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## THE SHIFT FROM «RP» TO «MODERN RP» AMONG THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BRITISH ROYAL FAMILY

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*English is not a single, uniform system. There are many dialects and accents of English, both in the British Isles and overseas. Indeed, we can speak of many Englishes around the world. The article focuses mainly on two varieties of English pronunciation. The research is dedicated to the type of British pronunciation most established as a teaching standard. This is not spoken by most people in Britain, but it's understood throughout Britain and beyond. It's mainly spoken in the south of England, and used widely in news, TV and movies. The standard British accent used to be known everywhere as Received Pronunciation (RP), but the term is used much less by British phoneticians today. Other names include Standard Southern British (SSB), which describes what it actually is, and also “BBC English” and “General British”. The existing descriptions of standard British English pronunciation, known as RP, are outdated. People who speak like the late Queen now sound old-fashioned. The article describes the various changes that have taken place since about 1950 in the kind of pronunciation usually taught to British-oriented learners and teachers of English as a foreign, second, or additional language. Essentially this is a comparison between RP, Received Pronunciation, spoken by King Charles III and its modern equivalent SSB, Standard Southern British, spoken by William and Harry. There is a lack of researches on the differences between these two accents. The kinds of speakers who constitute today's pronunciation models are different in social terms from the typical speakers of RP, and the sound of their speech is different, too. But around the world, knowledge of British pronunciation is still rooted in RP: much of what is taught about British pronunciation is out of date. The social prestige which RP once enjoyed, and the scholarly prestige of the classic works describing it, have left a legacy of conservatism.*

**Key words:** *General British Pronunciation, Modern RP, Standard Southern British Accent, Queen's and King's English, socio-phonetic change, replacement of vowels and consonants, uptalk.*

## ПЕРЕХІД ВІД «RP» ДО «MODERN RP» СЕРЕД ПРЕДСТАВНИКІВ БРИТАНСЬКОЇ КОРОЛЕВСЬКОЇ РОДИНИ

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*Англійська мова не є єдиною однорідною системою. Існує багато діалектів і акцентів англійської мови як на Британських островах, так і за кордоном. Дійсно, ми можемо говорити про багато англійських мов у всьому світі. Стаття зосереджена в основному на двох варіантах англійської вимови. Дослідження присвячене типу британської вимови, який став стандартом навчання. Цією вимовою не розмовляє більшість людей у Британії, але її розуміють у всій Британії та за її межами. В основному нею розмовляють на півдні Англії, її широко використовують у новинах, на телебаченні та в кіно. Стандартний британський акцент раніше був відомий як Received Pronunciation (RP), але сьогодні цей термін використовується британськими фонетистами набагато рідше. Інші назви включають Standard Southern British (SSB), назва, яка відповідає дійсності, а також «BBC English» і «General British». Існуючі описи стандартної британської англійської вимови, відомої як RP, застаріли. Люди, які говорять, як покійна королева, тепер звучать старомодно. У статті описуються різні зміни, які відбулися приблизно з 1950 року у вимові, якій зазвичай навчають британсько орієнтованих учнів та вчителів англійської мови як іноземної, другої або додаткової. По суті, це порівняння між RP, прийнятою вимовою, якою розмовляє король Карл III, і її сучасним еквівалентом SSB, стандартною південнобританською, якою розмовляють Вільям і Гаррі. Досліджень відмінностей між цими двома акцентами бракує. Типи носіїв, які складають сьогоднішні моделі вимови, відрізняються в соціальному плані від типових носіїв RP, і звучання їхньої мови також відрізняється. Але в усьому світі знання британської вимови все ще вкорінені в RP: багато з того, що викладають про британську вимову, застаріло. Соціальний престиж, яким колись користувався RP, і науковий престиж класичних праць, що описують його, залишили у спадок лише консерватизм.*

**Ключові слова:** загальнобританська вимова, Modern RP, стандартний південнобританський акцент, королівська англійська, соціо-фонетична зміна, заміна го-лосних і приголосних звуків, *uptalk*.

