



Received Pronunciation, Estuary English and
Cockney English: A Phonologic and
Sociolinguistic Comparison of Three British
English Accents

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to phonologically and sociolinguistically compare three British English accents: Cockney English (CE), Estuary English (EE) and Received Pronunciation (RP), including investigating the status these accents have in Britain today. Estuary English, which is spoken in London and the Home Counties, is said to be located on a continuum between Cockney English, which is a London working class accent, and Received Pronunciation, spoken by the higher classes in Britain. Four authentic Youtube lectures by an author who considers herself to be an EE speaker were compared with previous research in the area.

The findings regarding phonetic differences between the accents displayed many opposing opinions between the Youtube material and the previous research. This is likely to be partly because of regional and social differences, and partly because of the fact that accents change and also depend on the formality of the situation in which they are spoken. Furthermore, accents are not clearly defined units and Estuary English has been shown to be many different accents that also figure on a broad spectrum between Received Pronunciation and Cockney English (and any other regional accents that are spoken in the area).

When it comes to attitudes to the three different accents, the Youtube material and previous research seem to agree on most levels: RP can be perceived as cold and reserved and is not the only accepted accent today for people who wish to acquire a high status job, at the same time as it is still associated with the highest prestige. Speakers of Cockney English are still subject to prejudice on many occasions as are many other urban accents, although there have been some positive changes in the last 20 or 30 years. No conclusions about the status of EE could be drawn due to its position on a broad continuum, the fact that it is not just one accent, and also due to the fact that language changes over time.

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1. Introduction

The present study investigates the status and attitudes towards three different prolific accents in Britain: Received Pronunciation, Estuary English, and Cockney English. I will use authentic lectures available online in order to compare the opinions expressed in them with previous research in sociolinguistics.

Someone's accent, or dialect, is one of the first things we notice about a person, and it is closely linked to one's identity. Accents can reveal where someone is from, what social class he or she belongs to, and how old someone is.

Today, we are exposed to more dialects around us due to increased mobility, but we do not necessarily need to travel to experience different dialects due to the Internet and social media, such as YouTube. YouTube is an online platform for video sharing where anyone can upload a video clip (see Section 3). The impact of social media can of course be large when it comes to the number of people that it can reach, and in this essay I will examine four YouTube clips phonologically and sociolinguistically. The accents investigated are Received Pronunciation (RP), Estuary English (EE), and Cockney English (CE). Estuary English is a term often used by journalists while many linguists are sceptical about it. It is said to be an accent in-between Received Pronunciation and London Cockney (see Section 2.4).

The main aim of the present study is to account for the differences between three of the main dialects of Britain by comparing the findings of previous research with authentic lectures on pronunciation, based on the following research questions:

1. What sound features characterize RP, EE and CE?
2. What is the status of these dialects in today's Britain?

In the following section, I will define *accent*, *dialect* and *Standard English*, the difference between them and the relationship between accents and society. A brief history of Received Pronunciation will be given with some comments on accent change and variation. Cockney English and Estuary English will also be presented, including the four sound features of the latter. Furthermore, attitudes towards the accents will be discussed. In Section 3, the authentic YouTube material will be presented as well as the method used. Section 4 compares the primary material with previous research and also includes a discussion. Lastly, Section 5 sums up the results of the present investigation.

2. Previous research

In this section, I will introduce the key terms used throughout this essay. I will also present three main accents in the area in and around London, namely: Cockney English, Estuary English (EE), and Received Pronunciation (RP).

2.1 One language – different accents and dialects

The terms *accent* and *dialect* are often used interchangeably, but sometimes it is important to distinguish between them when discussing geographical and social language varieties. An *accent* concerns pronunciation only, which means that the only thing that would distinguish two different accents is how the words are pronounced, whereas a *dialect* involves pronunciation as well as differences in grammar and vocabulary (Hughes et al. 2012:3).

It is important to know that there are no distinct boundaries between different accents, but that they occur on an accent *continuum* (Finegan 1999:374). Even if two geographical accents are identified on a map, it does not mean that everyone on one side of the border speaks differently from the people on the other side (Finegan 1999). However, with geographical obstacles like mountain ranges, etc., the situation looks slightly different. In Britain, for example, the river Humber makes a division between its north and south side where people on the north pronounce *house* with a monophthong /hu:s/, and the speakers to the south of the river pronounce the same word with “some kind of [haus]-type diphthong” (Trudgill 2000:23). Geographical distance is an important factor when it comes to distinguishing between dialects. People will speak like the people around them and for this reason there are only small differences with accents that merge into each other, and the differences tend to increase with increased geographical distance (Finegan 1999). However, for practical reasons, accents are often viewed as language variants with clear-cut boundaries (Hughes et al. 2012:10).

Apart from geographical differences, there are also social differences associated with accents and dialects. The dialect that has the highest prestige in England is Standard English, i.e. the grammar and vocabulary taught in schools, both for native and non-native speakers of English (Hughes et al. 2012:3). It is also the English dialect that is used in print, and the historical reason behind the official use of Standard English is that it originates in the south east of England, where London is situated with the court and government, as well as big universities such as Cambridge and Oxford (Trudgill 1999:13). It is estimated that about 12–15 percent of the population in England speak Standard English, and around 7–12 percent of these Standard English speakers have some kind of regional accent (Trudgill 1999:3).

