dictionary' of 1917 did much to codify the accent, originally referred to it as 'public school pronunciation' before changing the name to Received Pronunciation in a later edition. There is, however, one important point to be made here; although RP was earlier sometimes referred to as the speech of the court, the public schools were then, as they are today, with the exception of a few very exclusive places, the preserve of the middle classes. It is not correct, then, to label RP as 'aristocratic' speech, and it is perfectly reasonable to expect that those who live only amongst the titled may display an accent somewhat removed from the Received standard.

A number of other names have been suggested for the accent, but none has achieved universal acceptance amongst phoneticians. There may be a certain distaste for the idea that a particular accent is 'received', or accepted, and the suggestion it carries that other accents are therefore unacceptable, and yet it might be argued that that hint of snobbery actually fits the accent rather well. In order to separate the concepts of a generally accepted pronouncing standard and an elite accent with strong social connotations, researchers have created a wide range of RP sub-divisions. Among those are Gimson's (1980) distinction of conservative, general and advanced RPs. The conservative version is associated with older users, advanced with younger users and general is seen as the mainstream and exemplified by 'the pronunciation adopted by the BBC' (Gimson, 1980, p. 91). This division makes it clear that Gimson sees change as largely generational; it also relies on an idea of BBC English which is probably no longer valid as the corporation has abandoned any particular standard in its presenters.

Several others have identified varieties of RP on the basis of social rather than generational distinctions. Wells (1982) uses the terms 'Mainstream RP' and 'upper-crust'

or U-RP, which is considered rather old-fashioned and associated only with the highest levels of society. Honey (1985) makes the same point using the terms ‘marked’ and ‘unmarked’ RP, where the marked form carries the social implications and the unmarked form is more neutral. Similarly, Cruttenden (2001) distinguishes ‘refined’ RP from the ‘general’ variety, stating that it is ‘commonly considered to be upper-class’ (Cruttenden, 2001, p. 80). This plethora of terms seems to me evidence of a somewhat desperate attempt to hold together the concept of RP as the accent of both the highest social class and the spheres of education and administration. The often ridiculed pronunciation of the very posh should probably be categorised as a completely separate accent to that of the English middle-classes and, I would venture, has been considered such by mainstream RP speakers for a long while. 20 years ago students (mainly middle-class) at my university (St. Andrews) who wanted to join the highest echelons of society were given mock pronunciation advice in the student magazine: introduce yourself with the phrase “Air - hell’air!”, which translated as ‘oh, hello!’, and reflects the fact that the speech of that social group was not considered a close relation of the middle-class norm.

Another group of varieties relies upon regional and native/non-native distinctions. Wells (1982) discusses ‘near-RP’, which is not a unified type of pronunciation but any accent which is largely RP but betrays traces of regional, non-RP influence. This is referred to by Cruttenden (2001) as ‘regional RP’. What is not clear is how many regionalisms are necessary for an accent to be rejected from mainstream RP, or indeed, how many RP features are necessary for an accent not to be considered simply regional. These distinctions are of little practical use, then, and do little more than make the obvious point that individuals experience varied influences on their accents. Finally, Wells also identifies ‘adoptive RP’, the accent of adults who ‘did not speak RP as children’ (Wells, 1982, p. 283). Since this variety is not phonologically distinct, it is highly questionable whether it can actually be referred to as an accent and merely seems to acknowledge the fact that, unlike regional accents, RP is, or perhaps used to be, deliberately learnt.

What is certain is that RP has changed considerably since its initial codification. As Wells points out, ‘Jonesian RP is unquestionably obsolete: no-one pronounces quite like that nowadays’ (1997, p. 20). He goes on to list 16 identifiable changes which took place as the twentieth century progressed, and his viewpoint is, if anything, rather conservative.

