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The rise of a standard

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2 THE RISE OF A STANDARD

Accent and dialect differences have always existed; they are likely to be intrinsic characteristics of any live language. One of the first instances where such differences are mentioned can be found in the Bible, and nothing less than a human life is at stake:

And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand. (Judges 12: 5–6, King James version)

Forty two thousand people lost their lives since they were not able to pronounce one single sound; namely the initial letter in the word ‘shibboleth’. The Ephraimites gave themselves away by not being able to utter /ʃ/. Their dialect lacked this sound and they only came up with /s/. In the course of time this story enriched the English lexicon with the word ‘shibboleth’, still in use to indicate a word (or a custom) that distinguishes one group of people from another.

2.1 Old English

Old English dialect differences are described in considerable detail for example in Baugh and Cable (2012) and Crystal (2005). The latter identifies four Old English dialects: Kentish, Northumbrian, Mercian, and West Saxon (2005: 34). These

enjoyed various amounts of prestige throughout the period, which is testified by the origin of the documents that have survived till the present day. For instance the majority of texts in Northumbrian date back to the 8th century, i.e. before the Vikings plundered this region and destroyed the well-known monasteries in Jarrow, Iona, and Lindisfarne. Similarly, the West Saxon dialect is represented mainly by texts from the period of King Alfred the Great (871–899) and later—the years when this kingdom was in the ascendancy. What evidence, however, is there of accent differences and potential standards of pronunciation?

Naturally, the period in question did not have any standardised spelling, which would appear a few centuries later with the advent of printing. What people living in this period used was some kind of a phonetic spelling system where ‘an Old English word would be spelled on the basis of how it sounded to the writer, who would instinctively follow his own pronunciation and assign the closest letters he could find’ (Crystal 2005: 41). Thus there were no fewer than three spellings for the modern word ‘merry’ (Crystal 2005: 37): *merry* (open-close front vowel, south-east of England), *myrry* (close front vowel with heavy lip-rounding, London), and *murry* (back vowel with heavy lip-rounding, south-west of England).

Evidence for asserting the existence of a pronunciation standard in the Old English period is only indirect. It is based on the uniformitarian principle, as defined by Labov (1972: 275): ‘the forces operating to produce linguistic change today are of the same kind and order of magnitude as those which operated in the past five or ten thousand years’. Hence we may presume that the dialects from those areas which happened to be dominant in a given period carried about them some amount of social prestige, much as those which happen to be prominent today tend to be popularly looked upon as more prestigious than others. Further, since the overwhelming majority of writings that have survived to this day come from scribes/monks, one can also suppose that the hierarchy of monasteries (or even the hierarchy of scribes within one monastery) dictated which forms were taken as those worth following. Because of the aforementioned phonetic spelling system, it is not unlikely that these written forms then should have made an impact on the pronunciation as well.

2.2 Middle English

The Middle English period is characterised by the dominance of French, which established itself as the dominant language after the Norman Conquest in 1066. It took no less than three and a half centuries before the English monarch could communicate with ease in the English language: it was Henry V, who reigned from 1413 to 1422 (Churchill 2005 [1956]: 404).

The dominant presence of French brought about something very unusual: all varieties of English at that time were viewed as mere dialects, and they were equally undesirable in the upper echelons of the society. Mugglestone (1995: 8) maintains that ‘all dialects in Middle English assumed an equality they were never after to attain’. Dialect differences are famously present in a very well-known tale from Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, namely the *Reeve’s Tale*. This tale depicts two Cambridge men called Alleyn and John, who speak in a pronounced northern accent. They are very clever and finally outwit Simkin, the miller, who speaks in a southern accent. Interestingly enough, the tale reverses the usual presumptions (albeit formed later on) about these two dialects: speakers of a northern accent are the more sophisticated ones.

The situation was, however, to change and the first writers on orthography and orthoepy knew exactly where the fashionable and prestigious forms were. Before attention is turned to them, it is worth pointing out that the 14th century provides one of the earliest records of the North-South divide. While the students and the miller from the tale apparently had no problem understanding each other, there is *Polychronicon*, a book by a monk called Ranulph Higden, where one can find that ‘all the speech of the Northumbrians, and especially at York, is so harsh, piercing, and grating, and formless, that we Southern men can hardly understand such speech’ (modern translation, qtd. in Crystal 2005: 216). Higden offers a shrewd observation as to the origin of the difference between the North and the South: he believes the dialect in the North is a product of the considerable distance from the King and his court as well as of the fact that all the noble cities and profitable harbours happen to be in the South.

Indeed, the growing dominance of London as the major cultural, political, and economic centre coupled with the two existing universities in Oxford and Cambridge made the South East a particularly influential region. Setting the standard was imminent and the need grew even bigger with the invention of printing.

Although the first book (William Caxton’s *The Recuyell of The Historyes of Troy*) was published in 1476, it took many decades before the effects of printing on the development of a standard variety became visible. It is now hard to imagine the situation in which Caxton found himself when setting up his printing business in London—a hotchpotch of spelling forms from various regions of England and foreign countries as well, large inconsistencies even within a single scribe, and obviously no body of authority to turn to for linguistic advice. To make matters worse, Caxton happened to live in an extremely turbulent era in terms of language change and variation: the period of the Great Vowel Shift (a basic description of the phenomenon can be found in Wells 1982: 184–8). As we know from recent sociolinguistic research (Chambers and Trudgill: 1998: 163–4) language change proceeds at a different pace at various stages and takes time before it enters the entire lexicon of one individual, let alone a group of speakers. It is also

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clear that some geographical areas must have been the innovators while in other areas the Great Vowel Shift has not been completed even after more than five hundred years (the existence of *town* pronounced as [tu:n] in Newcastle, cf. *Toon Army* as a label for Newcastle United FC supporters). Yet Caxton and his successors did succeed in setting a spelling standard. Crucially though for the present thesis, by doing so they paved the way to a growing unease about the spoken varieties of English. I fully concur with Crystal who maintains that

only after English was written down in a standardized form, and began to be taught in schools, did observers start to reflect about it, study it, and express their worries over how best to pronounce it, at which point the notion of a standard took on a spoken dimension. (2005: 225)

2.3 Early Modern English

Most of the writers who dealt with pronunciation matters in this era were largely concerned with them as a by-product of their major interest: they wanted to reform the spelling system. A case in point is John Hart, whose most influential book is *Orthographie* (1569). It advocates a radically new spelling system based on a one-to-one relationship between the sounds and the symbols that represent them. He classifies the sounds of English, describes their manner and place of articulation and describes London as the home of the best accent. The same opinion can be found in George Puttenham's *The Art of English Poesie*, in which the author defines the locus of the best pronunciation as follows: 'ye shall take the usuall speech of the Court and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx myles' (1589: 121, qtd. in Beal 2004a: 169). Puttenham also adds a social dimension to his description of the noblest accent: it is present in the speech of 'men civill and graciously behavoured and bred' (1589: 121, qtd. in Beal 2004a: 169). Neither Hart nor Puttenham actually recommended particular sounds to be adopted since they presumed that by mere mingling with those who possessed them one would acquire the desired mode of speech. Therefore, they did not blame those from provinces for speaking the way they did as their regional speech was not a mark of their inferiority or ignorance; provincials simply happened to live far from London and its environs.

The 17th century is characterised by continuous interest in English pronunciation. The prevailing opinion maintained that the best pronunciation was to be found in the capital and among those who were educated (Oxford and Cambridge universities, e.g. in Coles 1674, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 14). While the emerging standard was perceptible, in the 17th century it was in no way as mercilessly and viciously propagated as it would be in the following ones. Occasionally

though, one can see a creeping sentiment of the things to come. Owen Price, the schoolmaster, insists in his work called *The Vocal Organ* (1665) that he ‘has not been guided by our vulgar pronunciation, but that of London and our Universities, where the language is purely spoken’ (qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 14). The problematic notion is, of course, the word ‘vulgar’—so often used up until now to condemn nonstandard variants and their users alike. Likewise, Dobson (1957: 309) pays attention to the works of Christopher Cooper, who in his treatise called *The English Teacher* (1687) labels certain forms as ‘barbarous’, and claims that speakers should avoid them. However, Sheldon (1938: 198) notes that Cooper’s ‘barbarous’ variants are not associated with any region or class. Beal (2004a: 170) insists that ‘no 17th century grammarian advises his reader to avoid this or that pronunciation because it is heard only among the lower classes. It is clear that the feeling had not yet grown up that pronunciation was a class shibboleth’.

The 17th century still describes (rather than prescribes) a localised variety of spoken English. The 18th century seeks ‘instead to *codify* a non-localized supra-regional standard, and thus to displace the linguistic diversities of accent that currently pertained’ (my italics, Mugglestone 1995: 16).

2.4 Modern English: the 18th century

The 18th century brought about numerous changes in the society, most of which were connected with the Industrial Revolution causing ‘decisive reorganisation of the society’ (Williams 1976: 61). Perkin (1969: 176) claims that one of ‘the most profound and far reaching consequences of the Industrial Revolution [was] the birth of a new class society’. Since language is inseparable from its users, it hardly comes as a surprise that the 18th century also altered dramatically the way the English viewed their own language.

The market for good pronunciation was created in the course of the 18th century for several reasons. The main one is undoubtedly ‘the suddenly well-to-do bourgeois [who] were trying to rise above their stations’ (Sheldon 1938: 201). Beal (2008a: 23) expresses a similar view when she talks of ‘a socially-aspiring middle-class, who suffered from [...] linguistic insecurity [and] created a demand for explicit guides to “correct” usage in both grammar and pronunciation’; elsewhere (2004a: 170), she also lists other factors that helped to promote the idea: the rise of provincial towns and cities (especially in the North of England, Scotland, and Ireland), the consequences of the Act of Union (1707), and the expansion of education.