Standard English is also the dialect that is considered correct, but linguists are careful to point out that this is not a superior dialect since all dialects are correct depending on the situation they are spoken in (cf. Trudgill 1999:14). In linguistics, a distinction is made between *prescriptive grammar*, which consists of rules of how to speak (for example Standard English), and *descriptive grammar*, which describes how language is actually used by people in terms of vocabulary and grammar (Denham & Lobeck 2013:10). Trudgill (1999:14) gives an example of newer dialects, in which the sentence *I drewed a picture* might be used. According to the rules of prescriptive grammar, the correct alternative would be *I drew a picture*. Trudgill (1999:13) points out that all dialects are grammatically correct and differ only in “their social significance and function”. The negative associations with non-standard dialects thus reflect the social values in society and associations with underprivileged groups with low status (Trudgill 2000:8). It should be noted that there are other Standard ‘Englishes’, such as Scottish Standard English and American Standard English, etc. The variety investigated throughout this essay is British Standard English (Hughes et al. 2012).

For accents, however, there is no standard. Still, Received Pronunciation, or RP, is the accent that is generally associated with the highest prestige in England, although only a small percentage of the population speak it (Hughes et al. 2012:3; see Section 2.2.1). RP speakers use Standard English, however Standard English can be spoken with any accent, and is not confined to any particular social group (Hughes et al. 2012:3). The relationship between accents and status can be illustrated with a triangle, in which the broadest regional accents are situated at the bottom, and RP, which is not associated with a specific geographic location, is at the top (see Figure 1). The higher up someone is on the triangle, the less regional his/her accent is, and this usually coincides with the higher social status the person has (Hughes et al. 2012:10).

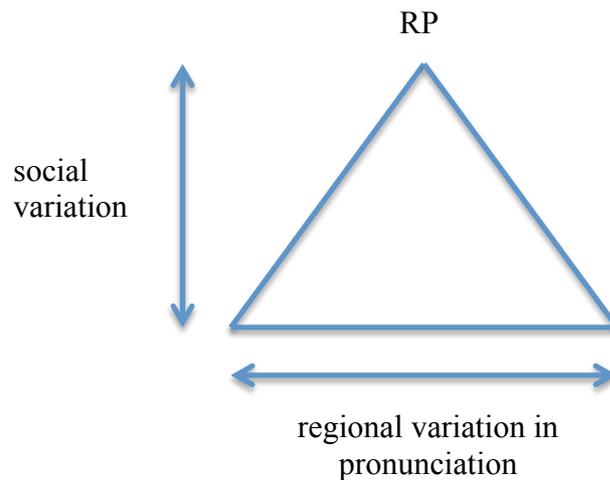


Figure 1. The accent triangle (adapted from Hughes et al. 2012:10)

The hierarchal division in terms of wealth, power and status, etc. is referred to as *social stratification* (Trudgill 2000:24). In England (and most Western industrial societies), this is manifested in social classes and social dialects. Social classes are rather complex, and social mobility (moving up or down in the accent triangle) is possible, even though social classes are often defined as “aggregates of individuals with similar social and/or economic characteristics.” (Trudgill 2000:24).

Some people might move up on the triangle consciously or unconsciously, for example when they start university studies, move, or find a high status job (Hughes et al. 2012:11). Nowadays, it is not usually required to adopt Received Pronunciation, and most people will keep some regional features and lose others (Hughes et al. 2012:11). Someone who has moved away from the place he or she was brought up in might still sound like a regional speaker to the people in the new location while sounding “posh” to the people in the former home area (Crystal 2014:38). One acquires different “languages” to suit the location, and most of us adapt our communicative styles, i.e. *register*: formal or informal, slang and swear words, etc., depending on the situation we are in (Finegan 1999:371). The influence of one accent or dialect on another so that they start to sound more alike is called *levelling* (Crystal 2014:219; see Section 2.2.2). Estuary English is said to be a result of levelling tendencies in London and the South East of England (Fabricius 2002; see Section 2.4).

2.2 Received Pronunciation (RP)

Received Pronunciation, or RP, is the accent that is often associated with Britain, often taught to L2 learners, and traditionally heard spoken by villains in Hollywood films (cf. Crystal 2014). The accent developed in the late eighteenth century in and around London among the most well-mannered circles of society who sought to keep their pronunciation as far as possible from the people in the provinces, and especially those living in the East End of London (Crystal 2014:70). It became a way of showing class distinction and the ‘Received’ in RP refers to the accent being accepted or received “[f]rom fashionable society, and in particular from the court and the aristocracy” (Crystal 2014:70). RP is traditionally associated with *public schools*, which in the UK means exclusive private schools out of reach of most parents’ budgets (Hughes et al. 2012:3). Examples of these are Eton and Rugby, and the accent spread beyond these boarding schools due to faster railway connections across the country in the nineteenth century (Crystal 2014:70). RP is considered *region-less*, which means that it is not possible to tell where in the country an RP speaker is from. RP is also the accent that the BBC used from its start in the 1920s, one of the reasons being that it had to be understood by everyone (Crystal 2014:72). It is not until very recent years that a more varied range of accents can be heard on the BBC (Crystal 2014).

According to Hughes et al. (2012:4, see also Trudgill 2002), the estimated number of RP speakers in England was approximately 3–5 percent at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Crystal’s (2014:63) estimates, however, are lower: namely, 2 percent of the population, which is the number also given on the British Library’s website (British Library). Naturally, RP has gone through changes, and there are various definitions available for different RP accents. This, according to Fabricius (2002), who describes RP as an ambiguous term, is often overlooked and many people expect RP not to change, something that for example leads journalists to claim that RP is not used anymore.