### 3.1 Changes in RP

Wells is not the only researcher to have looked at changes in RP and, unsurprisingly, there is a good deal of disagreement on the subject. Upton (2008) produced a table contrasting modern RP sounds with traditional RP. He is happy to use the term RP to describe the more advanced version as that is what he believes is currently in use. Some of his claims are controversial: for instance, he includes [a] as an acceptable alternative to [ɑ:] in the BATH group. The question here is one of regionality: if the short vowel is not accepted then RP becomes a regional accent of the south, since all northern English speakers use it. However, from the southerner’s perspective, use of the short vowel in BATH is a purely northern habit and has no place in a non-regional accent. I rather

favour the second view, but then I grew up in Cambridgeshire. Upton also suggests that RP now has a cardinal [a] instead of the traditional ash [æ] in TRAP, and while the quality of that vowel is generally acknowledged to have changed, this looks like more influence of northern English. The question then being: how much regional variation can a non-regional accent sustain? While Clive Upton is keen to move with the times and fight the idea that RP is a southern accent which has colonised parts of the north, it is important to remember that the role of a standard is to resist change and if every innovation and variation is immediately accepted into the standard it will soon cease to play any role at all.

Changes which might be put down to issues of regionality are not considered further in this study. The choice of which changes to assess in the case studies was based in large part on the excellent example of Bente Rebecca Hannisdal (2006), whose study of 30 British newsreaders considered 6 variables which had been identified as changes in progress in RP standards. They were, CURE lowering, the use of [ɔ:] instead of [ʊə] in words like 'poor' and 'sure'; GOAT allophony, the rendering of [əʊ] as [və] before dark l, in words such as 'hole' and 'goal'; R-Sandhi, the employment of a linking /r/ which may or may not be present in the spelling, for instance 'law and order' which has traditionally been frowned upon and 'far away' which has been considered an acceptable part of RP (Cruttenden, 2001); T-Voicing, where intervocalic /t/ is realised by a voiced tap, in words such as 'British'; Yod-coalescence, where [tj] and [dj] become [tʃ] and [dʒ] in words such as 'tune' and 'endure'; and, finally, Smoothing, the traditional RP habit of converting sequences such as [aɪə] in 'fire' to [aə] or [a:]. In order to make possible a comparison between her study and this one, I employed the first four of these criteria in my own analysis, the last two not appearing regularly enough in the samples to be possible. I also decided out of curiosity to include one change, CLOTH transfer, where the traditional [ɔ:] in words like 'off' has now been replaced by [ɒ], which is normally considered to have been completed in RP: Wells lists it as an early twentieth century change (Wells, 1992).

In Hannisdal's study she found that CURE lowering displayed great variability and was very much dependent on the particular word: 'Europe' was pronounced 360 times and not lowered once, the same being true for 'during' and 'security'; whereas 'poor' was said 28 times, all of them to rhyme with 'for', as was the case with 'your' and 'you're'. The extent to which this variability is found in individuals, both at one time and over their lifetimes, is therefore, an interesting area of investigation. GOAT allophony was found in 28 of the 30 speakers, although with some variability. The linking /r/ was found to occur about half the time and was somewhat context dependent, while T-voicing was present in about a third of the items studied and especially common in frequently used words. Items were also evenly split for Yod-coalescence and Smoothing, suggesting rather a lot of variation is found and accepted within contemporary RP (Hannisdal, 2006). Interestingly, a sociolinguistic study by Foulkes (1997) found that intrusive R-Sandhi was more common amongst working class speakers in Newcastle, but linking-r more common amongst middle-class speakers from the same city. This suggests that linking-r is perceived as good practice by educated northerners even if it is not usually present in their local accent.

## **4. The case studies**

### **4.1 Samples**

In the course of compiling these results it was necessary to listen to a great many recordings as only in the case of HM Queen Elizabeth was it possible to obtain transcriptions of the material and to know where to find instances of certain words and sounds. Only those recordings which have actually been used in drawing up the results tables are listed in appendix 1.

As noted above, all of the samples of speech were taken from the YouTube internet site. Only clips with clearly identified and verifiable dates were used. In some instances, particularly in the case of David Attenborough, the recording and broadcasting dates may have been different, but only very slightly; in situations where archive footage was shown in a subsequent broadcast, the date of the original is, of course, taken into account.

