

PRONUNCIATION NORMS IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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Annotation: The problem of pronunciation standards of a given language is certainly a most interesting and important one, and it is surely the first that a person wishing to acquire an acceptable pronunciation of a foreign language has to solve. Exposure to a number of varieties of the foreign language may play an important and useful part in the study, and the question arises as to which of the various forms of pronunciation to choose. As regards the English language, this question is even more serious, for it is a fact that nowadays over 400 million people speak English as their first language. Along with them, millions of others learn and speak English as a second or a foreign language all over the world.

Keywords: pronunciation, pronunciation standards, language varieties, Received Pronunciation, General American Pronunciation.

INTRODUCTION

When they come to the British Isles for the first time, foreign learners of English are usually hit by surprise and dismay as they discover how little they understand of the English they hear. Except for the fact that people seem to be speaking much faster than expected, the English spoken by great majority of people seems to be different in many ways from what they have been taught. While differences in pronunciation are quite striking they are not the only ones since learners may also notice differences of grammar and vocabulary¹.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

What is *dialect*

Many people in the world take pride in where they come from and it is safe to say that the English is not different. Regardless of what we happen to come across in our later life and how much we travel and change our residence, the place where we grew up and spent our childhood and adolescence bears a special significance. Nowadays, people travel much more than they used to and quite often they change several residences in their lifetime. Therefore, some of them have a “nomadic” childhood and have not got any desires whatever with any of the places they lived in. On the other hand, for a majority of English people pride and interest in the area where they grew up is still a reality².

Where they come from is thus an important part of their personal identity, and for many of them an important component of their local identity is the way they speak

their accent and dialect. The vast majority of people in England speak in a manner that indicates that they come from a particular place. They speak like the ones they grew up with and for that matter they differ from those who grew up somewhere else. The way people speak, of course, may change over time as they shift their residence. Nevertheless, some trace of the way people spoke in the place where they grew up will remain in their utterance all their life. And depending on what they sound like when they speak, or where they come from, people in England may be labeled as “Cockney”, “Scouse”, “Geordie”, “Jock”, etc.

Still, *accent* is not the same as *dialect*. When we talk about dialect we are usually referring to something more than accent. We are referring not only to pronunciation but also to the vocabulary and grammar people use. For instance, one can say *I haven't got any* and somebody else can say *I have got none*. They differ in the grammar they use and therefore they speak two distinct dialects. Of course, dialect and accent normally match. So, if one speaks, for example, Yorkshire dialect, he should normally do it with the Yorkshire accent. Hence, the term *accent* refers to varieties of pronunciation, whilst the term *dialect* refers to varieties distinguished from each other not only by differences in pronunciation but also by differences in grammar and vocabulary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

¹ Abercrombie, D. (2015). *Studies in Phonetics and Linguistics*, Library Edition. London: Oxford University Press.

² Bronstein, A. I. (2010). *The Pronunciation of American English, An Introduction to Phonetics*. New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, Inc.

Origins of dialectal differences

One very interesting question that linguists and dialectologists sometimes find difficult to answer is where all these dialects come from? Why do people from different parts of the country speak differently, or why they do not speak the same? As has just been said, the answer is not easy to give as many factors contribute to development of the differences between the ways people speak in various parts of the country. Yet, one of the answers could be that English, like every other language, is constantly changing and that different changes in language take place in different parts of the country. A language change that occurred in one region may spread out to neighbouring areas. Some of the changes may even spread so much as to cover entire country. More often though, the changes will only spread so far as to lead to dialect difference between the areas which have the new form and those that do not.

Natural barriers may also bring the spread of a language change to a halt. One of the most important dialect boundaries in England runs through the Fens, which until recently was an isolated, swampy area which is difficult to get across. Therefore, it is not by pure chance that people in Norfolk pronounce *laugh* as /la:f/ while people in Lincolnshire pronounce it as /laef/. Norfolk pronunciation is just an example of a language change which could not make it across the Fens into Lincolnshire as very few people made it across due to the obstructing terrain.

Regional and social variation

The most prestigious dialect of the English language is Standard English, and the most prestigious accent is the so-called R.P. However, only a very small percentage of the population in England speak the R.P. The others have some form of regional accent.

Regional accents are sometimes spoken of as, for instance, northern or southern English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh. But this is not meant to say that there is one Irish or one north-of-England accent. It only means that English speakers in one particular area have enough pronunciation features in common with one another, which are not shared with speakers of other areas. Thus, the term "northern accent" is not more than a convenient label for a group of more local accents.

Standard English and R.P.

If we want to describe regional varieties of a language or differences among its dialects, we certainly need some reference point or a benchmark by which we will measure those differences. Describing regional varieties of English, as the reference point we will take the so-called Standard English. Grammatical, lexical and other properties of Standard English are well known and documented. Nevertheless, it is necessary to explain what Standard English *is* and what it *is not* in order to avoid any confusion and to say a couple words about its significance³.

CONCLUSION

Although there is no Standard Pronunciation of the American English, those trying to acquire this model of the language are advised to take the General American Pronunciation (G.A.). This is the speech of the educated people from the Mid-West of the United States of America which is one of the largest dialect areas. Therefore speaking the G.A. in Educated Colloquial Pronunciation could be more useful than to pronounce American English in some other manner.

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