2.2.1 Types and definitions of RP

Fabricius (2002:118) lists some of the most frequently used types of RP: *Mainstream RP*, or *General RP*, which is said to be a more neutral accent; *U-RP*, or *Refined RP*, which is an upper-class accent; and *near RP*, or *Regional RP*, which displays less prestigious, or *localisable*, features. Based on Cruttendean (1994:80), Fabricius (2002:118) questions whether Regional RP should be seen as an RP accent. Since the definition of RP is that it is a regionless accent, Regional RP was classified as Estuary English by Cruttendean (1994) (Fabricius 2002:118).

U-RP is a conservative RP spoken by the older population and aristocrats. However, Wells (2013) remarks in a blog entry comment that if he had to start over his publication of “Accents of English” issued in the 1970s, he would probably not mention U-RP at all due to the very small percentage of the population that speak it, and because the closest we come to U-RP in public life today might be the now former mayor of London Boris Johnson.

The term Mainstream RP is used by Fabricius (2002) and Przedlacka (2001) for the more neutral modern variant of RP, and I will use the same term for this variety in the present study.

2.2.2 Development and changes of RP

Fabricius (2002:118) distinguishes between *n-RP* (*native RP*) defined as “an accent used by those who acquire it as native speaker” and *c-RP* (*Construct RP*), which is “the normative pronunciation described in dictionaries, especially pronunciation dictionaries such as Jones’ English Pronunciation Dictionary”. These two terms were introduced by Fabricius (2002:116) in order to differentiate between the changes in “speech/pronunciation over time” (n-RP), and a “change in language norms or notions of correctness over time” (c-RP). Fabricius (2002) explores the sociolinguistic changes in RP over time (n-RP), and emphasizes the accent *levelling*, i.e. the influence of one accent on another, which takes place among the regional variants of Southern British English. This is affecting RP because “increased social and personal mobility” is also increasing contact between regional non-standard Southern English accents (which is a group of considerable size and includes Cockney English), and RP speakers, with a change in Mainstream RP as a consequence (Fabricius 2002:116).

Harrington et al. (2000) analysed a selection of the Queen’s Christmas Broadcasts between 1950 and 1988 regarding a change in the pronunciation of two vowels. The results showed that the vowel change detected in the broadcasts could be described as a move in the direction of Mainstream RP (Harrington et al. 2000:74). In another study, Harrington (2007) examined whether the sound changes, such as /u/-fronting and /æ/-lowering¹, that had taken place in Standard English during the last 50 years also occurred in the Queen’s speech, by using various Christmas Broadcasts between 1952 and 2002. Harrington (2007) concludes that both the phonological changes have occurred in the Queen’s speech, and that these changes have been gradual.

Another phonological change that has taken place in the RP accent during the last

¹ The sound changes were /u/-fronting (where the tongue has moved forward when making the /u/ sound) and /æ/-lowering where the tongue is lowered thus giving the /æ/ a more open sound (Knight 2012).

century is *smoothing* (Hughes et al. 2012:4). The term *smoothing* is used to describe the change in the quality of vowel sounds that used to be pronounced as *triphthongs* and *diphthongs*, and now are pronounced as *monophthongs* (Hughes et al. 2012:4). Hughes et al. (2012) illustrate this with the words *tyre* and *hour*. Initially, *tyre* was usually pronounced as /taɪə/, but was gradually reduced to /tɑ:/. The smoothing of the word *hour* would go from /aʊə/ to /ɑ:/. These more current changes in RP are referred to as *advanced RP*, which is generally adopted by younger speakers. However, Hughes et al. (2012:5) point out that there is no perfect correlation between the age of the speaker and the type of RP. Some RP speakers can be described as “early adopters” who quickly pick up new features, whereas others will be reluctant to use them or prefer to wait until these new phonological changes become more common. The speakers of Advanced RP are looked upon as pretentious by some of the more conservative speakers (Hughes et al. 2012:5).

2.3 Cockney English

Cockney is “the [t]raditional [d]ialect of working-class London” (Trudgill 1999:46). The speakers of Cockney English do not use Standard English but a non-standard dialect, which for example includes stigmatised negative forms, as in *I don't want no dinner* (Trudgill 1999:14). Interestingly, this feature used to be common in Standard English, but is now lost (Trudgill 1999:14). Modern Cockney English includes t-glottaling, h-dropping and th-fronting (see Sections 2.4.1–2.4.2). It also uses vocalised /l/ which makes *milk* sound like /miɔk/ and some vowel-sounds typical for Cockney speakers (Hughes et al. 2012:75–76), however they will not be mentioned any further in this essay.

2.4 Estuary English

The term Estuary English was first introduced by David Rosewarne (1984):

“Estuary English” is a variety of modified regional speech. It is a mixture of non-regional and local south-eastern English pronunciation and intonation. If one imagines a continuum with RP and London speech at either end, “Estuary English” speakers are to be found grouped in the middle ground.

In addition, Rosewarne (1984) points out that the “heartland of this variety lies by the banks of the Thames and its estuary, but it seems to be the most influential accent in the south-east of England”. Trudgill (1999:80) points out that the area, in which Estuary English

is spoken, is larger than the estuary area and that it entails the Home Counties area, i.e. the counties adjacent to London. Furthermore, Trudgill (1999:80) identifies Estuary English as the accent of the lower middle-classes spoken in this area. Interestingly, Trudgill (1999:81) predicts a further spread of the Home Counties area, which, in the future, is likely to include “all of Hampshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and parts of Northamptonshire”.