Each subject was sampled in three time categories: the 1950s and 60s, the 1970s and 80s, and the 1990s to the present day. The recordings of David Dimbleby, being the youngest of the four, encompass the shortest time span, the first sample coming from 1969, and those of Her Majesty, the longest, reaching from 1953 to the present.

### **4.2 Analysis**

Each subject was assessed for all of the criteria described above, in each of the three time periods. The analysis was done by ear alone, and no technical instruments were employed. The decision to analyse the speech samples in this way was made due to this study's being based on an interest in perceptible differences in accent, following Hannisdal, rather than small changes in sound quality, the causes of which may be various. Obvious differences such as CLOTH transfer and CURE lowering would appear to be cases of influence of changing norms in the accent rather than strictly personal factors.

Samples were listened to for each subject in each time period until examples of each category for analysis were found and the sound used noted. With some speakers this meant that a great many examples of one type of word were heard before a suitable example of another was found, leading to certain cases of uncertainty and conflicting usage, which are discussed in the review of each subject given below.

### **4.3 Case study 1 - Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II**

With this subject, little may be required in terms of background information. Born in 1926 and raised in an extremely atypical environment presumably surrounded by aristocratic voices, Her Majesty would be expected to exemplify very high end conservative or upper crust RP. Despite travelling all over the world and meeting people from all walks of life, the majority of her time has always been spent in the London area



and any regional influence would therefore be expected to come from the accents of southern England.

The Queen was the only one of the cases to have been the subject of previously published studies on changing accent features. A group of Australian researchers have published several papers (Harrington, 2006, 2007; Harrington, Palethorpe & Watson, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c) in which they focus on aspects of vowel quality over time, also using the annual Christmas Message to the Commonwealth as their source material. The results of their work caused some excitement in the British press with headlines such as ‘Cor Blimey! Even the Queen no longer speaks the Queen’s English’ (Connor, 2000). This is something of an over-statement since the conclusion in the original text is: ‘We conclude that the Queen no longer speaks the Queen’s English of the 1950s, although the vowels of the 1980s Christmas message are still clearly set apart from those of an SSB [Standard Southern British] accent’ (Harrington, Palethorpe & Watson, 2000b, p. 927).

What the studies actually show is a series of small shifts in the formant frequency of the Queen’s vowel realisations and that these shifts are made in the direction of the SSB accent, the standards of which were taken from a corpus of 1980s BBC newsreaders. It is worth noting that the majority of this change took place between the early recordings of the 1950s and those of the late 60s/early 70s with little further alteration in the 1980s. This leads the authors to speculate that the process may not be an ongoing one: ‘the Queen’s vowel positions may well have stabilised by the 1980s’ (Harrington, Palethorpe & Watson, 2000b, p. 74). It also raises the possibility that the shift may have been intentional as the social changes of the 60s led to a deliberate narrowing of the distance between the monarch and her subjects. This is an obvious disadvantage of studies involving just one subject, as any number of personal circumstances may affect an individual’s pronunciation without being evidence of a general trend.

Harrington’s more recent work focussed on the quality of schwa and the happyY vowel. He concludes that the Queen’s schwa has changed over time, but notes that ‘it is not possible to explain with any degree of certainty the pattern of formant changes in schwas between the 1950s and 1990s in the Christmas broadcasts’ (Harrington, 2006, p. 446) and that while there is a small move in the final [ɪ:] in the direction of [i:] it is only marginal and not as significant as the shifts he reported in his earlier work.

There are reasons to question the approach of Harrington and his collaborators. Firstly, they claim to be using the Queen’s speech as evidence of changes in RP, and state that she is moving towards an SSB model. And yet, SSB is regarded by many researchers as just another, updated, name for RP. Evans and Iverson refer to it as ‘the prestige accent of English’ (2007, p. 3814) and according to the handbook of the International Phonetic Association ‘Standard Southern British [...] is the modern equivalent of what has been called “Received Pronunciation”’ (International Phonetic Association, 1999, p. 4), which makes it clear that Her Majesty is moving closer to the norm rather than redefining it. Indeed, the Queen would be a strange choice as an exemplar of typical RP pronunciation. Also, the changes they note are in a range not normally perceptible making their relevance to the accent changes discussed above and possible influence on them questionable.