**Objectives.** The purpose of this article is to gather a description of notable ways in which contemporary standard British speech differs from the British upper class accent of the last century, Received Pronunciation, analysing the speeches of the representatives of the British Royal family of different generations.

**Results and discussion.** Around the beginning of the nineteenth century, something remarkable happened in Great Britain. All over the country, people at the top of society began to change the way they spoke: they began to adopt the speech patterns of the upper classes in the London area. Before this, there had been greater diversity of speech among Britain's social elite. But the London area model steadily became established as uniquely respectable, or 'received'. By 1869, the phonetician Alexander Ellis could write of 'a received pronunciation all over the country, not widely different in any particular locality, and admitting of a certain degree of variety. It may be especially considered as the educated pronunciation of the metropolis, of the court, the pulpit, and the bar' (Lindsey, 2019).

Daniel Jones, the first UCL Professor of Phonetics, referred to RP in 1918 as the pronunciation 'of Southern Englishmen who have been educated at the great public boarding schools' (Jones, 1918). John Wells, the last UCL Professor of Phonetics, referred to it in 1982 as typically spoken by 'families whose menfolk were or are pupils at one of the "public schools"' (Wells, 2006). This conception, established in the nineteenth century, meaningful to Jones during the First World War and to Wells in the era of Margaret Thatcher, has in the subsequent decades become part of history.

In contemporary Britain, diversity is celebrated. Prominent figures in business, politics, academia and the media exhibit a range of accents. But London and the South are still dominant in wealth, power and influence. Accents of the South, particularly middle and upper-middle class accents, are heard more often than others in public life, and in the TV programmes and films that are seen internationally. Southern speech of this type is a natural teaching standard for 'British English' today; the abbreviation SSB is used for this Standard Southern British pronunciation. Some call it 'General British', but it's socially and regionally far less general than General American is in North America. It's an accent of England, and certainly not representative of Scotland, Ireland, or the former British colonies, where pronunciation is substantially different.

Although the pace of socio-phonetic change has been rapid in recent decades, there was no overnight revolution in speech patterns; modern pronunciation has much in common with RP. Indeed, some phoneticians have made efforts to keep the term 'RP' for the modern standard, by redefining it. But the term is linked in many people's minds with the past and with the upper classes. Nowadays journalists and actors will often refer to RP with

precisely these connotations in mind. A line was finally drawn under the British Empire over twenty years ago, with the handover of Hong Kong in 1997. The turn of the twenty-first century might be taken as a convenient point from which RP can be referred to in the past tense.

King Charles's accent is basically classic Received Pronunciation, RP. This was the upper class accent during the last century or so of the British empire. There aren't that many speakers of it left, because the huge social changes in Britain starting in the 1960s rapidly made it sound very posh and old fashioned. As it was mentioned, today's standard accent in the south of Britain is called Standard Southern British, SSB. Charles was just old enough for his accent to be fixed before the Swinging Sixties. Unfortunately, another thing that got fixed before the Swinging Sixties was the set of vowel symbols that can be found in most dictionaries for British English. This means that King Charles is one of the few people who actually sounds like these. Between Charles's childhood and William and Harry's, Britain saw huge social changes. Being upper class changed rapidly from being prestigious to being a symptom of unfair privilege, and many in the upper classes shifted their pronunciation to sound less like posh RP. Even the Queen shifted her vowels a bit between the 1950s and the 1980s. For example, the vowel in the word PRICE.

*The King's vowels symbols.* For example the vowel of the word PRICE in modern SSB begins quite far back in the mouth, /ɑj/. But the King actually pronounces it like the familiar symbol /aɪ/, beginning with a more front quality, whereas William and Harry have the SSB vowel, beginning /ɑ/, /ɑj/. And in words like 'while' and 'smile', the vowel can be smoothed into just that first part, /a/ and /ɑ/.