According to Hughes et al. (2012:6), EE is usually defined as a mix between Cockney English and RP, which gives people from the lower classes a chance to “appear higher status than they are”, and the middle-class and upper-class speakers to appear to have a lower status than they have. Wells’s (1998) definition of Estuary English is “standard English spoken with a non-RP, London-influenced accent”. Wells (2004) agrees with Przedlacka (2001) that this accent is not just one specific accent. Przedlacka’s (2001) study is based on interviews (from 1997–1998) with two teenage RP speakers (one U-RP and one Mainstream RP, classified by their teacher) and 16 teenagers situated in four different directions from outer London (within a radius of 50 miles). The four counties examined were Bucks, Essex, Kent and Surrey with four adolescents in each, evenly distributed by social class and gender. Thirteen different sounds were analysed and compared, and the results showed that the variation between the geographical areas was too large for the likelihood that there would be a clearly definable accent in this area. However, Przedlacka (2001:47) points out that “as the regional accents of the Southeast indeed reveal a weaker presence of old regional variants, it is plausible that the levelling tendencies, reported elsewhere, are at work”.

Parts of Przedlacka’s (2001) study are useful as comparison with the phonetic features presented in the authentic material. Other literature will also be explored and used as a comparison. To represent and help analyse the authentic material of this study, a few features that are generally described in conjunction with EE will be mentioned and defined in the subsequent sections: t-glottaling, yod-coalescence, h-dropping and th-fronting.

2.4.1 T-glottaling

T-glottaling happens when the /t/-sound in words is exchanged for an air constriction of the vocal chords, also called *glottal stop* (Knight 2012:30). T-glottaling can occur in different degrees and in different phonetic environments. Speakers of Cockney use more t-glottaling than speakers of Estuary English, and RP speakers use it less than EE speakers (Rønnerdal & Johansson 2005:54).

According to Trudgill (1999:81), Estuary English uses glottal stops in words such as *bet* and *what*, but not in words like *better* and *water*. Handke (2012) states that glottal stops in EE

are “confined to context before consonants, in words such as *Scotland* or *Gatwick*. Words like *butter* would still be realised as *butter...*”. Crystal (2014:221) writes that Estuary English speakers “on the whole don’t (yet) say *bo’le*” (bottle).

In Przedlacka’s (2001) study, among the non-RP informants, the females used glottal stops in 47 percent of all the possible instances, while the corresponding number for males was 28 percent. These differences did not seem to be motivated by the informants’ social class (Przedlacka 2001). Out of 335 occasions, in which intervocalic glottaling, i.e. in words such as *butter* and *water*, was possible, only four were realised as glottal stops.

Fabricius (2002:119) explains the inconsistent use of glottal stops by speakers of English across Britain as follows:

Sociolinguistic data from many parts of Britain reveals *t*-glottaling to be used by at least some groups of speakers, although phonological constraints (such as whether or not *t*-glottaling occurs word-internally in words like *butter*) and age and social class profiles vary widely across the different areas. This variation is to be expected, since *t*-glottaling remains an as-yet-incomplete change in progress.

Even though the above quote does not refer to EE speakers exclusively, the fact that the process is incomplete it is of interest for the study at hand. Furthermore, in reference to Wells (1997), Fabricius (2002:119–120) states that there is a division between an RP speaker and a non-RP speaker where *t*-glottaling in words such as *water* and *bottle* occurs outside of RP, but is used by RP speakers in words such as *football* and *Gatwick*. However, Fabricius (2002) refers to her own (2000) study where she investigated the *t*-glottaling used by Cambridge University students who were classified as Mainstream RP speakers, where she came to the conclusion that pre-vocalic *t*-glottaling was very much a regional feature and used by the speakers living in London. However, this was true only for interview situations and not for scripted reading.

2.4.2 Yod-coalescence

This phonological feature concerns the change of the sound /tj/ into /tʃ/ (the same sound as the first and last consonant sounds in *church*), and the change of /dj/ into /dʒ/, identical to the first consonant sound in *jungle* (Hughes et al. 2012:47–48). It can also happen in connected speech, and in the middle of words, but for the purpose of the study the focus will be on

word-initial yod-coalescence. Examples of this is *tune*, in which /tjun/ becomes /tʃʊn/, and *dune*, where /djun/ becomes /dʒʊn/ (Hughes et al. 2012:47)

Maidment (1994) states that EE is said to usually accept yod-coalescence in more environments than RP. Moreover, while RP has this feature in unstressed positions, EE includes it in words such as *Tuesday* and *reduce* (Maidment 1994, see also Wells 1997). For Przedlacka's (2001) test subjects, only four tokens were recorded: *suit*, *Tuesday* and *new* (the last word recorded twice). The results for *Tuesday* are of interest for this study as this type of yod-coalescence is investigated. Both RP speakers used yod-coalescence for this word whereas half of the non-RP subjects displayed this feature. (Przedlacka 2001:46).

2.4.3 H-dropping

H-dropping (or /h/-elision) is a phonological term, which describes the loss of the initial /h/ sound, in words like *herb* and *hospital* which is typical of Cockney speech (Knight 2012:196–197). It happens in Standard English too (which is the dialect used by all RP speakers, see Section 2.1 and EE speakers, see Section 2.4), but normally with weak forms of function words that are not at the beginning of an utterance (Knight 2012:196). An Estuary English speaker does not usually drop /h/s, and most linguists seem to agree on this if they mention this aspect of Estuary English. Handke (2012) and Mompean (2006) do not consider h-dropping as a phonological feature typical of Estuary English. Maidment (1994) remarks that a Cockney speaker might avoid h-dropping in formal situations, and an EE speaker might miss out a few /h/s on a relaxed non-formal occasion.