These studies would, however, suggest that some changes may be expected in the Queen’s pronunciation of vowel sounds over time. A recent study by Piotrowski (2011) which looked at consonant realisation, on the other hand, concluded that ‘there has been

no real and serious change in the accent of Queen Elizabeth II' (Piotrowski, 2011, p. 33). The current study looks at both aspects and attempts to identify changes clear to the unaided ear rather than small changes in measured sound quality.

The results of the analysis for HM the Queen are detailed in the table below.

	CLOTH transfer	GOAT allophony	CURE lowering	R-Sandhi	T-Voicing
Sample 1	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Sample 2	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Sample 3	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

**Table 1.** HM Queen Elizabeth II – Results.

The table clearly shows that little has changed in the Queen's pronunciation over the period studied. She has been unaffected by the expected modern trends in T-voicing and GOAT allophony and remains staunchly traditional in the largely obsolete use of [ɔ:] rather than [ɒ] in words such as 'off'. Interestingly, however, there is one clear instance of [ɒ] in the word 'often' in the broadcast from 1987. This is a common word, featuring frequently in the speeches and is rendered in this way only once that I could discover. This represents a fine example of the dangers of small sampling in studies of this nature and also illustrates clearly that even quite large variations in individual speech patterns may occasionally be present.

Another interesting feature is the apparent completion from youth of the process of CURE lowering. In the first broadcast analysed the subject clearly says the word 'sure' to rhyme with 'for' and this practice continues throughout, the only exception being 'Europe' where the first vowel is clearly the diphthong [ʊə] as might generally be expected from Hannisdal's results discussed earlier.

Purists of RP pronunciation might also be surprised by the frequent appearance of R-Sandhi. This appears to be confined to cases where the r is indicated by the spelling (far as, far across, far East) although opportunities for the intrusive /r/ were few in the sample recordings. Again, this is in line with previous research suggesting that linking-r is a standard RP feature.

Certain aspects of her pronunciation, then, show that HM Queen Elizabeth is an atypical RP speaker, retaining features of traditional RP but being more advanced in other areas. Given the unusual circumstances of her life and upbringing it is perhaps not surprising that she does not fit easily into any major group but it does mean that using changes in her pronunciation as illustrative of broader changes across the RP speaking community is questionable at best.

#### 4.4 Case study 2 - Baroness Thatcher

Margaret Thatcher, first woman to become Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, was born in 1925 in Grantham. Both her parents were also from the East Midlands of England and her father, famously, owned grocer's shops. It is unclear whether she would have spoken RP at home, but upon winning a scholarship to grammar school, she would

certainly have been taught ‘correct’ pronunciation as it was conceived at the time. She later studied at Oxford University before becoming a barrister and then a politician.

The first sample used in the study comes from a somewhat staged, and rather patronising interview in the wake of well-received maiden speech in the House of Commons in 1960. The final sample comes from an interview in 1995, five years after leaving office but before the first of the series of strokes which may have affected her speech. The results of the analysis of Baroness Thatcher were as follows:

	CLOTH transfer	GOAT allophony	CURE lowering	R-Sandhi	T-Voicing
Sample 1	Yes	No	No	No	No
Sample 2	Yes	No	No	No	No
Sample 3	Yes	No	Yes	No	No

**Table 2.** Baroness Thatcher – Results.

What is most noticeable about Margaret Thatcher’s speech is the extreme care and precision evident in both what she says and how she says it. It is no surprise, therefore, that she does not allow herself to use either T-Voicing or R-Sandhi. There is, however, evidence of CURE lowering: in her conference speech of 1990 the word ‘ensure’, and in the final 1995 sample, the word ‘poor’, are pronounced to rhyme with ‘for’ although the word ‘poor’ was pronounced differently, with the diphthong, in a broadcast from 1987 and in earlier recordings.

#### 4.5 Case study 3 - Sir David Attenborough

Born in London in 1926, Attenborough was the son of an academic and attended grammar school in Leicester, before studying at Cambridge university. A pioneer of wildlife filming, he remains probably the best known figure in nature programming around the world. In addition to making programmes, he also served as controller of BBC2 where he was responsible for a number of innovations involving the introduction of colour pictures and live sport to television. His long career in broadcasting means a great deal of material is available for sampling his accent. His results are recorded below.