In 1712 Jonathan Swift sends a letter to the leader of the then government. The letter is called *A proposal for correcting, improving and ascertaining the English tongue* and presents arguably the first outburst of criticism of such outspokenness.

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My LORD; I do here, in the Name of all the Learned and Polite Persons of the Nation, complain to your LORDSHIP, as *First Minister*, that our Language is extremely imperfect; that its daily Improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily Corruptions; that the Pretenders to polish and refine it, have chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities; and, that in many Instances, it offends against every Part of Grammar. (qtd. in Bolton 1966: 108)

Swift's torrent of abuse deals with grammar in particular and the rest of the text reveals that 'imperfect' pronunciation did not trouble him at all. Fixing the spoken word was still a thing of the future. The linguists of the first half of the 18th century were, however, not totally ignorant of speech 'imperfections' of their time. James Greenwood, the grammarian and schoolmaster, admits it would be useful to have a pronunciation standard along with a grammatical one. However, he also shrewdly observes the complexity of the task: 'I cannot dissemble my unwillingness to say anything at all on this head [orthoepy]; first, because of the irregular and wrong Pronunciation of the Letters and Words, which if one should go about to mend, would be a business of great Labour and Trouble, as well as Fruitless and Unsuccessful' (1711, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 22).

Samuel Johnson, the famous lexicographer, also dealt with the matters of pronunciation when preparing his masterpiece *A Dictionary of the English Language*. In 1747 he published *The Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language*, in which he promised to provide a work 'by which the pronunciation of our language may be fixed, and its attainment facilitated'. In the *Dictionary* itself, published eight years later, pronunciation is nevertheless largely neglected because, as Johnson humbly admits in the Preface, 'sounds are too volatile and subtle for legal restraints; to enchain syllables, and to lash the wind, are equally the undertakings of pride, unwilling to measure its desires by its strength' (qtd. in Bolton 1966: 152).

Thomas Sheridan, a student of Swift's, wonders in the preface to his *General Dictionary of the English Language* 'whether many important advantages would not be accrue both to the present age, and to prosperity, if the English language were ascertained, and reduced to a fixed and permanent standard' (1780:B1). Earlier, he observed that 'almost every country in England has its peculiar dialect' and insisted that 'one [...] preference, this is the court dialect, as the court is the source of fashions of all kinds. All the other dialects, are sure marks, either of a provincial, rustic, pedantic or mechanical education, and therefore have some degree of disgrace annexed to them' (1761: 29–30, qtd. in Beal 2004a: 172). The major difference between Sheridan (and his contemporaries) and orthoepists of the previous century was clearly the fact that the latter were 'content to locate the "best" speech, [whilst Sheridan] deliberately set out to define and "fix" an explicit standard' (Beal 2004a: 171). The framing ideology for Sheridan was that of social ambition as the dominant social force (Mugglestone 1995: 19). William

Johnston, in his *Pronouncing and Spelling Dictionary*, offers help to those ‘many who labour under the disadvantages of a wrong pronunciation [and who] are so sensible of these things, as to have earnest desires to acquire a right one’ (1764: v, qtd in Mugglestone 1995: 39).

While people in the 17th century had to overcome only geographical barriers, orthoepists in the 18th century erected social barriers as well, even though their proclaimed aim was exactly the opposite (as shown below). To speak a regional accent in the 17th century was a matter of misfortune; in the next century it would become a matter of abhorrence. Gone were the sentiments about ‘too volatile’ sounds and ‘lashing the wind’. The main task Sheridan’s era faced was to suppress all variability within what they perceived to be the standard accent: ‘[n]o evil so great can befall any language, as a perpetual fluctuation both in point of spelling and pronouncing’ (Sheridan 1786: v, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 24). Sheridan explains what his objective is by claiming he wants to

fix such a standard of pronunciation, by means of visible marks, that it may be in the power of every one, to acquire an accurate manner of uttering every word in the English tongue, by applying to that standard. In order to do this, the author of this scheme proposes to publish a Dictionary, in which the true pronunciation, of all the words in our tongue, shall be pointed out by visible and accurate marks. (1761: 29–30, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 33)

2.4.1 Pronouncing Dictionaries: Sheridan and Walker

The most common way of publishing advice on ‘proper’ pronunciation was a pronouncing dictionary. Sheridan’s was the first comprehensive one, but by far the most successful one (reprinted over 100 times by 1904; Beal 2004a: 129) was *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* by John Walker, which was first published in 1791. Such was the impact that

by the end of the nineteenth century, John Walker [...] had almost become a household name, so that manuals of etiquette could refer to those obsessed with linguistic propriety as trying to “out-Walker Walker”. [...] He had in effect become one of the icons of the age, commonly referred to as “Elocution Walker”, just as Johnson had come to be labelled “Dictionary Johnson” in the public mind. (Mugglestone 1995: 41)

Walker introduced a different concept of the prestige accent. As has been noted above, orthoepists of the previous two centuries attempted to merely locate the ‘best’ accent, their counterparts towards the end of the 18th century endeavoured to fix it, and this was to be achieved by means of providing a non-

localisable model of speech. It was an important step towards the establishment of RP. Orthoepists like Walker were undoubtedly buoyed by the success prescriptive grammarians had achieved. Double negatives and double comparatives were ‘gradually eliminated from [...] the public discourses over the whole country, though their use could and did continue in the localized norms of speech’ (Mugglestone 1995: 26). Likewise, the national standard of spelling had emerged, which suppressed the enormous variability that had existed before. The likes of Walker and Sheridan faced an uphill struggle, though, when they set out to codify the spoken word in a similar way. Not that they did not realise how much more difficult their task was. For instance, Walker (1791: vi) concedes that ‘a degree of versatility seems involved in the very nature of language’, but it did not make their determination wither away; on the contrary, they only took it as an impetus to intensify their effort.

Mugglestone (1995:26) stresses the fact that the natural state of humans (including pronunciation, of course) was evidently not good enough for the 18th century. Nature needed to be reformed by art and reason because, as Alexander Bicknell insists in his book called *Grammatical Wreath*, ‘nature leaves us in a rude and uncultivated form [and] it is our business to polish and refine ourselves. Nature gives the organs, it is ours to acquire the skilful performance upon them’ (1796; qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 26). This appeal for linguistic refinement is in many ways similar to the one in operation today (cf. Beal 2008a); there was, however, an added dimension to it in the 18th century. It was not in the interest of only individuals to refine their pronunciation. It was an issue of national honour. English orthoepists of the period in all likelihood casted envious glances over the English Channel to L’Académie Française—an institution that had been in operation for about 150 years and whose job was to purify the French language and to prevent any impurities from entering it. In spite of the fact that the calls for establishing such an institution in England fell on deaf ears, the state of profound anxiety over their ‘correct’ pronunciation seems to have remained with the English ever since.

A ready answer to the question why it was Walker’s *Dictionary* that enjoyed such an unprecedented amount of fame and recognition is that it filled the void in the market in a much better way than the others: it was easy-to-use, comprehensive, authoritative, and, above all, Walker turned out to possess some prophetic skills when it came to rival variants. Most of the variants he chose out of two (or even more) competing ones were those which eventually prevailed. Despite the *Dictionary* being so popular, I would attribute this achievement to Walker’s good nose for innovations rather than to the success of the *Dictionary* already in circulation. Beal (2004a: 132) voices the same opinion when she dismisses Ellis’s (1869: 624) complaint about the fact that Walker described and prescribed the accent of a society he did not belong to, thereby being insufficiently acquainted with its

speech. She, in fact, directly links Walker's success with the fact that he was 'on the fringe of "polite" society and loosely connected to the networks of the powerful and influential [...] which made him, according to social network theory, most likely to be an innovator' (cf. Milroy 1987).

Walker's *Dictionary* has been discussed ever since the early days of philology as an academic discipline. The bone of contention is the reliability of the information in the dictionary. Some linguists maintain that the prescriptive nature of the work prevented the author from observing the real state of things around him. Holmberg (1964: 10) makes a general claim about orthoepists of the 18th century: 'they were sometimes more anxious to teach what they believed was correct than to record the pronunciation they actually heard or used'. Ellis, the first dialectologist, expresses the same opinion: he talks of Walker and Sheridan as 'those word-pedlars, those letter-drivers, those stiff-necked pedantic philosophical, miserably informed, and therefore supremely certain, self-confident and self-conceited orthographers' (1869: vol. I, 155). On the other hand, there are linguists (such as Wyld, 1936: 183) who believe that Walker 'must be placed with the most reliable and informing writers of his class'. Beal explains that pronouncing dictionaries (and Walker's *Dictionary* is a case in point) provide valuable insight into at least one variety of English, namely the 'proto-RP' (1999: 60). Furthermore, Beal reconciles the opposing views expressed by Ellis and Wyld by pointing out their different focuses; she observes that

Ellis [...] was interested in dialects so it is understandable that he would react to Walker's representation of a prestigious standard and, to a certain extent, the fossilization of this eighteenth-century standard in later reprints [whereas] Wyld was interested in the development of Standard and Modified Standard pronunciation, and so would be interested in the socio-linguistic information provided by Walker. (Beal 2004a: 129–30)

The pronouncing dictionaries were largely successful. Despite their relatively high price—Altick (1957: 51) claims that it was over a pound at the beginning of the nineteenth century—they enjoyed a wide circulation, most notably in the educational system of that time, for which it was a welcome means of instilling the pronunciation standard into pupils. The biggest objection raised against the dictionaries was concerned with their size and how impractical they were to use as reference books. Boswell ([1791] 2011: vol. II, 161) sums up the argument by quoting Samuel Johnson, who admitted that Sheridan's dictionary was a fine piece of work but 'you cannot always carry it about with you: and, when you want the word, you have not the Dictionary'. The orthoepists, however, did not conceive of their dictionaries as primarily works of reference. They recommended that they be used as textbooks which require daily practice. Johnston (1746: 41, qtd. in Muggleston 1995: 39) gives clear instructions as to how people should

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use his dictionary: '[t]hree quarters of an hour, employed in pronouncing words in this distinct manner, in the order in which they occur, would be a sufficient exercise at a time [...] and this exercise repeated two or three times in a day, as affairs will permit, for a month together, will carry you several times through the book, and give you a general knowledge and practice of a right pronunciation'. The best method was daily practice rather than occasional reference when in doubt. What is interesting in connection with the next century (and the next subchapter) is the call for smaller and less expensive editions of the dictionaries. Russel (1801: 13, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 37) wanted an edition which would 'be portable with convenience' and, above all, affordably priced even for those 'who cannot, without inconvenience, spare a guinea'. An upsurge in cheap 'penny manuals' in the nineteenth century is a direct answer to Russel's demand.

