
PRESENT CHANGES IN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

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This paper results from a comparison between my speech and that of five 17-year-old schoolboys now at Eton College, and born between 1949 and 1951. We all live in west London and have very similar origins, and I was myself at the same school. We are thus environmentally similar, and our differences of speech are due only to the twenty-odd years difference in age.

The material is a recording of 170 sentences, containing 470 different words, read by them and by me. The reliability of the findings is limited: ((Firstly, inasmuch as they are derived from subjective impressions; the statistics are merely counts of the written symbols in the transcript, and terms such as lip rounding must be understood as relating, not to the original sounds, but to my attempts to imitate the recorded sounds. Secondly, inasmuch as they are true only for a particular social context, where a single informant was closeted with a machine and an investigator and knew neither very well. The reservation of social context is of course implied in every linguistic description. In free discourse both I and the informants show far wider departures from the kind of English described by Pr Jones. For instance: from each of the five informants; *Sunningdale -deo*; *railway* ¹reowe; *can't one* ¹kãʔwan; *kick the bucket* ¹kɪʔ ðə ¹bakɪʔ; *about* ¹bɔt *twenty-four* ¹twɛɪʔfo; or from myself, *twenty-three* ¹twen¹θri, *isn't it* ¹ɪnɪʔ, *what will that be* ¹wɔt ¹lɛʔbi.))

I was concerned only with the differences between me and them. In each difference noted I therefore consider only the word in which it occurred once or more on the tape. I state the percentage frequency of occurrence of one term of the difference as against the other, in my speech and in theirs. For instance, in the case of the velarised [ʔ], which occurs in 92 words, the difference is as between a lateral and a non-lateral or sulcal; that is, with the tongue touching or not touching the palate. The 92 words gave to me 92 occurrences of velarised [ʔ], of which 98 % were lateral; and to them, 92 multiplied of course by 5, that is, 460 occurrences, of which 46 % were lateral.

In the findings themselves, we note an increased occurrence of glottalised consonants and [ʔ].

In the case of [p], mine was glottalised in 36 % of cases, theirs in 54 %.

In the case of [t], and [ʔ] replacing [t]: for me 55 %, for them 70 %.

In the case of [k], and the [ʔ] here and there replacing [k]: for me 44 %, for them 61 %.

There was also glottalisation of [tʃ] after a stressed vowel. Of these cases, I had glottalisation in 67 %, and they had it in 89 %.

[ʔ] also occurred in other situations; for instance, instead of linking [r], as in *joʔlæp:lɪke:n*; or between vowels, as in *ði ʔaɪlənd*; or to replace an initial [ə], as, *ʔfeɪməs lænma:k*; or between a nasal and a voiceless fricative, as, *ɪkʰs pænʔn* or *leɪʔθ*. In such cases, I had it in 11 % of all the words concerned, but they had it in 33 %.

To test for assimilation of [d] or [n] to the corresponding velar or labial, I included some words, like *brown-coal*, *skinfint* or *threadbare*, which would probably show assimilation in substandard speech. But there were few examples of [d] assimilated except after [l], as, *lɔːlbmæn* or *lɪ:lɪkra:ft*. Except in very common words all the bilabial assimilations of [db], such as *lɔːrebbeə* for *lθredbeə*, were the work of a single informant.

[n] was assimilated more often, in about 30 of the sentences. But there were also about 15 candidates, such as *mainmast* or *organ-pipes*, which evoked no assimilation. Most of the [n] assimilations, like *lɪfɪlɪ:ɪ:ɪ:ɪ:gɪnɪz*, were velar. The figures for [n] assimilated were 18 % for me, 47 % for them.

Among the fricatives we note the assimilation of [v] to [β], as, *the rights of man-tsaβlɪm*. This occurs very predictably with the informants. The figures for [v] assimilated to [β], [b], [f], [z], and so on, were 24 % for me and 56 % for them.

There is regressive assimilation of the voiced dental fricative [ð] after [n], [l], [z] and so on in phrases like *lɪnɪəbɒks*, *lɪlləgæp*, *lɪvʔszəlɪtarm*. The percentages for this assimilation were 17 % for me, 42 % for them.

As for the flap [ɾ]: after [θ] as in *θɪəu*, 100 % for me, 67 % for them; between vowels, as in *veɪu*, 48 % for me, 5 % for them.

The recording of me had no instances of [r]'s with lip-rounding, retroflexion, or what I shall call the lingua-faucal quality which distinguishes the so-called bunched [r]. The percentage of these sounds is accordingly 0 % for me, but 23 % for the informants.