	CLOTH transfer	GOAT allophony	CURE lowering	R-Sandhi	T-Voicing
Sample 1	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Sample 2	Yes	Weak	Mixed	Yes	No
Sample 3	Yes	Weak	Yes	Yes	No

**Table 3.** Sir David Attenborough – Results.

Sir David’s pronunciation clearly undergoes two changes. While he begins with the more modern CLOTH transfer position and remains unaffected by T-Voicing, there are

obvious signs of a shift taking place in the vowel sounds. In the early recordings, words such as ‘whole’ (1955) are produced with a strong [əʊ] sound, but, while this is never entirely lost, there is an audible drift towards [ʊ] in later broadcasts. A similar process can be seen with the CURE vowel. In the narration for the anthropological series ‘The Tribal Eye’ broadcast in 1976, there appears to be a battle going on, with individual words normally considered part of the same group rendered differently. Thus, ‘ensure’ and ‘endure’ do not rhyme, the former being realised with [ɜ:] and the latter with [ʊə]. This conflict leads also to odd pronunciations of ‘poor’ where the word appears to have two syllables with a [w] in the middle of the word in later samples.

#### 4.6 Case study 4 - David Dimbleby

The youngest of the four subjects, Dimbleby was born in 1938 in Surrey. His father was a famous reporter and broadcaster and he attended the Charterhouse public school and Christ Church, Oxford. His professional career has been spent entirely broadcasting for the BBC.

	CLOTH transfer	GOAT allophony	CURE lowering	R-Sandhi	T-Voicing
Sample 1	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Sample 2	Yes	No	Mixed	No	No
Sample 3	Yes	No	Yes	Mixed	No

**Table 4.** David Dimbleby – Results.

As with the previous two cases, CLOTH transfer is complete and there is no movement towards T-Voicing. Also, the [əʊ] in words such as ‘role’ (1969) and ‘rolling’ (2010) is retained throughout. As far as R-Sandhi is concerned it seems reasonable to conclude that it has always been present in some cases, though may not have occurred in the second set of samples. As a professional broadcaster, Dimbleby may well have been trying to avoid it, with mixed success. In the final sample from 2010 we find ‘our own’ pronounced with a clear [r] in the middle, but ‘for ever’ pronounced without.

The situation with CURE lowering is similar to that of Attenborough with different words featuring differing pronunciations. Thus, in 1970 we can hear ‘sure’ pronounced as a homophone of ‘shore’ but ‘assured’ features the diphthong [ʊə].

## 5. Conclusions

The conclusions that might be reached from these case studies are of two types. Firstly, despite the very small group of subjects, certain points may be made about the current state of Received Pronunciation. The process of CLOTH transfer is generally complete and has been for some time. Use of the older form with [ɜ:] can be regarded as archaic and idiosyncratic. GOAT allophony does not appear to have affected the older generation of RP speakers, although its prevalence among the young is undeniable.

CURE lowering is perhaps the most interesting case as there is a good deal of variation both between speakers and between vocabulary items for the same speaker. The Queen's consistent use of [ɔ:] makes it difficult to label that version more progressive than the traditional [ʊə] given other more conservative features of her speech. It appears that a separation of the CURE group is in progress with the vowels in 'Europe' and 'poor' now kept distinct by most speakers. This group of subjects showed no signs of moving away from a clear unvoiced /t/ and were split over the use of R-Sandhi, although this feature was the one most likely to be affected by a conscious effort and was only absent in the speech of the most careful enunciator, Baroness Thatcher.