The pronouncing dictionaries were not the only way Sheridan and Walker helped disseminate 'proper' pronunciation, though. They were both very active in giving lectures throughout Britain, and the number of people they attracted was certainly not low. Watkins (1817: 79, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 44) informs us that 'upwards of six hundred subscribers, at a guinea each, besides occasional visitors' regularly attended Sheridan's lectures.

From today's perspective, the whole prescriptive enterprise of the 18th century (and later periods) is strikingly paradoxical: 'it was social harmony rather than social hegemony [that people thought would] emerge as a consequence of prescriptive endeavour, [with the] "ill consequences" of accent difference being removed [and] with the adoption of a new and, in particular, a neutral standard for all.' (Mugglestone 1995: 31). Sheridan believed he was a missionary bringing new equality in speech and his ultimate goal was to unite the entire nation. Not much time was needed to reveal how ill-advised this way of thinking about accents was.

Furthermore, it may seem hard to believe to people today that such large numbers of people should have given up their own reason and should blindly have followed the rules set out by a few individuals (Johnson, Sheridan, Walker). There is hardly any more suitable piece of evidence to illustrate the extremity of some people's defeatism (when faced with the task of finding the 'best' variants) than Lord Chesterfield's letter to *The World* magazine in 1754:

I give my vote for Mr Johnson to fill that great and arduous post. And I hereby declare that I make a total surrender of all my rights and privileges in the English language, as a freeborn British subject, to the said Mr Johnson, during the term of his dictatorship. Nay more, I will not only obey him, like an old Roman, as my dictator, but, like a modern Roman, I will implicitly believe in him as my pope, and hold him to be infallible. (1754, qtd. in Crystal 2005: 413)

The English language, according to Lord Chesterfield, was in imminent danger of being torn apart by vicious ‘barbarisms’ and nothing less than a tyranny of a linguistic dictator may have prevented the ultimate fall.

It would, nonetheless, be misleading to think that the prescriptive paradigm gained unanimous support. At least two linguists did not shy away from expressing their serious reservations about it, and it is perhaps not surprising that both are still considered to be one of the greatest of all time. The first is Samuel Johnson, whose comment reveals his appreciation of the beauty of English accents. He claims that ‘a small intermixture of provincial peculiarities may, perhaps, have an agreeable effect, as the notes of different birds concur in the harmony of the grove, and please more than if they were all exactly alike’ (Boswell [1791] 2011: vol. II, 159). The other linguist, Noah Webster, explicitly warns against the dangers of prescriptive ideology and its seemingly egalitarian aims. Two years before Walker’s *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* appears he dismisses attempts to fix a standard as ‘absurd’ and ‘unjust’ (1789: 25) and he goes on to explain that

[w]hile all men are on a footing and no singularities are accounted vulgar and ridiculous, every man enjoys perfect liberty. But when a particular set of men, in exalted stations, undertake to say “we are the standards of propriety and elegance, and if all men do not conform to our practice, they shall be accounted vulgar and ignorant”, they take a very great liberty with the rules of the language and the rights of civility. (Webster 1789: 24–5)

2.4.2 ‘Proto RP’: comparison of Walker and Jones

Below is a piece of text, notoriously known by all those whose academic specialisation is phonetics and phonology. I decided to add one sentence (the very last one) with the aim of including one particular feature: /wh/ in *which*. The text is transcribed according to the advice found in Walker’s *Dictionary* and Jones’s *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (4th edition, 1937), thereby revealing the phonology of ‘proto-RP’.

Please call Stella. Ask her to bring these things with her from the store: Six spoons of fresh snow peas, five thick slabs of blue cheese, and maybe a snack for her brother Bob. We also need a small plastic snake and a big toy frog for the kids. She can scoop these things into three red bags, and we will go meet her Wednesday at the train station, which was renovated last month.

Walker's *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791)

pli:z ko:l stɛl æsk hɛɪ tu: bliŋ ði:z θiŋz wið hɛ frɒm ðɛ stɔ:ɪ siks spɜ:nz ɒv frɛʃ
 sno: pi:z faɪv θɪk slæbz ɒv bliu tʃi:z ænd me:bi: e: snæk fɔɪ hɛɪ bliðlɪ bɒb wi:
 o:lso: ni:d e: smɔ:l plæstɪk sne:k ænd e: bɪg toi frɔŋ fɔɪ ðɛ kɪdz ʃi: kæn sku:p ði:z
 θiŋz mtu: θɪɪ: ɹɛd bægz ænd wi: wɪl go: mi:t hɛɪ wenzdi: æt ðɛ trɛ:n ste:ʃn hwɪʃ
 wɒz renɒvɛ:tɪd læst mʌnθ

Jones's *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (1937)

pli:z kɔ:l stɛlə ɑ:sk hə tə bliŋ ði:z θiŋz wið hə frəm ðə stɔ: siks spɜ:nz əv frɛʃ
 snou pi:z faɪv θɪk slæbz əv blu: tʃi:z ənd meɪbi ə snæk fə hə bliðə bɒb wi: ɔ:lsoʊ
 ni:d ə smɔ:l plæstɪk sneɪk ənd ə bɪg toi frɔŋ fə ðə kɪdz ʃi: kæn sku:p ði:z θiŋz ɪntə
 θɪɪ: ɹɛd bægz ən wi: wɪl gou mi:t hə wenzdi ət ðə trɛɪn steɪʃn wɪʃ (hwɪʃ) wəz
 renəvɛɪtɪd lɑ:st mʌnθ

Before the two transcriptions are analysed and compared, it needs to be pointed out that some differences are caused by transcriptional preferences; Jones does not use /ɪ/ and /ɒ/ but clearly states that he perceives the difference in both quality and quantity between /i:/ and /i/, as well as /ɔ:/ and /ɔ/ (1937: xiii). In this section I only aim to provide a simple comparison of the two transcriptions.

- **rhoticity**: while Walker's model is rhotic, Jones's is not. Admittedly, Walker remarks that 'the /r/ is only a jar, and not a definite a distinct articulation like the other consonants' (1791: 13). The change had been under way in the south-east of England for more than one hundred years (Beal 2004a: 154) but remained a hotly-debated shibboleth throughout the nineteenth century.
- **schwa**: Walker does not use the symbol at all; instead he employs [ʌ] for /-er/ endings and 'full' vowels in other unaccented syllables, e.g. *renovated* in the text. The appearance of schwa is intertwined with non-rhoticity, but it is something that must have been present before Walker's *Dictionary* since the lexicographer complains that the 'lowest of the people totally sink them [i.e. unaccented vowels], or change them, into some other sound' (1791: 23).
- **FACE** vowel: while Jones's transcription corresponds with today's RP, Walker has a long monophthong. The first mentions of FACE realised as a diphthong only appear at the beginning of the next century (e.g. Batchelor 1809 and Smart 1836).
- **GOAT** vowel: again, it is a monophthong for Walker and as with FACE it becomes diphthongised in the 19th century. Jones's transcription has the onset as a back rounded vowel [o]. Later, it would become unrounded and centralised to give the modern form [əʊ].

- **BATH** vowel: the difference between the two versions is the same as there is between the North and the South of England today, although Walker’s preferred pronunciation is not a fully-open [a] (as it is in northern England today) but rather the so-called ‘ash’ vowel [æ]. Walker maintains that ‘pronouncing the *a* in *after*, *answer*, *basket*, *plant*, *mast*, etc as long as in *half*, *calf*, etc. borders very closely on vulgarity’ (1791: 10). It seems likely, according to Beal (2004a: 141), that the short [æ] vowel was lengthened to [æ:] and only then did the retraction to [ɑ:] take place.
- **yod-dropping**: Walker’s [bliu] changes into Jones’s (and modern) [blu:]. It is an immensely complex feature that is discussed at some length in 3.2.2.5. *Blue* belongs to a set of words where [iu] changed to [ju], and then the ‘yod’ was dropped.
- **/wh/-cluster**: the difference between Walker and Jones is in the loss of [h]. However, it would be very misleading to label this as /h/-dropping (the pronunciation of *hammer* as [amə], for instance), which is a phenomenon with a rather different history (3.2.2.4). For Walker, however, it was the same phenomenon and he therefore insists on the [hw] cluster in his dictionary. Any omission of /h/ was in his eyes pure cockneyism (1791: xii).