He also pronounces the vowels of DRESS and FACE like the familiar symbols /e/ and /eɪ/. The vowel in the word DRESS was made with a closer mouth in RP, /e/. In SSB those are more open, /ɛ/ and /ej/. The same is true of the vowel in FACE. The opposite applies to the vowel in CHOICE. In today's SSB the vowel in the word CHOICE is quite close, /oj/, whereas the King has the more open RP vowel, /ɔɪ/, while Prince Harry has the less open /oj/ of SSB. This means that the start of the word 'joy' sounds like 'job' when Charles says it, but like 'jaw' when Harry says it. The King even has a couple of vowels that are actually posher and more old fashioned than the symbols. One is the vowel of GOAT, which in the familiar symbol begins with schwa, as it does in SSB, /ə/, /əʊ/. But the King begins the vowel further forward in the mouth, /əʊ/. And his MOUTH vowel is quite different

from today's /aw/, starting a bit further back in the mouth and with no lip rounding at all.

In RP, the vowel in SQUARE was a diphthong, a changing vowel, /eə/.

In SSB, it's a monophthong, with a steady, unchanging quality, /ɛ:/. So they end very differently.

Brits sometimes make fun of this posh old vowel by writing 'house' as 'hice'. A difference in his weak syllables is the so-called "happy vowel". And in RP, the unstressed vowel on the end of words like happY was the lax vowel of 'it', the happY vowel but in SSB, it's the tense vowel of 'tea'. Today, SSB speakers have the same vowel in both syllables of the word "deeply". But in the King's RP, the word ends with the lax /ɪ/ of KIT, deeplɪ/.

Before we leave vowels, we have to mention the effects ON vowels of one particular consonant, dark L and L vocalization of the dark L. Older speakers like King Charles have pretty much the same vowel in 'no' and 'soul', but how different they are for Prince Harry. The listener might hear something closer to /səʊ/ instead of /səʊl/.

And the smoothed-out PRICE vowel can get merged into a following L. Prince William often seems to be talking about the vegetable chard. This L-vocalization is a huge topic and it can be found in many accents and many languages. Now let's move on to consonants.

#### *The King's consonants.*

*/t/ glottaling.* In other words, turn final /t/ at the end of a word into a glo[ʔ]al when a vowel follows. It can be seen in the last videos that King Charles occasionally does this. But his sons, like many SSB speakers, do it quite a bit more. Like the new Prime Minister, William and Harry do this lots. Of course Prince Harry spends a lot of time in the United States, and this may well be why he does this even in words where most Brits wouldn't. Youtube's automatic captioning algorithm is amazingly good, but it can be confused by this glottal stop, for example on the end of the word Charlotte.

The algorithm is more at home with American style /t/voicing, sometimes called flapping. Occasionally the King uses American-style t-voicing, as in the word 'forty'. But one kind of t-weakening that posh people like the King never does is pronouncing a /t/ as a glottal stop before a vowel, as demonstrated by a new Prime Minister's speech. One rather posh, old-fashioned feature here is the weakening of the /t/ sound to a kind of /s/. The listener might hear the word 'sing'. But that's actually the second half of the word 'fighting'. As it is known, in SSB /t/ is typically affricated, in other words pronounced with a little s-type release, t<sup>s</sup> t<sup>s</sup> t<sup>s</sup>. Well in the King's

speech, when /t/ is in what we call a weak position, it often is transformed entirely into a fricative. Prince William might almost be saying 'see' but it's the second half of the word 'city'. Releasing the consonant /t/ with a little /s/ is called affrication and is absolutely the norm for SSB speakers, but William uses more than most. Some of his pronunciations could have been lifted directly from Liverpool English, Scouse.