2.4.4 Th-fronting

Th-fronting refers to the change in the quality of the sound /θ/ at the beginning of words, such as *think* and *thought*, from dental to labiodental, /f/ (cf. Knight 2012 and Handke 2012). The lower lip touches the upper front teeth instead of the tongue touching the teeth, so that the words sound like *fink* and *fought*. The same happens with the voiced equivalent /ð/ (which is the first sound in *the*) when it becomes a /v/ instead. An example is the word *brother* /brʌðə/ which would sound like /brʌvə/ pronounced with th-fronting (cf. Handke 2012).

Trudgill (1999:81) states that there are no instances of th-fronting in Estuary English, and that this feature is typical of working-class accents. Handke (2012) and Mompean (2006) are also of the opinion that th-fronting is a feature of Cockney but not Estuary English. Crystal (2014:223), however, includes th-fronting stating that most EE speakers use this feature “in such words as *youth*, *thanks*, and *bother*”.

Przedlacka (2001) does not provide any opinion on whether th-fronting is a feature of EE or not, but she compares the rate in which it is realised compared to the two RP speakers. The U-RP speaker did not include th-fronting and the Mainstream RP speaker has a very low use of th-fronting; he pronounces *think* as *fink* twice, but in an incidental recording. In *mouth* he pronounces a clear /f/ which Przedlacka (2001) explains as happening because of the rounded vowel preceding the /th/ sound. From the supposed Estuary speakers the percentage of labiodental realizations was 42 percent for males and 15 percent for females. For social class differences the material was not statistically significant (Przedlacka 2001:40,45).

2.5 Attitudes towards accents and dialects

According to Crystal (2014:40), “views about accents are among the most strongly expressed of all”, which can be seen in the numerous letters of complaint about accents on British television and radio. Now, the Internet is also used as a medium for opinions of this kind.

Even though this essay does not aim to discuss all British accents, it is interesting to include some of them here as a point of reference. Trudgill (2000:9) writes that urban accents, for example those of Birmingham, Newcastle and London, are often associated with unpleasantness and seen as ugly and careless, whereas rural accents are considered charming, pleasant and amusing, the examples being Devonshire, Northumberland and the Scottish Highlands. The Birmingham accent in particular is known for scoring the lowest in terms of attractiveness and prestige. According to Crystal (2014), this prejudice began when Birmingham used to be a growing and dirty city. Even though the appearance of the city has changed since then, the negative associations with the accent remain at the same time as other city accents have improved slightly. Crystal (2014) explains that the reason that Birmingham is still scoring so low is because of prolonged exposure to the accent through radio (since 1950s) and TV-shows, in which it has been depicted as slow, lazy and thick. Consequently, the accent has been associated with stupidity. This shows how psychological associations can work and also how difficult they can be to change.

Crystal (2012) comments on positive changes that have happened, particularly during the last twenty or thirty years, and the fact that RP would have had the top results in all categories in the 1980s while regional accents all the negative values. As an example, he writes that the question as to whether someone would buy a used car from a Cockney speaker would probably have been answered in the negative, whereas the question as to whether someone with a Birmingham accent had committed a crime probably would have been answered with a yes. Crystal (2014:235) continues with the observation that there are still “far

too many reports of accent antagonism around, of accent misinterpretation of people being made to feel inferior because of the way they talk”.

An extensive survey was initiated by the BBC in 2005 in conjunction with their project *Voices*. Coupland and Bishop (2007) designed and executed the survey in November 2004 with the administration of the survey implemented by a market research company contracted by the BBC. Since the survey was contracted by the BBC, Coupland and Bishop (2007) did not have full control of the design and final content of it. The number of informants was 5010 and all participants were over 15 years of age. Information about social class was not collected as the BBC did not prioritise this. The questions consisted of 34 different accent labels where the informants were asked to rate them on a seven-point scale. The questions were: “How much prestige do you think is associated with this accent?”, and “How pleasant do you think this accent sounds?” (Coupland and Bishop 2007:77).

For prestige *Queens English* scored the highest followed by *A standard accent of English* and *Accent identical to own*. For social attractiveness *A standard accent of English* came on top followed by *Accent identical to own*, *Southern Irish* and *Scottish*. *London English* scored comparatively low for social attractiveness (22nd), but for prestige it received a 6th place overall. As a point it could be added that the label *London English* could be rather ambiguous.

Coupland and Bishop (2007) found that vernacular city accents were rated low with some exceptions and this is following the pattern from previous studies (for example Giles 1970). The authors express disappointment regarding the conservative values where Standard English and *Queen's English* still attracts high scores. However, what they found to be perhaps a glimmer of hope was a slight age difference in the attitudes towards Standard English. Both prestige and attractiveness displayed a linear effect where young people rated Standard English lower than the older groups, although the younger were still positive on the whole. For *Queen's English* the authors also found a similar effect regarding social attractiveness where the older participants rated it more highly.