2.5 Modern English: The Nineteenth Century

The orthoepists of the previous century essentially set out to achieve two things: to inform the public of the ‘correct’ pronunciation (to raise consciousness of the ‘correct’ forms) and to make the public correct their errors. An enormous wealth of nonstandard forms that have survived to this day tells us that in the latter point they failed considerably. The former, on the other hand, was carried out with remarkable success.

The nineteenth century operates with a firm idea in the mind; as Mugglestone (1995: 53) puts it, it is ‘a set of beliefs surrounding the emerging and non-localized “received pronunciation” which in themselves were often at some remove from linguistic reality, especially as far as the majority of the population were concerned’. This led the common public to believe that the ideal variety of spoken English is that ‘without an accent’, although it is, naturally, linguistically impossible. Any remnants of localised speech in one’s accent were markers of deviation from the idealised norm. Smart (1836: §178) insists that ‘the common standard dialect is that in which all marks of a particular place and residence are lost, and nothing appears to indicate any other habits of intercourse than with the well-bred and well-informed, wherever they may be found’.

The conviction that a non-localisable standard accent was superior to accents full of ‘mere provincialisms’ was also inspired by the findings of Charles Darwin.

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Sherman's *A Handbook of Pronunciation* informs its readers that '[l]anguage is the chief of those attainments which distinguish man from lower animals. The perfection and grace with which one speaks his mother tongue, is justly regarded as an index of his culture and associations' (1885: iii). The author then goes on to explain that the same status that man has compared to other species (namely that of superiority), the 'best' accent has compared to the other ones.

Linguistic behaviour was regarded on a par with other codes of behaviour. Thus some variants were deemed as unbecoming of gentlemanly conduct. Using certain variants was as unworthy as, for instance, listening at doors, reading other people's correspondence, or wearing unsuitable clothes.

It is said that in dress the true gentleman is distinguished by faultless linen, and by accurately-fitting gloves. And in education he is distinguished by his unfailing self-possession and by good spelling ... he ought never to trip into the vulgarism of mispronouncing his words. They are the faultless linen and the accurately-fitting gloves; the little things that carry with them the "ring" of true gentility. (Brewer 1866: 75, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 164)

Decency, gentility, propriety, refinement were all viewed as magic keys that should open many a door. Not that all people of the period took to this idea of self-improvement. For instance, Macaulay (1878: 338, qtd. in Malchow 1992) complains in a letter to his wife that 'the curse of England is the obstinate determination of the middle class to make their sons what they call gentlemen'. This was, however, just one feeble trickle that could never have changed the torrent.

Another 19th-century watchword is politeness. As Crystal (2005: 371) reveals, the adjective 'polite' could be used with a host of nouns, most notably with 'literature, science, education, the arts, entertainment [...] scholars and wits, nations and languages'. The adjective was essentially used to convey the meaning of 'not too difficult, to be enjoyed by all without any special prior knowledge'. Thus, a "polite lecture" would be one which avoided specialized or arcane learning [and] "polite language" would be a use of English which was widely intelligible and acceptable—polished, elegant, correct' (Crystal 2005: 371). A more detailed account of what politeness actually meant to the people of the period is offered in Vickery:

Politeness [...] meant much more than mere etiquette, and minding your ps and qs. It was an all-embracing philosophy of life, and a model for a harmonious society. It promoted openness and accessibility in social behaviour, but at the same time set strict standards of decorum for merchants and manufacturers to live up to. Indeed the social lubrication which politeness offered was one of its greatest attractions, because it offered a way for very different sorts of people to get along without violence. (2001: 10)

2.5.1 Penny manuals: reaching the masses

Upward social mobility created demand which even Walker's and Sheridan's dictionaries could not have satisfied entirely. Furthermore, as it has been mentioned above, the price of these dictionaries was considerably high. As a consequence, the so-called 'penny manuals' appeared and they tightened the screws of prescriptive ideology. Beal (2008a: 26) describes them as 'self-help books which concentrated on warning against the most obvious linguistic (and social) shibboleths'. Elsewhere (2004a: 179), she adds that they were 'aimed at the newly emerging lower middle class whose white-collar and service-based jobs demanded a veneer of gentility'. Whilst we can say that Sheridan and Walker took scientific (given the standards of science of their period) interest in the matters of pronunciation, these cheap leaflets were written by people who, by and large, lacked basic linguistic education—a large number of them were even published anonymously. Their effect is nicely summed up in Bailey (1996: 82): 'if there is one heritage of the nineteenth-century language culture that survives most vigorously, it is the institutionalization of hierarchy among linguistic variants. The nineteenth century is, in short, a century of steadily increasing linguistic intolerance'. The penny manuals were, among other things, full of comical anecdotes illustrating how embarrassing and vulgar it is if one does not know, for example, the rules of pronouncing /h/:

I have heard a person who was very well dressed, and looked like a lady, ask a gentleman, who was sitting behind her, if he knew whether Lord Murray has left any *Heir* behind him:- the gentleman almost blushed, and I thought stopped a little, to see whether the lady meant a *Son* or a *Hare*. (*Mind Your H's and Take Care of Your R's* 1866:16–17, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 131)

This particular shibboleth (discussed in more detail in 3.2.2.4) was fiercely criticised in these manuals. The front cover of another one depicts a gentlewoman with a gentleman who holds a big letter H and, with his hat obsequiously taken off, says 'Please, Ma'am, you've dropped something' (*Poor Letter H: Its Use and Abuse* 1854, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 134). Others thought that this letter was the most reliable indicator of one's breeding and encouraged people to use it the 'proper' way: here is an example from *The Letter H, Past, Present and Future*:

H, in speech, is an unmistakable mark of class distinction in England, as every person soon discovers ... I remarked upon this to an English gentleman, who replied – "It's the greatest blessing in the world, a sure protection against cads. You meet a fellow who is well-dressed, behaves himself decently enough, and yet you don't know exactly what

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to make of him; but get him talking and, if he trips upon his H's that settles the question. He's a chap you'd better be shy of". (Leach 1881: 10–11, qtd. in Beal 2004a: 182)

The fallacy of the self-appointed arbiters of speech is demonstrated in another self-help manual called *How Should I Pronounce?*. The author has it that '[s]ince cultivated people are, in general, presumed to speak accurately, accuracy in pronunciation comes naturally to be regarded as a sign of culture, and there is, therefore, a tendency to imitate the pronunciation of the cultured class' (Phyfe 1885: 13). What is completely disregarded in arguments of such a type are essential things like access to education, IQ estimations, and communicative skills; instead all that seems to be of importance is the superficiality of articulation that gives power to deliver judgements about other people—indeed, to condemn them as ignorant and illiterate. A similar observation is made by Mugglestone (1995: 63), who says that ‘“manner” and not “matter” was, it seemed, to be accorded the primary role in [...] notions of intellectual ability, as well as of social refinement’. A late nineteenth-century text openly warns against underestimating the significance of manners:

[t]he proverb which warns us against judging by appearances can never have much weight in a civilised community. There, appearance is inevitably the index of character. First impressions must, in nine times out of ten be formed from it, and that is a consideration of so much importance that no-one can afford to disregard it. (*Modern Etiquette in Public and Private*, 1888: 39, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 69)

2.5.2 The Dictates of the Written Form

Authorities in the previous centuries recommended being in ‘good company’ as the best way to acquire the ‘perfect’ accent. Admittedly, only a few had such an ambition. In the nineteenth century, however, an unprecedented number of people strived for a ‘better’ pronunciation. It was impossible, though, for such large masses to get the opportunity to mingle with those from the level of society they aspired to belong to; hence the extensive demand for the variety of teaching materials (pronouncing dictionaries, self-help books, and cheap penny manuals). A far-reaching consequence is the shift of focus from an oral to a written medium and the subsequent triumph of graphemes over phonemes. ‘For pronunciation the best general rule is, to consider those as the most elegant speakers who deviate least from the written words’, explained Johnson in his *Dictionary* (1755: i, qtd. in Crowley 1991: 98). For Johnson, the ideal situation clearly was if the two (spoken and written language) were in total concord. In popular thinking, the written word must have been superior when compared to

the spoken one for the following reasons: firstly, graphemes display far greater stability (they had been, more or less, fixed a century before attempts to fix the spoken language commenced, as was observed in 1.2), and secondly, writing is something that needs to be learned (often going to great pains when doing so) while speech just comes naturally in infancy. Knowledge of the written system thus indicates education. Needless to say, the latter argument could easily be reversed to claim that the spoken language should be established as the rule (if it comes first), but this way of thinking did not fit in with the prevalent ideology of that time.

Pronunciation shibboleths that came under intense prescriptive scrutiny for the divergence from spelling were for example /g/-dropping, /h/-dropping, /wh/-clusters, and /r/-dropping. Whilst they are all discussed in detail in parts dedicated specifically to them (3.2.2.1, 3.2.2.4, and the last two in 3.2.2.5), the last of them merits at least a passing mention here. /r/-dropping refers to the disappearance of /r/ 'before a consonant or in absolute final position' (Wells 1982: 218). Mugglestone (1991: 57–66) provides a full account of this phenomenon with respect to the poetry of John Keats (1795–1821). He came in for a lot of criticism during his life and also after his death for the 'vulgar' rhymes he produced in his poems. It was rhymes such as *thorns/fawns* that were thorns in the flesh for Keats's contemporaries. Gerard Manley Hopkins's complaint is a fine example of what many thought of Keats's rhymes:

there is one thing that Keats's authority can never excuse, and that is rhyming open vowels to silent *rs*, as *higher* to *Thalia*: as long as the *r* is pronounced by anybody, and it is by a good many yet, the feeling that it is there makes this rhyme most offensive, not indeed to the ear, but to the mind. (Hopkins 1880, in Beal 1999: 162)

The quote dismisses vocalised /r/ although, clearly, it is a change in progress and one can only wonder whether Hopkins himself was a rhotic or a non-rhotic speaker (his ear was not offended, after all). It did not matter, though, for pronunciation was inferior to spelling, and such rhymes as the one given in the quote were doomed as vulgarisms.