*Weakening and 'mumbling'.* Weakening is something that the King does a lot more generally. He has occasionally been described as mumbling. But Geoff Lindsey's book "English After RP" he actually devoted a chapter to this relaxed, somewhat weakened style of speech that was characteristic of many RP speakers (Lindsey, 2019). Of course, we all do this kind of thing when we're chatting casually, but the King does it in formal public speaking. Sometimes it involves racing through the words at lightning speed. Occasionally Charles produces some of his words very quickly or misses out a syllable or two though it has been noticed less of this in his speeches since becoming King. This really shows that what we're talking about here isn't laziness but an actual style of speaking. And then there's William. It's quite hard to find speeches where William doesn't do this kind of thing a lot. You might jump to the conclusion that he's got it from his father, but in William's case it seems the opposite of relaxed, it sounds rushed, hurried. And away from the royals, there are some very successful public communicators who do the same thing as William.

*Emphasising and gesturing.* Now the King does often emphasize words or syllables, but rather than doing this by articulating clearly, he often prefers to do it by gesturing with his head or his whole body.

It would be suitable to notice three features that can be heard from SSB speakers but which doubtfully anyone can ever hear from King Charles. First, 'Uptalk', which is basically saying statements with rising intonation more like a typical question. It's often used to check that the person you're speaking to is following you. In RP, high rising intonation typically turned a statement into a yes-no question. In recent decades, such intonation has become increasingly used on conversational statements, as way to check that the hearer is following; this is widely known as 'Uptalk'. In recent decades, one intonational development has attracted more attention than any other. This is 'Uptalk' or the 'High Rising Terminal'. It's not a new contour, but rather a new use of an existing one. O'Connor & Arnold called it the 'High Bounce' pattern, ending in a High Rise nuclear tone (O'Connor and Arnold, 1973). In RP, if used on a statement, this pattern generally turned it

into a yes-no question, as a high rising pitch does in many other languages. Use of Uptalk is widespread across the English-speaking world today. It's perhaps most common in Australia, but is also heavily used in America and by many in Britain, though not typically by older British speakers. Uptalk has been discussed a lot in the press, often in negative terms by writers who fail to grasp its function and who underestimate how well established it actually is in conversational speech. It can be also heard quite often from young non-native speakers, who either have picked it up by ear (as it's hardly ever taught) or perhaps use it in their native languages too.

Next, *TH-fronting*, which includes pronouncing th as /f/. It's a general British phenomenon that can be heard increasingly from younger and not so younger speakers all over the country, and is a prominent feature of Cockney accent. In Cockney, *this* could be /dɪs/, *think* could be /fɪŋk/, and *other* could be /'ʌvə/

In recent years, the replacement of /θ/ and /p/ with /f/, /v/ and /d/ has become common among younger speakers across Britain, and it may occasionally be heard from television presenters. It's not yet considered a standard feature, but this may change in future.

And finally *ejective* /k'/. In word-final position, /p/, /t/ and /k/ are sometimes heard today in a strengthened form that wasn't characteristic of RP. This is the realization of these three plosives as *ejectives*, [p'], [t'] and [k']. Ejectives involve making a glottal stop during the oral closure, and forcefully raising the larynx in the throat. This compresses the air in the mouth so that a very sharp sound is heard when the oral closure is released. Ejective articulation is most common with /k/ at the end of a phrase, as in *next week, on Facebook, what would you like?*

**Conclusions.** Thus, based on the complex auditory analysis of the phonetical characteristics of the speeches delivered by the representatives of the British Royal Family (Queen Elizabeth, King Charles, the Prince of Wales and Prince Harry), we can conclude that there are distinctive changes either on segmental and suprasegmental levels in their pronunciation. These changes are inevitable as the Royal Family tends to be closer to its people. By using modern trends in their speech, the royals demolish the gap between them and their English-speaking subjects and as a result are perceived with more trust and belief that they stand for their people and interests of their country. This kind of closeness is extremely important for the popularity of the Royal Family. Although all these changes are the result of the historical developments, the modern generation of royals has formed their accent un-

der the influence of people surrounding them not only in the palaces but in different educational institutions as well. Nevertheless, the recent monarch as well as the future one, still have the traces of the Received Pronunciation that is considered to be an accent of the upper class and will always be connected with the late Queen and the Great Elizabethan Era of the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

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