The focus of this study, however, was not the state of modern RP but the degree to which accent change is present in the speech of individuals over time. The results here show relatively little change and a good deal of resistance to alterations to which the subjects must have been repeatedly exposed. Apart from a certain drift in David Attenborough's GOAT vowel, and David Dimbleby's mixed success in his efforts to avoid linking-r, the only category which experienced change was CURE lowering. Some alteration here was noted in three out of the four cases: the only exception being the one in which the CURE diphthong was never present. As Hannisdal's (2006) study showed, there is a good deal of confusion among RP speakers as to how this group should be pronounced and, indeed, whether the CURE group can actually be said to exist at all. It is interesting, then, that this uncertainty and variation appears to have affected individuals more than other features where the change may be more clear cut.

This study can, therefore, claim to have shown that variation in an individual's accent over time can be observed and that not all accent change is inter-generational. It appears that this is likely to happen when the standard is in a state of flux rather than where two clearly defined variations exist and the speaker would have to jump from one to the other, as in CLOTH transfer, for instance. That said, however, it does appear that individuals are likely to retain most features of the accent they have upon reaching maturity and are relatively unaffected by changing trends around them. The relationship between these two processes, inter-generational and diachronic individual change, and types of change which are favoured by one or the other process is a promising field for further study in the future.

## References

- Bowie, D., & Yaeger-Dror, M. (2014). Phonological change in real time. In P. Honeybone & J. Salmons (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Phonology* (chapter 34). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- British Library. Received Pronunciation. <http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/case-studies/received-pronunciation/>
- Connor, S. (2000). Cor blimey! Even the Queen no longer speaks the Queen's English. *The Independent*, 21st December, 2000.
- Cruttenden, A. (2001). *Gimson's Pronunciation of English* (6th ed.). London: Arnold.
- Evans, B. G., & Iverson, P. (2007). Plasticity in vowel perception and production: A study of accent change in young adults. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 121(6), 3814-3826.
- Foulkes, P. (1997). English [r]-sandhi - a sociolinguistic perspective. *Histoire Épistémologie Langage*. Tome 19, fascicule 1, 1997. Construction des théories du son [Première partie], 73-96.
- Gimson, A. C. (1980). *An introduction to the pronunciation of English* (3rd ed.). London: Edward Arnold.
- Hannisdal, B. R. (2006). *Variability and change in Received Pronunciation*. Bergen: University of Bergen.
- Harrington, J. (2006). An acoustic analysis of 'happy-tensing' in the Queen's Christmas broadcasts. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*, 34, 439-457.
- Harrington, J. (2007). Evidence for a relationship between synchronic variability and diachronic change in the Queen's annual Christmas broadcasts. In J. Cole & J. Hualde (Eds.), *Laboratory Phonology 9* (pp 125-143). Mouton de Gruyter:Berlin.
- Harrington, J., Palethorpe, S., & Watson, C. (2000a). Vowel change in received Pronunciation: Evidence from the Queen's English. *8th Aust.Int.Conf.Speech Sci. & Tech*, 130-135.
- Harrington, J., Palethorpe, S., & Watson, C. (2000b). Does the Queen speak the Queen's English? *Nature Vol. 408*, 927.
- Harrington, J., Palethorpe, S., & Watson, C. (2000c). Monophthongal vowel changes in received Pronunciation: an acoustic analysis of the Queen's Christmas broadcasts. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*. 30(1/2), 63-78.
- Honey, J. (1985). Acrolect and hyperlect: the redefinition of English RP. *English Studies* 66(3), 241-257.
- International Phonetic Association. (1999). *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ježek, M. (2012). The double-edged sword of RP: the contrasting roles of a pronunciation model in both native and non-native environments. *Research in Language*, vol. 10.2, 133-142. DOI: 10.2478/v10015-011-0037-6
- Jones, D. (1917). *An English pronouncing dictionary*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons.
- Kerswill, P. (2006). RP, Standard English and the standard/non-standard relationship. In D. Britain (Ed.), *Language in the British Isles* (2nd ed.), (pp 1-18). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- MacMahon, M. K. C. (1998). Phonology. In S. Romaine (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of the English Language. Vol. 4: 1776-1997* (pp 373-535). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nevalainen, T. (2003). English. In A. Deumert & W. Vandenbussche (Eds.), *Germanic standardizations: past to present* (127-156). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Piotrowski, M. (2011). Queen's English - Is Queen Elizabeth II becoming non-standard? *Gavagai Journal* 1, 28-38.
- Sankoff, G. (2005). Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Studies in Sociolinguistics. In U. Ammon, N. Dittmar, K. J. Mattheier, & P. Trudgill (Eds.), *An International Handbook of the Science of Language and Society, vol. 2* (pp. 1003-13), Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Sankoff, G., & Blondeau, H. (2007). Language Change Across the Lifespan: /r/ in Montreal French. *Language* 83, 560-88.
- Trudgill, P. (2008). The historical sociolinguistics of elite accent change: On why RP is not disappearing. *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 44, 3-12.
- Upton C. (2008). Received Pronunciation. In C. Upton & B. Kortmann (Eds.), *Varieties of English: The British Isles* (pp 237-52). New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Wells, J. C. (1982). *Accents of English* (3 vols.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wells, J. C. (1997). Whatever happened to Received Pronunciation? In C. C. Medina & P. Soto (Eds.), *Il Jornadas de Estudios Ingleses* (pp. 19-28). Universidad de Jaén, Spain.
- Wells, J. C. (1999). Which pronunciation do you prefer? *IATEFL Issues* 149, 10-11.