That accent prejudice is still an issue can be seen in a survey by the research consultants Comres undertaken in September 2013 for the British broadcaster ITV. They performed online interviews with 2006 adults over 18 in Great Britain (the data weighted to represent adults in Great Britain). Ten accents were included. Comres (2013) asked: “How friendly or unfriendly do you find the following accents to be?” and they asked the same questions, but with intelligence and trustworthiness as factors. They also asked the informants if they had felt that they had been discriminated against because of their accent and if they

had discriminated against someone else because of a regional accent. There were five values of friendliness to choose from with “neither friendly nor unfriendly” in the middle. There was also an option for “Don’t know”. I will use the net values - where the middle neutral option and the “Don’t know” are removed. The results for friendliness showed that the rural *Devon* and the Celtic Fringe cities came on top. *Devon* received 65 percent for friendliness and 4 percent for not being friendly. *Cockney* had the result 49 percent and 19 percent and *Queen’s English* 38 percent and 23 percent. For intelligence *Queen’s English* came on top where 63 percent considered it an intelligent accent and only 3 percent not an intelligent accent. The Celtic Fringe and Manchester received higher scores than *Cockney* for which the latter the results were 18 percent and 32 percent. Only *Birmingham* and *Liverpool* had lower scores. For trustworthiness there is a very similar pattern with *Queen’s English* on top (51 percent, 8 percent) and *Cockney* in the bottom (28 percent, 24 percent) only followed by *Liverpool*.

The question of discrimination showed that 28 percent felt that they had been discriminated against because of their regional accent. In a social situation 20 percent answered that they had been discriminated against and in the workplace 14 percent. The results for when served in shops or restaurants was 13 percent and in job interviews 12 percent. For the opposite question (if they had discriminated against anyone else), the results were: On the telephone: 14 percent; in a social situation 10 percent; in the workplace 6 percent and in a job interview 4 percent.

RP is an accent that is associated with high prestige and currency in England since it continues to exist in the top section of the social scale “as measured by education, income, and profession, or title” (Hughes et al. 2012:3). It is interesting to compare the positions of prestige in England with other countries in the United Kingdom: Hughes et al. (2012) points out that in Scotland, RP is considered an English accent. Even in northern England RP is not necessarily met with more respect, but is generally considered a southern accent (Hughes et al. 2012:3). Trudgill (2000:7) writes that RP possesses prestige in the rest of the British Isles which somewhat goes against Hughes et al.’s (2012) comments and according to Hughes et al. (2012:4), the associations with status and power etc. cause a considerable number of people in Britain to form the opinion that RP is the most beautiful and the best accent.

At the same time RP is often associated with “affectation, social snobbery, arrogance, aloofness” etc. and especially the advanced RP (Hughes et al. 2012:5; see Section 2.2.3). Hughes et al. point out that a foreign person who learns advanced RP and manages to acquire it will probably still sound pretentious to an English or British listener, even if the listener

detects a foreign accent, and many younger British RP speakers want to escape from this image (Hughes et al. 2012:5).

A comment on a post in John Wells's accent blog describes how a student complained at a lecture about being mocked in England for sounding like a Royal Navy admiral from WWII.² Ben Crystal, son of David Crystal, expresses in their co-written book how he understood in his late teenage years that it was not always an advantage to speak with an RP accent, and he made it rougher as a result even though as he remarks he can still use it (cf. Crystal 2014). B Crystal who is an actor by profession interviewed his agent about how the demand for RP has changed (Crystal 2014:108). She tells him that people wanted to hear a voice of money - the family doctor of the local vicar - in adverts, but after 2000 it changed with the recession. All of a sudden it was important for advertising companies to secure the exact right natural and chummy variety of accent to make sure it suited the audience. Another thing she noted is that London accent used to mean Cockney, but now it can mean anyone with any English accent (Crystal 2014:111).

3. Material and Method

The material analysed in this essay consists of four authentic video clips taken from YouTube. YouTube is an online social media platform, to which anyone can upload a video. Videos can be either private, with a selected audience, or public where anyone could access the video material, for example by searching for keywords or subscribing to authors. Viewers of these videos can choose to leave comments underneath the video clips so written conversations are possible. The author of the videos examined in this essay is a woman calling herself Jade Joddle. She gives lectures about English accents, and how to improve one's English-speaking skills. Joddle has over 134 thousand subscribers/followers (April 2016). She also gives advice about more personal matters, such as how to deal with introversion, but for the purpose of this essay I have only chosen clips on the subject of English pronunciation. These clips, which are from seven to eleven minutes long, were uploaded in 2013 and have been viewed by approximately 10 700 and 311 000 times (May 26, 2016). Two other videos have been used to obtain information about the author, and these were approximately 11 and 38 minutes long. In the videos I have chosen to look at, Jade Joddle addresses the difference between RP, Estuary English and Cockney, and she also talks about how these accents can be perceived.

² <http://phonetic-blog.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/son-of-rp.html>

One reason for choosing YouTube clips is that I wanted the material to be authentic. Within the limits of the current study, it would have been difficult to collect new material since transcription is time consuming, and for it to be as accurate as possible, I would need special equipment. Moreover, in studies involving human subjects, a consent form must be signed by the participants. Finally, the material, such as the Queen's speech referred to in Section 2.2.2, is not representative of authentic language as speeches normally follow a script. By uploading clips on YouTube, Joddle makes her content publicly available, and hence very useful for the purpose of this essay. Finally, the wide use and possible impact of the Internet and social media when it comes to one's exposure to different British accents today is another reason for choosing Joddle's YouTube lectures.

Joddle (2016) comes from a working class background. She was born in the south of London in 1985³ where she grew up with her single mother who was on benefits. She was accepted into what she describes as a good secondary school, which was a state school and free to attend, but with the vast majority being middle class children. She then continued her studies at a university level and got a (first class) degree in English and American literature, after which she started to look for a job in charity. Her job seeking proved fruitless; it included internships and 14 job application rejections and lasted for two years. That is when she decided to become self-employed and started her YouTube channel (Joddle 2016).