Mugglestone (1995: 103) introduces the term 'literate speakers' for those heavily influenced by spelling when making their pronunciation choices. Also, she goes on to consider a 'hyperliterate speaker', i.e. one who puts an /r/ even where there is none in the spelling. This phenomenon was, however, more tightly linked with /h/-dropping to give forms such as 'a horange' used for the common type of fruit.

The approach to phenomena such as /h/-dropping was rather qualitative (it may alternatively be called the 'either/or' approach). It would take about a hundred years before linguists like William Labov (1966) and Peter Trudgill (1974), in

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New York and Norwich respectively, would set up a new linguistic discipline: sociolinguistics. Their paradigm would totally change what had been in use before: they would approach their data quantitatively (sometimes called the ‘more-or-less’ approach) to show that the ideology of standardisation (with its binary absolutes) did not (fully) reflect the reality of speech communities. Instead, they found out that these variables (as they labelled them, cf. Trudgill 2000 or 4.3 here) were socially stratified, i.e. ‘speakers of all social groups [...] used varying percentages of [h] in response to the situational variables of formality, or the speaker variables of status, gender, or age’ (Mugglestone 1995: 54). In other words, they observed that people used standard variants more in more formal situations, that women tended to use them more than men or that younger speakers propelled linguistic change whereas older people were rather conservative. In short, they revealed the gross oversimplifications that the quantitative approach had been guilty of. Thus, they proved that language variation data was observable and meaningful, providing invaluable insight into the general mechanisms of language variation and change.

2.5.3 Accent and Social Class

‘Social class’ and ‘accent’ are two terms that belong to the keywords of this publication. It is significant that both of them underwent considerable changes during the period in question.

Accent had primarily been used to denote word stress and only slowly during the 18th century did it gain the meaning of a way of pronouncing words of a particular language variety. We find in the OED an entry from *The Spectator* that cites the writer and politician Joseph Addison (1711)—it testifies its novelty: ‘The Tone, or (as the French call it) the Accent of every Nation in their ordinary Speech’. It is one of the first examples where the word had acquired its new meaning.

‘Social class’ replaced a term which had been in use before, namely that of a ‘rank’. The crucial difference between the two lies in the fact that ‘rank’ was associated with the ‘assumptions of inherited hierarchy and unequal birth’ (Hughes 1988: 6) whereas ‘class’ enabled social advancement. It brought about a gradual appearance of the culture of self-improvement. Both geographical (improved ways of travelling, particularly the rapid development of railways) and social (the replacement of an agrarian social order with an urban one) mobility is characteristic of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries alongside with a whole new set of service and professional jobs. Mugglestone points out that these phenomena were not particularly new at that time; however, ‘it is the number and nature of the shifts in social level which is most striking, serving to create perceptions

(and associated stereotypes) not only of the “new rich”, but also of a new, and extensive middle section of society’ (1995: 73).

How radical the changes must have been is neatly illustrated by the following quote by Samuel Johnson (Boswell [1791] 2011: vol. I, 442). He insists that ‘[s] ubordination tends greatly to human happiness [and] contentions for superiority are very dangerous’. Such a sentiment would have been a rare thing a few decades later when the notion of ‘class’ had taken over—social class as a position that is created (or at least permits people to create it) rather than inherited (determined by birth).

It was inevitable that people’s attention turned to language issues. As Jernudd (1989: 3) shrewdly observes ‘it is in periods of transition [...] that puristic responses to language are especially likely to arise’. The aforementioned nouveau riche provide a case in point; they must have been doubly apprehensive about affirming their new social position and, crucially, not being identified with their original one. Such groups of people are particularly sensitive to linguistic shibboleths and proscribed variants, (Chambers 2002: 58–65).

Social class has always been a problematic notion. While the basis may be economic (Marx’s proletariat springs to mind), there are several other factors that determine it—in sociolinguistics are often-mentioned aspects such as education, pastime activities, occupation, and, unsurprisingly, language as well. The nineteenth-century concept of ‘social class’ was, in this respect, similar to the present one. Davis (1865: 16–17, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 69) makes it clear that ‘the wealthy man, great in his accumulation of riches, if he be not in possession of knowledge sufficient to command respect, and if he speak ungrammatically, is not considered a gentleman’. The chief reason why it is so is provided in what May (1987: 43) says about social class which ‘in a large part is what [a person] believes it to be and, more importantly, what others accept it to be’. The whole concept of social class is, naturally, a social construct. As such, it depends entirely on common consent. There was often felt to be ‘an unbridgeable gap of behaviour, attitude, and accent between the old aristocracy and the *nouveaux riches*’, insists Rubenstein (1981: 140). In other words, money alone could not buy people a place in an upper echelon of the society. As Mugglestone (1995: 77) points out, people ‘could proclaim their social origins in ways which transcended their import of property and possessions’. Thus, though an ordinary classical music teacher may have earned far less than a skilful manual worker, it would never have crossed anybody’s mind that the two should belong to the same social class. In fact, accent played such an important role in the act of social class assignment because it was often the most prominent sign that one could use to underline one’s superiority over another person—all the others were more or less connected with property and possessions.

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The concept of social class has come under considerable academic scrutiny as well with some important amendments made by Max Weber, the German sociologist. He introduced another concept, namely that of a ‘social status’, to complement the social class. Bendix (1992: 86) explains Weber’s notion of economic class and social status—the former is based on wealth and its unequal distribution, while the latter is determined upon ‘the social estimation of honor [which] is expressed by [...] a specific style of life [that] can be expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle’. Crucially, this is linked to ‘restrictions on social intercourse (that is, intercourse which is not subservient to economic [...] purposes)’ (Weber and Swedberg 1999: 89). With economic criteria having been assigned to social class, social status, according to Weber’s theory, should only be determined on external aspects like education, language, clothing, and manners.

Throughout the twentieth century sociologists operated with three main social classes, namely the ‘upper’, ‘middle’, and ‘working’ class (with further subdivisions possible, of course). What is interesting is that we can find the same division as far back as the beginning of the 18th century—in the famous *Proposal* by Jonathan Swift (1712, qtd. in Crystal 2005: 368): ‘[n]ot only the several Towns and Countries of *England*, have a different way of Pronouncing, but even here in *London*, they clip their Words after one Manner about the Court, another in the City, and a third in the Suburbs’. The Court, the City and the Suburbs roughly correspond with the upper, middle and working classes.

2.5.4 The Value of a ‘Proper’ Accent for Women

Both examples from the nineteenth-century penny manuals (p. 38) are concerned with women; it is not a coincidence because the century in question saw an upsurge of prescriptive advice specifically aimed at them. The same ideas of propriety, delicacy, and virtue were applied to women of all social classes, although differences, of course, existed. The main one lied in the fact that working class women could not enjoy the luxury of staying at home like their middle-class counterparts. The underlying sentiment dictated that ‘[the lady] must be even more on her guard than a man in all those niceties of speech, look, and manner, which are the special and indispensable credentials of good breeding’, as is expressed in a magazine called *Good Society* (1869: 49, qtd. in Lambek 2010). Purity was the hallmark of a ladylike conduct not only in their intimate life but also in their accent. Furthermore, ‘proper’ ladies were looked upon as those who were endowed with the responsibility to carry on the proverbial torch of linguistic correctness that had been lit in the 18th century by Walker. Some considered their task to be even saviour-like in its character: ‘will not our young ladies stand

up for their own mother tongue and, by speaking it in its purity, redeem its lost character?’ (Mackarness 1876: 121, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 172).

Most importantly, a ‘proper’ accent was a highly marketable commodity for ladies, without which success at the ‘marriage market’ was in jeopardy. /h/-dropping was viewed as a danger that could potentially destroy a marriage. It was therefore better to make things clear right at the beginning: ‘so important indeed is the question of the use of h’s in England ... that no marriage should take place between persons whose ideas on this subject do not agree’ (Hill 1902: 13, qtd. in Beal 2008a: 27).

The concern about a wife’s accent is naturally linked with the role wives fulfilled in the 19th century. Beal (2004a: 182) remarks that ‘pronunciation reflects status and since, in the nineteenth century (and later) society, a wife reflected her husband’s status, “vulgar” speech would be an acute social embarrassment’. Furthermore, many self-help books of the period stressed more practical consequences of acquiring a pleasant voice. Their comments did not simply proscribe certain variants but they also recommended that ladies should speak in a soft, low tone of a voice, because a loud voice was ‘extremely unladylike and degrading’ (*Hints to Governesses* 1856: 17, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 174). The practical consequence was related to the place where a woman naturally belonged: the home, where her pleasant gentle voice could create the real homely atmosphere because ‘a woman who reads aloud really well holds a power of pleasing difficult to over-estimate, since it is an every-day accomplishment, and eminently suited to home life (Mackarness 1876: 45, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 176)’. To put it simply, reading out aloud was a pastime activity at which women (wives) were supposed to shine and a ‘vulgar’ voice would surely have all but destroyed the pleasure. An ultimate warning is then found in yet another anonymous pamphlet called *How to Choose a Wife* (1854: 51, qtd. in Beal 2009: 51), where it is stated that ‘[p]erpetual nausea and disgust will be your doom if you marry a vulgar and uncultivated woman’.