## Appendix

All of the recordings below were taken from the site [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

### HM Queen Elizabeth II

The samples for Queen Elizabeth were taken from her Christmas Messages to the Commonwealth in the years:

Sample period 1: 1953, 1957, 1963

Sample period 2: 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988

Sample period 3: 1991, 1994, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011

### Baroness Margaret Thatcher

Sample period 1: 1960 - Interview after her maiden speech in House of Commons.

([www.youtube.com/watch?v=yc3hm7dhEQo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yc3hm7dhEQo))

1961 - Interview after appointment as Joint Secretary to the Ministry of Pensions. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-HutCHfrfo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-HutCHfrfo))

Sample period 2: 1972 - Interview Thames Television. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhLRtUUdDsY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhLRtUUdDsY))

1987 - BBC Election Special Interview. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDzvm092eAA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDzvm092eAA))

Sample period 3: 1990 - Conservative Party Conference Speech.

([www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnLUN7eDJ6g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnLUN7eDJ6g))

1993 - Breakfast with Frost Interview. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYDr2ahg4eE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYDr2ahg4eE))

1995 - Interview for Swedish television. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgBPYbvoKqA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgBPYbvoKqA))

### Sir David Attenborough

Sample period 1: 1955 - Narration, 'Zoo quest', BBC Television.

([www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFiHzw-lui8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFiHzw-lui8))

1960 - Narration, 'Land of the Gurkhas' BBC Television.

([www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTMcmjy8JY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTMcmjy8JY))

Sample period 2: 1976 - Narration, 'The Tribal Eye' episode 1, BBC Television.

([www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPfFBA0yuoo&list=PLMKTDbfTIjUG3loOqwzZimqjn-gWSgLDZ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPfFBA0yuoo&list=PLMKTDbfTIjUG3loOqwzZimqjn-gWSgLDZ))

Sample period 3: 1998 - Desert Island Discs, BBC Radio interview.

([www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVV1fgK4bUc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVV1fgK4bUc))



2002 - Life on Air, BBC Documentary. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFiHzw-Iui8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFiHzw-Iui8))

2011 - Interview, University of Surrey. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=xta4O5Itn5U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xta4O5Itn5U))

### **David Dimbleby**

Sample period 1: 1969 - Interview with Rupert Murdoch. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=4M44Bixi9KM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4M44Bixi9KM))

Sample period 2: 1970 - Interview with Harold Wilson. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwAhWeb3-RY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwAhWeb3-RY))

1974 - Election broadcast. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=kI9jwtfOU54](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kI9jwtfOU54))

1988 - Interview with John Major. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aJGz0r9-pY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aJGz0r9-pY))

Sample period 3: 2008 - Interview with Gore Vidal. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=tD0p-wfCARK](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tD0p-wfCARK))

2010 - Narration, 'The Romantic North'.

Pt 1 ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gPW-1U33X8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gPW-1U33X8))

Pt 2 ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJOl5O9KHqA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJOl5O9KHqA))