3.1 Method

I listened to the authentic video material, noting down the difference in sound features the author mentions and her opinions on attitudes towards the accents in question. I also read through all viewers' comments on the clips since the interactive nature makes it an important part of the communication between the author and the audience (and also between the members of the audience). In order to get some background information about Joddle, I examined an additional video posted in 2016.

Joddle (2013e) describes her accent as Estuary English and puts herself slightly closer to Cockney than to conservative RP on the accent continuum. This is due to the fact that she is from the south of London, which is influenced by Cockney to a great extent. She describes Estuary English as a good accent to learn and have, since it is not a working class accent and it is still not posh (Joddle 2013e).

³ information about date of birth taken from Joddle (2013c).

Joddle (2013e) also points out that disagreements always occur when it comes to accents. Some people for example would say that Estuary English is a working class accent, while Joddle sees it as a middle ground. She points out that upper middle class people can adopt Estuary English to sound less posh if they do not want to be perceived as unfriendly, reserved and unapproachable (Joddle 2013e). Joddle (2013b) also makes the claim that no one speaks conservative RP anymore unless they are very old.

On the other hand, someone with a working class accent like Cockney might change their accent, consciously or not, because as Joddle (2013e) explains, perhaps a working class accent can prevent one from getting a decent job, or people might presume that someone with a working class accent has not been to university, etc.

In one of the clips, a non-native viewer asked in a comment box if it is bad to have a working class accent (Joddle 2013d). Someone pointed out to this second-language learner of English that she spoke with one. Joddle's (2013d) answer was that it depends on what her aims are. If someone wants a professional job higher up on the social ranking scale, like at an international company or a lawyer's office for example, it is worth neutralising the accent and removing the working class qualities of the speech. Joddle (2013d) continues by saying that for a job in a shop, for holidays and socially, a working class accent is fine, and that it is not a problem to speak with a specific accent if the people you are surrounded with speak in the same way. In addition, she mentions and that a working class accent can give an impression of warmth and openness in a real way (Joddle 2013d).

Joddle (2013e) presents some qualities of the Estuary English accent:

1. Glottal stop. Joddle explains that EE speakers use glottal stops before a vowel and as examples she uses the words: *button*, *butter*, *written*, *treatment*, *forgotten* and *pity*.
2. Yod coalescence where the /tj/ sound becomes /tʃ/. Joddle is holding up a sheet with the words *tube*, *Tuesday* and *Tuna sandwich*. Above the words there is an arrow pointing from /tj/ to /tʃ/ to indicate the change in sound quality.
3. H-dropping. As an example, Joddle uses the sentence *Have you seen Henry?* and holds a paper sheet saying *'Ave you seen 'enry?*. She is of the opinion that EE speakers sometimes use h-dropping.
4. Th-fronting. This is not really used in Estuary English according to Joddle, but she believes that she uses it sometimes because she is from the south of London.

4. Results and Discussion

In this section I will compare the authentic lectures by Joddle (the YouTube clips) with the findings of previous research on the subject (see Sections 3 and 2).

4.1 Sound features

The phonetic features analysed are: t-glottaling, yod-coalescence, h-dropping and th-fronting (see Sections 2.4.2–2.4.4). Below I will present the results for each sound.

4.1.1 T-glottaling

Trudgill (1999:81), Handke (2012) and Crystal (2014:221) all exclude t-glottaling in pre-vocalic environments, i.e. in words such as *butter*. Przedlacka's (2001) study showed very low glottaling word-medially (only 4 out of 335 possible instances, just slightly more than 1 percent). Joddle, on the other hand, states that glottal stops are used in Estuary English in words such as *butter*.

This shows that the opinions of t-glottaling are differing between the authentic material analysed in this study and the results reported by previous research. For t-glottaling regional aspects seem to be of great importance, with London being set apart from other regions, with regard to higher occurrences of pre-vocalic t-glottaling compared to the rest of the country (Fabricius 2002). As also seen in section 2.4.1, Fabricius (2002) comments on the fact that t-glottaling is not yet a completed process hence it is subject to differing opinions as to when it is used.

4.1.2 Yod-coalescence

Maidment (1994) and Wells (1997) describe yod-coalescence as a feature of EE. Przedlacka's (2001) findings show that half of her supposed EE subjects used it in *Tuesday* which shows that it is used, but perhaps not proving anything since this word was just pronounced once. Joddle (2013e) claims that Estuary English speakers pronounce words like *tuna* and *Tuesday* with Yod-coalescence (see Section 3.1). Therefore, the observations here are quite similar, but there is not enough data to base a conclusion on since the descriptions are quite vague and the fact that only half of the informants in Przedlacka's study used yod-coalescence. Moreover, it is important to consider the time aspect since language changes over time and Przedlacka's (2001) study was based on interviews performed in 1997-1998, whereas Joddle's (2013) clips are much more recent.

4.1.3 H-dropping

Handke (2012) and Mompean (2006) exclude h-dropping from Estuary English. Joddle presents h-dropping as a feature of Cockney, but believes that she uses it sometimes. There seems to be an agreement here and it could also agree with Maidment's (1994) suggestion that EE speakers might use some h-dropping under more relaxed circumstances.

4.1.4 Th-fronting

Trudgill, Handke (2012) and Mompean (2006) describe th-fronting as a feature of Cockney, whereas Crystal (2014:223) lists it under Estuary English for words such as “*youth, thanks, and bother*”. As in the case of with h-dropping, Joddle states that th-fronting is not used by EE speakers, but that she uses it sometimes, probably because she is from south London.

Here the opinions differ and this could be because, as Joddle points out indirectly, that people speak differently in different geographical regions, or as with the h-dropping: the formality of the situation matters.