Being a good and ‘proper’ spouse that befits her husband and helps to achieve (and does not thwart) his social ambition was, however, just one of the two main duties women were asked to perform. The other one was, of course, the role of a mother. Here women were under the same pressure as in their roles of wives because they would be the ones whose speech their children imitated, and a failure to set pronunciation standards could seriously hinder their children’s social advancement. ‘It is decidedly the duty of the mother to pronounce every word she utters distinctly, and in a proper tone, carefully avoiding, and strictly forbidding, the mis-pronunciation of any word’, advises the anonymous author of *The Mother’s Home Book* (1879, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 188). The point is also dramatically illustrated in *New Grub Street* (1891), a novel by George Gissing, in which one of the main characters, Mrs Yule, is scarcely ever allowed to talk to her

child lest she should contaminate her daughter's speech with her own 'imperfections'. When the child gets older and has learnt the basics of 'proper' speech, she asks her father bluntly: 'Why doesn't mother speak as properly as we do?' (1891: 171, qtd. in Mugglestone 1995: 188). Later, when the children had got older and had come into contact with the outside world full of linguistic 'vulgarisms', mothers would assume the role of a guardian of speech, promptly correcting any 'improprieties' their children might have contracted.

Observers in the nineteenth century did not fail to spot a very interesting sociolinguistic phenomenon, namely the fact that women tend to use more standard variants than men do. As *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen* (1839: 10, qtd. in Romaine 2000: 124) has it, women are 'more susceptible of external polish than Man is'. It is likely that women were forced to master all the linguistic nuances owing to the social and cultural pressure under which they were placed. Modern sociolinguistic research has, on a number of occasions, confirmed that women do use more statusful variants than men (cf. e.g. Labov 2001: 261–93, Chambers 1998: 115–58, Romaine 2000: 101–28). Whether it means that the sociocultural conditions have not really changed in the past one hundred and fifty years or so, I do not dare confirm or refute, even though Beal (2008a) presents a solid argument that the pressures today are basically the same as they were two centuries ago.

2.6 The Birth of RP

The person often credited with the first mention of 'Received Pronunciation' is Alexander Ellis. He says in the following quote from his major work called *On Early English Pronunciation* that

in the present day we may [...] recognise a received pronunciation all over the country, not widely differing in any particular locality, and admitting 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. (1869: 23)

Ellis, however, was not the first person to use these two words together. Walker in his dictionary makes use of this collocation on numerous occasions. For instance, he talks of 'a corrupt, but received pronunciation [of the letter "a"] in the words *any, many, catch, Thames*, where the *a* sounds like short *e*, as if written *enny, menny, ketch, Themes*' (1791: 12). The major difference between the two lies in the fact that Walker uses the term 'received' to talk of a single sound whereas Ellis extends the use of the term to an entire variety. The meaning is the same for both though: 'received' means acceptable in polite society. The accent is non-

localisable, which is a notable shift from how the ‘best’ accent was defined in the previous centuries, when it was firmly located in the capital. Ellis was well aware of the fact that the accent he described was far from a homogeneous one: ‘in as much as all these localities and professions are recruited from the provinces, there will be a varied thread of provincial utterance running through the whole’ (1869: 23). And, further, he insists that the accent exists ‘all over the country not widely differing in any particular locality, and admitting a certain degree of variety’ (1869: 23). The last part of the quote is truly interesting, particularly when the focus of this thesis turns to modern attitudes towards the prestige accent (1.7).

2.6.1 Public Schools and RP

The birth of RP is closely linked with the prominence of public school education (secondary schools such as Eton, Harrow, Winchester, and Westminster followed by university education at Cambridge or Oxford). The accent that students acquired during their adolescence and early adulthood ‘rapidly spread through the career structure which such an education opened up—in the civil and diplomatic service (especially abroad, as the Empire expanded) and the Anglican Church’ (Crystal 2005: 469). It seems that Received Pronunciation could hardly have had a better milieu to ensure its dissemination: young boys received their public school education during a period of considerable peer pressure. This period demonstrates profound susceptibility to change as far as people’s accents are concerned (Chambers 2002: 172–5). Secondary schools were, moreover, boarding schools, which resulted in the boys having all the links with their home broken. Whichever region they may have come from, the general attempt was to rid everyone of their regional affiliations, all the more so when it came to the matters of pronunciation. Honey (1991: 25) gives an example of a parent who sent one of his sons to Eton in the 1860’s claiming that ‘it is the object of the father, as a rule, to withdraw his son from local associations, and to take him as far as possible from the sons of his neighbours and dependants’. This led to a great amount of uniformity of speech within the public school accent, despite a few exceptions who appear to have resisted the pressure: e.g. William Gladstone, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, who was born in Liverpool (though was otherwise of purely Scottish ancestry) and whose accent contained discernible traces of northern English throughout his life (Honey 1991: 24).

There is little academic agreement regarding the role of public schools in the process of dissemination of RP. Honey, who generally tends to defend the standards of speech and grammar, holds the view that the process of acquiring the accent was unconscious and rather automatic; ‘new boys with local accents were simply shamed out of them by the pressure of the school’s “public opinion”’ (1991: 27).

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He likens the public school accent to the famous school tie—an immediate and obvious proof of one’s educational background. Milroy agrees with Honey that boys were shamed out of their local accents, but he firmly believes that the educational authorities played their part in the process. He does not find it possible that ‘a minority accent so uniform throughout the country could have been inculcated and maintained in any other way than consciously and deliberately’ (2001: 21).

By and large, public school graduates would climb up to the highest positions in the British society of their time. It is then not surprising that their accent (i.e. what would later be known under the name of RP) became a powerful symbol of prestige, intelligence, and education. In the nineteenth-century ‘the possession of a particular accent, uniquely based on the public schools, must have appeared as a guarantee that the speaker was educated’ (Milroy 2001: 20). This exclusivity would gradually disappear in the twentieth century (consequently changing the whole milieu surrounding RP and its status), but this is to anticipate Chapter 1.7.

The link with public boarding-schools was extremely strong. Jones in his first edition of the *English Pronouncing Dictionary* even names the accent ‘Public School Pronunciation’, only to switch to ‘Received Pronunciation’ in the next edition in 1926. Beal remarks that to speak RP at the beginning of the 20th century one ‘had to move in a very restricted social circle: that of the public-school educated’ (2004a: 185); hence the claim that RP is non-localisable (i.e. limited to a particular social circle rather than region-based). Honey (1988: 210) even introduces a new caste onto the scene, namely that of a ‘public school man’. It has been remarked that public-school students were, with more or less effort on the part of their teachers, shamed out of their regional accents. They formed a close-knit group of peers and such circumstances would, in all likelihood, lead to uniformity of speech. The process is well-known among sociolinguists as ‘dialect levelling’, with ‘educated people from different regional backgrounds increasingly coming into contact and accommodating to each other’s speech’ (Crystal 2005: 469). The case of RP is rather special insofar as it involved groups of people from various regional backgrounds acquiring a supraregional accent. Today, the process of dialect levelling usually means that people from various backgrounds come into contact and their dialects converge to create another regional (but levelled-out) dialect. Milton Keynes is a case in point (cf. Williams and Kerswill 1999, Kerswill and Williams 2005).

The quote from Jones on the previous page is also interesting because it recognises that in order to acquire RP one did not necessarily have to go to one of the ‘great public boarding-schools.’ It was one of the first small steps towards what would happen in the latter half of the twentieth century: the severance of the exclusive links between public schools and the educated accent. As a result, as is

shown in 1.7.1, at the end of the century there would be linguists announcing the (imminent) death of RP.

2.6.2 RP as a Middle-class Accent

Although it may seem that RP originated as an upper-class phenomenon, it is a rather mistaken belief. Milroy offers two reasons why RP (at least in its origin) is to be associated with the middle class:

- the highest class accents are not involved in the origin of successful changes (such changes diffuse in the middle ranges of society)
- RP seems to be a product of a high degree of upward social mobility among educated people (with an increasing number of prime ministers, bishops, army officers, higher civil servants, etc. of middle class background) (Milroy 2001: 27)

The fact that upper class members pay little heed to their pronunciation is well-established in sociolinguistics. The chief reason is their social security and an obvious lack of social ambition: there are no higher rungs of the social ladder (cf. Chambers 2002: 53–9). In the past two hundred years or so, self-appointed arbiters of speech have been raging against /g/-dropping (see Mugglestone 1995: 152–5 for a detailed account): a typically working-class feature where the pronunciation of *-ing* endings is [m] rather than [ŋ], often marked in writing with an apostrophe to give forms like *shootin'*. Not many years ago were members of the highest echelons of English society heard pronounce words such as *shooting* with the voiced alveolar nasal [n] rather than with its velar counterpart [ŋ]. They did not pay attention to this hotly-debated shibboleth, for there was little danger of them being mistaken for working-class people. This only confirms what was said earlier: RP is essentially a middle-class phenomenon and it was '[t]he access of the Victorian middle class to a high standard of education [that] seems to have been a vital factor in the establishment and diffusion of RP' (Milroy 2001: 27).