We also note the change of velarised [l] from a lateral to a non-lateral sound. My velarised [l]'s were 98 % lateral, but theirs, only 46 %. The remainder of theirs were roughly in the proportions sulcal 7, vocalic [u] etc 2, entirely absent 1, depending partly on context.

The number of long consonants has also grown.

The post-war generation show a marked lowering of [æ] towards [a], particularly the girls. In this survey there was appreciable lowering in 6 % of my words, against 41 % of the informants'. Before velarised [l], three of the five made either no distinction, or sometimes a distinction of length only, between [æ] and [ʌ] unstressed, having exactly the same vowel in *Algeria* and *ulterior*.

[u:] may be fronted to [ʉ:], or diphthonged to [ʉu], or to a diphthong whose first element is unrounded, [ʉu]. If we group on the one hand all those occurrences which

contain either fronted or unrounded sounds, and on the other, those which are not thus altered, then the altered ones are 41 % of mine but 71 % of theirs.

[ei] and [ai] showed little difference, except before velarised [l], where they tended to be "smoothed" to [e:] and [a:]. Thus *neɪl* might become *ne:u* and *waɪld*, *wa:lɪd*. This smoothing happened with me in 13 % of cases, but with them, in 53 %.

The second element of [ɔi] before velarised [l] was rounded and retracted, giving [ʉφv]. The word *foiled* sounded like my *furled*. This rounding or retraction happened in 25 % of cases with me, and in 53 % with them.

The diphthong [au] is largely unrounded to [aʉ], except before velarised [l]. The change is widespread, so the difference between me and them is less marked. My [au] was unrounded in 60 % of cases, and theirs in 77 %.

The [əu] in free position is also largely unrounded to [əʉ]: for me, 39 %, for them, 84 %. Of their rounded ones, 72 % were before a lip consonant. Before another vowel, the diphthong is levelled to [ɛ:] as when *pəʉtri* becomes *pɛ:ətri*, or *fləʉɪŋ* *flɛ:ɪŋ*. This levelling happened in 40 % of cases with me, and in 56 % with them.

I was surprised that [əu] before velarised [l] was sometimes rendered [əʉ]: *told* was sometimes pronounced *təʉd*, with no [l] at all. I would certainly have called this a vulgarism, yet there were several instances of it. One informant made no difference between *coal* and *col*, but had *khəu* for both. But another pronounced *pole* and *pearl* identically.

There were formal differences in about 60 words, including spelling-pronunciations like *ɪkʰs æmənd* for *ɪgʰz æmənd*, or vulgarisms like *θɪlɛtə* for *lɔɪtə*. The spelling pronunciations and vulgarisms accounted for 20 % of the formal differences with them, against 3 % with me.

Time forbids discussion of biographical influences on the speech of the informants; of the phonetic context of the changes; of aspiration, other glides, intonation, the proportion of diphthongs to simple vowels; or of the phonology of each idiolect. Further interesting questions would also certainly emerge from spectrographic study. But I hope to deal with some of these points in a future report.

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

DISCUSSION

Schubiger:

It was said in the summary that no general trends in stress were observed as e.g. 'educational', 'universal' etc. Did the test include enough material in which a change of stress might have become evident?

Lewis:

The speaker was asked whether he had noted in the cases of phonetic variation any which might be attributed to the sort of paralinguistic differences that might be reflection of the changing mood, increasing fatigue etc of his subjects (e.g. in their choice of flapped *r* as opposed to other types).

Sivertsen:

Mr. Eustace, you gave precise figures for the occurrence of such features as lip-rounding, glottalization, vocoid replacement for the lateral ("dark l"), etc. How did you observe the occurrence of such features what were your means of observation?

Eustace:

ad Schubiger: My remark in the summary was erroneous. There were 11 words in which —'— > '—'— was possible. I had —'— in all, but the informants had '—'— as follows: *Algeria* 0%, *co-operative* 0%, *Be quiet* 40%, *malpractices* 40%, *Minoan* 56%, *Mulholland* 40%, *Nairobi* 40%, *Niagara* 25%, *Nigeria* 20%, *ulterior* 0%, *Victoria* 40%. In this context there is evidently a tendency for stress to become a function of vowel quality.

13 other words with stress difference were too diverse to allow a firm conclusion.

ad Lewis and Sivertsen: An answer is now included in double brackets in the text.