We can also look at Prezdlacka's study, in which the males used it in 42 percent of the instances compared to 15 percent for the females, showing that at least for these adolescents, gender is an important factor.

Discrepancies between the facts stated by Joddle and other sources can be expected. This is because Estuary English is not just one accent, but many, and each might be influenced by the regional accent in the area, and because it lies on a continuum that stretches somewhere between a broad regional accent and RP, so that the number of a certain feature, for example h-dropping might be dependent on where on this continuum an individual is (see Section 2.4). The formality of a situation can also be of significance (see Section 2.1).

Furthermore, language and dialects constantly change and are by no means static entities (see Section 2.2.2). These changes can happen at a different speed, sometimes faster and sometimes more slowly. A descriptive change might become a prescriptive rule if enough people start to change certain aspects of accents/dialects in the same way (see Section 2.1). Fabricius (2002:134) explains the same procedure by stating that c-RP sometimes has to be updated because of changes in n-RP (see Section 2.2.2).

Gender differences have not been a focus of this essay due to time restrictions, although there are quite large differences in how women and men rate regional accents. A note should be made on Przedlacka's (2001) study, which focuses on teenagers between the ages of 14 and 16 (see Section 2.4). She explains that the reason for choosing this age group is that they are

receptive to accent change. Przedlacka (2001) points out that for young people it seems to be more important to speak the same way as their peers, rather than as a certain social class.

4.2 Attitudes

Coupland and Bishop (2007), Trudgill (2000:9), and Giles (1970) state that urban accents (including London) are less popular accents than rural and standard accents (see Section 2.5). Crystal (2014) remarks that there have been positive changes in the last twenty or thirty years with an improvement in the perception of the urban accents, but that too many people still are judged and made to feel inferior because of how they speak (see Section 2.5). This can also be seen in the study by Comres (2013), in which 28 percent of the informants indicated that they have been objects of prejudice because of their accent, and 12 percent felt that they had been discriminated against at a job interview (see Section 2.5). In the same study, Queen's English was rated high regarding intelligence: 63 percent of the informants considered Queen's English to be an intelligent accent and only 18 percent thought the same about Cockney English (and 32 percent stated that they found the Cockney accent not intelligent). The results for trustworthiness showed similar results, in which Queen's English received positive votes from 51 percent (3 percent for not trustworthy) of the informants, while the corresponding result for Cockney English was 28 percent (with 24 percent for not trustworthy). The only section that Cockney English received higher scores for was friendliness: 49 percent considered this accent friendly, whereas 28 percent reviewed Queen's English as a friendly accent (and 23 percent as not friendly).

Coupland and Bishop (2007) saw similar results in their study where Standard English and Queen's English were rated high. They hope that the informants that chose to take part in the study are among the more conservative of the British population.

Joddle (2013) is of the opinion that there is a possible need for people from working class backgrounds to change their accents for certain careers. She remarks that Cockney English can be perceived as warm and friendly while conservative RP is seen as cold and unfriendly.

Joddle's (2013) claims seem to be confirmed by previous research (see Section 2.5) in many ways. Even though positive changes when it comes to accent prejudice seem to have occurred, urban and working class accents such as Cockney English are often seen as inferior to rural accents and especially Standard English.

When it comes to RP, the general opinion is that only older people and aristocrats speak with this accent. This is an opinion that Joddle (2013b) agrees with (see Section 3.1).

However, the ambiguity of the term RP, the different definitions of it, the changes that it has been subject to like all accents and the fact that it is difficult to determine who is an RP speaker and who is not makes it more complicated (cf. Fabricius 2002; see section 2.2). What we can see though is that there is not the same pressure to change accents to make them totally regionless nowadays as Hughes et al. 2012 point out (see Section 2.1). The upper class RP (U-RP) seems to almost have entirely vanished or is at least used by a very small part of the population (cf. Wells 2013; see Section 2.2.1).

5. Conclusion

The answer to the question what sound features characterize RP, EE and CE differ between the findings of previous research and the authentic video material which makes it difficult to appoint any specific features for the accents. This is likely to be due to the overlapping and changing nature of the accents as well as regional and social differences (see Section 2.1).

When it comes to the question what status the three accents investigated have today, the authentic video clips and previous research seems to account for similar tendencies. Received Pronunciation has lost its place as the only accepted accent in many positions including BBC announcers, at the same time as it can be perceived as reserved and unfriendly (see Section 2.5 and Section 3.1). On the other hand, RP is still considered an intelligent accent and the accent with the highest prestige. There is a discrepancy between the general opinion that no one speaks RP and previous research, due to the changes that have affected RP and the different types of RP (see Section 2.2). Cockney English is still subject to prejudice and discrimination in many situations even though there seems to have been a reduction in this compared to 20 or 30 years ago (cf. Crystal 2014; see Section 2.5). There is a possibility that the perception of Standard English and Queen's English are becoming less positive among the younger population (see Section 2.5), but only the future will tell if this is the case. As for Estuary English, the fact that it is situated on a continuum between RP and Cockney (see Section 2.4), and the levelling that is occurring in the south of England between RP and regional accents in the Home Counties (see Section 2.2.2), together with Przedlacka's (2001) findings that EE is not one accent (see Section 2.4), makes it difficult to draw any conclusions about what status it has today.

It would be interesting to see what results a longitudinal study about accent attitudes in relation to different age-groups would show. This would indicate whether accent prejudice is something that is reducing in Britain, or if it is something that is increasing with age within the same individual.

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