2.6.3 How to Approach RP?

In 1917 Daniel Jones, the famous phonetician, published the first edition of his *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (since then there has been as many as eighteen editions; the latest one published in 2011). He is certainly to be thought of as a modern linguist, in as much as he did not want to prescribe the 'correct' sounds but rather describe those he could hear educated people use. In the preface to the first edition, Jones informs the readers that

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the object of the present book is to record, with as much accuracy as is necessary for practical linguistic purposes, the pronunciation used by a considerable number of cultivated Southern English people in ordinary conversation [...] the book is a record of *facts*, not theories or personal preferences. No attempt is made to decide how people *ought* to pronounce; all that the dictionary aims at doing is to give a faithful record of the manner in which certain people do pronounce. (1917: vii)

On the face of it, Jones could hardly have done more to ensure his model is taken descriptively rather than prescriptively. He was not the first to attempt to approach the issues of pronunciation from a descriptive perspective, though. Sweet (1890: 3) expresses a similar view when he asserts that ‘language only exists in the individual, and [...] such a phrase as “standard English pronunciation” expresses only an abstraction. Reflect that it is absurd to set up a standard of how English people *ought* to speak, before we know how they actually *do* speak’.

Despite all these precautionary remarks, the general public got a prescriptive hold of the *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (cf. Milroy 1992:9), for which, however, Jones and Sweet are to blame as well. As Beal (2004a: 184) observes, ‘in confining their descriptions of “English” pronunciation to that of their own social group, Jones and Sweet unwittingly promoted RP as the norm both for British readers and for foreign learners of English’. Also, the time was not ripe for dictionaries to be taken descriptively by the masses that had long been flogged by the prescriptive whip in the hands of Sheridan, Walker and the innumerable penny manuals. They were simply not used to taking what they saw in pronouncing dictionaries as a description of how a certain group of people pronounced words; they thought the sounds were there to be immaculately imitated. To give an example, Wyld maintains that RP ‘is superior, from the character of its vowels, to any other form of English, in beauty and clarity, and is therefore, if for no other reason, the type best suited to public speaking’ (1934, qtd. in Crowley 1991: 213).

Moreover, it is worth pointing out who the intended readers of Jones’s pronunciation model were. A few years before the publication of his *English Pronouncing Dictionary* Jones wrote in *The Pronunciation of English* that the book was aimed at

English students and teachers, and more especially [at] students in training colleges and teachers whose aim is to correct cockneyisms or other undesirable pronunciations in their scholars. At the same time it is hoped that the book may be found of use to lecturers, barristers, clergy, etc., in short all who desire to speak in public. The dialectal peculiarities, indistinctiveness and artificialities which are unfortunately so common in the pronunciation of public speakers may be avoided by the application of the elementary principles of phonetics. (1909, qtd. in Crowley 1991: 165–6)

Here Jones can be seen in a rather more prescriptive light. Beal (2004a: 188) rightly observes that one of the effects would unavoidably make ‘teachers all over the country attempt to eradicate those same “marks of disgrace” identified by eighteenth-century authorities such as Walker and Sheridan [and] these teachers would, at the very least, instil into their pupils a sense of inferiority of their native accent and dialect’. Upton (2008: 237) talks of Jones as a person ‘living in a hierarchical, south-east focused and male-dominated world’, thus his (=Jones’s) ‘stance on a model accent was understandable’. Indeed, the pronunciation Jones offered in his dictionary was

most usually heard in everyday speech in the families of Southern English persons whose men-folk have been educated at the great public boarding-schools. This pronunciation is also used by a considerable proportion of those who do not come from the South of England but who have been educated at these schools. The pronunciation may also be heard, to an extent which is considerable though difficult to specify, from Natives of the South of England who have not been educated at these schools. (1917: viii)

In the course of the nineteenth century, the idea of RP as a non-localisable accent was reinforced. Lloyd (1894: 52, qtd. in MacMahon 1998: 393) writes that ‘the perfect English is that which is admittedly correct, while giving the least possible indication of local origin’. In modern sociolinguistic terms: RP displayed all the features of a sociolect: ‘a variety or lect which is thought of as being related to its speakers’ social background rather than their geographical background’ (Trudgill 2003: 122).

As far as the first half of the twentieth century is concerned, not much change regarding the social status of Received Pronunciation can be detected. According to Beal (2004a: 188) ‘[the] consensus as to the superiority of this variety [=RP] seems to hold until the end of World War II’. Without any doubt, the two world wars, and the subsequent process of decolonisation were sources of major social changes, which, however, were not observed immediately.

The unchanging status of RP after World War II is illustrated by the following quote from Abercrombie:

The existence of R.P. gives accent judgements a peculiar importance in England, and perhaps makes the English more sensitive than most people to accent differences. In England, Standard English speakers are divided by an ‘accent-bar’, on one side of which is R.P., and on the other side, all other accents. [...] There is no doubt that R.P. is a privileged accent; your social life, or your career, or both, may be affected by whether you possess it or not. ([1951] 1965: 13)

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Abercrombie chose the term ‘accent-bar’ for one particular reason: in the 1950’s and 1960’s there was another term very similar to the one he coined, namely the ‘colour-bar’, which was used to ‘voice concerns about the discrimination against persons of colour in a Britain which had as yet no equal opportunities legislation’ (Beal 2004a: 188).

To speak RP was vital in many professions. Army officers and the Church of England clergymen are mentioned in Honey (1991: 30–1). While the clergymen belonging to the Church of England spoke RP, others (most notably Roman Catholics) employed people with distinct regional (Irish or continental) accents.

2.6.4 The Role of the BBC

Received Pronunciation is very often dubbed ‘the BBC accent’ (cf. Roach et al. 2011 and the Introduction). Indeed, its associations with the British Broadcasting Corporation have been very strong ever since the BBC was established in 1922. There are two opposing views as to what influence (if any) the BBC (has) had on RP and its diffusion.

The first view is represented e.g. by Honey, who stresses the importance of ‘the careful selection of announcers and presenters with RP accents’ (1991: 31) as well as the establishment of the BBC’s *Advisory Committee on Spoken English* in 1926. Honey also asserts that ‘from the 1920’s to at least the 1960’s many people from non-standard accent backgrounds were influenced in the direction of RP by the model presented by BBC radio’ (1991: 33). At the beginning, as Jones (1926:112, qtd. in Bolton and Crystal 1969: 103) claims, the BBC only wanted speakers with similar accents; they had to follow a set of guidelines ‘to secure some measure of uniformity in the pronunciation of broadcast English, and to provide announcers with some degree of protection against the criticism to which they are, from the nature of their work, peculiarly liable’. The link between RP and the BBC was immensely strong. Strang (1970: 45) claims that ‘if we can agree to use RP for the variety of speech heard from British-born national newscasters on the BBC we shall have a general idea of the kind of accent we are talking about’. Beal (2004a: 187) is also convinced that the amount of exposure had profound influence upon the target audience—RP as the accent of radio broadcasting became associated with intelligence and reliability during the Second World War.

Linguists from the opposing group challenge the assumption that one’s exposure to a given accent makes people adopt its features. Milroy (2001: 30) voices his opinion that the mere ‘exposure to RP may enable one to imitate it, but not to speak it habitually and carry on a full conversation in it’. He goes on to claim that ‘the use of broadcasting has probably had very little effect in spreading its use by speakers’ (2001: 30). A view like this can also be found in *Language Style as*

Audience Design, a paper by Bell (1984), in which the author expresses his conviction that newscasters do not set new fashions; in fact, they follow them.

Another contentious issue related to the relationship between the BBC and RP concerns the accent policy of the BBC. While Wells is convinced that '[u]ntil the early 1970's, this [=RP] was the accent demanded in its announcers by the BBC', Abercrombie offers a different take on the BBC and its policy:

[a]ll BBC announcers did speak RP, it is true, but in fact that was an accidental by-product of another policy: that BBC employees—administrators as well as announcers—should be of good social position, with appropriate interests and tastes. [...] The question of accent never arose; all suitable applicants naturally spoke RP. (1991: 49)

The first director of the BBC and the most prominent figure in the process of its foundation, Lord John Reith, was, interestingly enough, not an RP speaker at all. He was born in Stonehaven in Aberdeenshire and kept his Scottish accent not only while for working for the BBC (1922–38) but also during his job for the governments of Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill (he was appointed Minister of Information in the former government, though he held the post only for a few months in 1940). His own regional accent notwithstanding, he desired to set a standard for his employees:

Since the earliest of broadcasting the BBC has recognised a great responsibility towards the problems of spoken English. [...] Tendencies might have been observed and either reinforced or resisted. As the broadcaster is influential, so also is open to criticism from every quarter in that he addresses listeners of every degree of education, many of whom are influenced by local vernacular and tradition. There has been no attempt to establish a uniform spoken language, but it seemed desirable to adopt uniformity of principle and uniformity of pronunciation to be observed by Announcers with respect to doubtful words. The policy might be described as that of seeking a common denominator of educated speech. (Lloyd James 1928: Foreword, qtd. in Crystal 2005: 470)

Lord Reith's words reveal several things. First of all, it is the fact that the BBC was aware of the task of setting (or rather following) certain pronunciation standards. Then, we can see that the BBC took precautions to protect itself from unnecessary criticism by opting against regional voices (the supraregional accent provided unquestionable advantages since it arguably prevented a lot of possible bias-related complaints). Last but not least, the *Advisory Committee on Spoken English* focused on individual words rather than the accent as a whole. When the committee was established, it was chaired by the poet laureate Robert Bridges, who could consult those 'doubtful words' with Daniel Jones and George Bernard Shaw. The committee published a list of words with their 'correct' pronunciations

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in a manual called *Broadcast English*. The first two editions were only published with a three-year gap in between them (in 1928 and 1931) and Crystal (2005: 470–1) offers a list of examples from the second edition, noting that the editors found it necessary to make changes from the first edition. The pronunciation of ‘garage’ is a case in point. While the first edition had advised the original French pronunciation, the second one concedes that ‘[g]arage has been granted unconditional British nationality, and may now be rhymed with *marriage* and *carriage*’ (Lloyd James 1931, qtd. in Crystal 2005: 470).

Despite the rather contradictory opinions as to what the precise role of the BBC has been, we can safely conclude that the BBC has been influential in at least raising the awareness of RP. As a result of this, the British people (lay people as well as academics) very often use the term ‘the BBC accent’ as a synonym to RP; and no matter how (in)accurate lay people’s definition of RP may be, they ‘can recognise it when they hear it, and they have a pretty good idea whether they themselves speak it or not’ (Abercrombie [1951] 1965: 12).

2.7 RP Today

The status of RP after the Second World War seems to have changed dramatically. In spite of Abercrombie’s comment about the ‘accent-bar’, RP gradually lost its unique position. Not more than eleven years after this comment, Gimson states that ‘RP itself can be a handicap if used in inappropriate social situations, since it might be taken as a mark of affectation, or a desire to emphasize social superiority’ (1962: 84).

Wilfred Pickles, from Halifax, Yorkshire, became arguably the first non-RP-speaking BBC announcer in 1941. He came in for a lot of criticism and some people even found the news less credible when delivered by a man with a marked non-RP accent. After World War Two he claimed that the BBC was trying to make the British talk in the same way. Also, he fully realised how important it was to do everything possible to maintain ‘our rich contrast of voices [which] is a vocal tapestry of great beauty and incalculable value, handed down to us by our forefathers’ (Pickles 1949: 146–7).

A host of changes were brought about by the Education Act in 1944, enabling more and more people (particularly from the previously rather neglected working class) to achieve a higher level of education than before. These would then turn against the Establishment and their values; the so-called ‘Angry Young Men’ being the best example of this sentiment. Barber discusses three famous books associated with the movement in question (namely Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*, Amis’s *Lucky Jim*, and Braine’s *Room at the Top*) and cites them as examples of the prevailing feelings of that period:

The great success of these three works with the English public shows the extent to which they are canalising current feelings; the new working-class intellectual and his resentment of the Establishment are certainly realities of our time. And this resentment can also be directed at Received Standard as the language of the Establishment. (1964: 27)

An unprecedented number of people with grammar-school (and university) education rocked RP's privileged position. Abercrombie observes that 'although those who talk RP can justly consider themselves educated, they are outnumbered these days by the undoubtedly educated people who do not speak RP' ([1951] 1965: 15). To carry on with the metaphor (p. 49), the 'old school tie' was still a proof of one's education, but it lost its exclusivity as people with regional voices gained access to the same standards of education and RP gradually became just one of many accents that educated people spoke with.

The BBC recognised it as well. In 1977 the Annan Report on the future of broadcasting was published and it openly declared that '[w]e welcome regional accents' (qtd. in Crystal 2005: 474). Admittedly, the welcoming embrace did not initially apply to newscasters who were still expected to speak RP; in fact RP only ceased to be a prerequisite for this job in the 1990's when the BBC chose a 'Welsh-accented Huw Edwards as the anchor-man [for the BBC Six O'Clock News], rejecting an RP-speaking female newscaster as "too snooty" ' (Beal 2008a: 29).

In the 1970's Giles used a method known from sociology and psychology, namely the 'matched-guise technique' (cf. Giles et al. 1990), to elicit some invaluable data about accent perception. In a nutshell, the technique involves one person who can put on different accents which are recorded and played to respondents. The method makes sure that respondents do not react to various personal idiosyncrasies (e.g. gender and age). Naturally, respondents are not aware of the fact that all the samples were actually made by one speaker. The findings concerning RP and British regional accents are conclusive. They reveal that 'RP guise was always given the highest score for features such as intelligence, competence and persuasiveness, whereas regional accented guises scored higher for features such as friendliness and honesty' (Beal 2008a: 29). Soft regional voices have been enjoying a great deal of 'covert prestige', which is a sociolinguistic term that explains that 'attitudes of this type are not usually overtly expressed, and depart markedly from the mainstream societal values (of schools and other institutions), of which everyone is consciously aware' (Trudgill 1974: 96).

Call centres represent an environment where these attitudes are easily visible. Soft regional voices are a valuable asset there: '[call centre] workers avoid both the "unfriendly" connotations of RP, and the "uneducated" associations of broad

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regional accents, and so are acceptable to a wide range of clients' (Beal 2006: 33). RP and broad regional accents appear equally undesirable.

One could be led to believe that RP (as the prestige accent) is no longer desirable but it is only partially true. The thirst for orthoepic guidance and lessons of elocution is far from quenched. Beal's paper, fittingly called *Shamed by Your English* (2008a), analyses some of the numerous advertisements that offer to improve one's accent (i.e. they promise to rid speakers' accents of their regional traces). One particular advertisement, placed on its website by *The Central School of Speech and Drama*, informs its readers and potential customers that

[e]locution is an old-fashioned term but remains a skill for the 21st century. The voice is the most vital communication tool. Clear, confident, expressive communication ensures that you get the message across. The course is designed to enable you to improve your vocal technique, soften your accent, and develop your vocal skills in order to communicate more effectively in both business and social environments. (http://www.cssd.ac.uk/pages/bus_elocution+.html)

What is interesting, according to Beal, is 'the juxtaposition of "softening" the accent with "vocal skills" and effective communication, as if those with unsoftened accents lack a skill' (2008a: 36). The advertised accent is, in all likelihood, near-RP, or, to put it another way, modern RP with a few regional touches. Beal appositely compares this currently fashionable accent to ladies' 'career-wear' in Marks & Spencer (pencil skirts, trouser suits in dark shades, white and blue blouses) which presents 'a bland, inoffensive face to the public' (Beal 2008a: 36). This era seems to be marked by the culture of self-improvement; elocutionists then provide the same sort of service as cosmetic surgeons, image consultants, and fitness instructors.

Beal reaches the conclusion that 'British society today is every bit as hierarchical as that which spawned the elocution movement of the 18th century, but [...] the models of "good" pronunciation are no longer the aristocracy but the professional and entrepreneurial classes who can provide employment' (2008a: 38). The common denominator unifying elocutionists of the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries is the fear of the underclass: the fear that one might be taken by others as belonging to a lower social class than they actually belong to.

2.7.1 The Death of RP?

Bearing in mind the social changes of the second half of the twentieth century, some linguists ask what future Received Pronunciation faces. There are linguists who maintain that RP's future is rather bleak. Wells holds the opinion that 'RP is

on the way out [because of] the loosening of social stratification and the recent trend for people of working-class or lower-middle-class origins to set the fashion in many areas of life' (1982: 118). Similarly, Milroy is convinced that there are many people who consider RP

as effete, affected and artificial. For the majority, in most situations, it simply has not been an appropriate model to aspire to and millions of people still do not care about it. Indeed, the academic's belief that everybody wants to acquire RP may well come from spending too much time in universities. (2001: 29)

RP, Milroy also argues, is not as salient as it used to be because the professional environment has become substantially democratised. RP is nothing more or nothing less than 'a product of a particular period of British history, during which time it served important social and political functions. As the conditions that supported its continuance as a high prestige accent have altered dramatically, its uniquely "received" status has largely disappeared' (2001: 31).

What these predictions are based on, in my opinion, is a rather simplified view of what RP is. Of course, like any other accent, RP is far from monolithic. As we have seen in the Introduction, there are many varieties of this accent and what is likely to happen (or even to have happened) is the demise of traditional RP. Whether we retain the label RP for the modern variety, which is 'alive and well and still used in British institutions stereotypically associated with it' (Przedlacka 2005: 29) or disregard it in want of a more appropriate label is another matter.

Trudgill is dismissive of the claims prophesying the death of RP; he calls them myths for which he puts the blame on 'journalists in need of something to write about' (2002: 177–8). He simply sees all the changes going on in RP as modifications of the accent. The past two centuries abound with examples of changes within the prestige accent: BATH lengthening and the loss of rhoticity are among the most prominent ones (cf. 4.2.1.7 and 4.2.2.5 respectively). Yet the prestige accent emerged rather unscathed. Naturally, labels can be changed, thus Public School Pronunciation was replaced by RP, and there might be another label needed as well. Is it now or later, though?

A simple way of determining whether RP is on the way out or not is by asking the following question: how many RP speakers are there? There is, alas, no simple answer to this question. Again, the problem lies in which variety of RP we work with: is it the modern, traditional, or even near-RP? Linguists who do hazard a guess usually do not cite very high numbers: Holmes's guesstimate is 3–5% (1992: 144) while Trudgill had earlier popularised the figure 3% (1974), and basically sticks to it in his paper from 2001. Crystal even lowers the guesstimate claiming '[t]his must now be less than 2% percent and falling' (2005: 472). It may have appeared in the 1970's and the 1980's that there were more RP speakers than

there are now. Trudgill, however, aptly points out that ‘a little reflection [shows] that this impression was due to the fact that it was much easier to hear speakers of the RP accent in the media than their proportion in the population would indicate’ (2002: 171). Now RP speakers seem to be few and far between as their exclusive access to certain media professions has ceased to exist, and these professions are performed by non-RP speakers as well. In addition, the guestimates above seem to deal with traditional RP rather than its modern variety.

There is yet another explanation as to why there appear to be fewer speakers of RP today. It is found in Upton, who blames ‘the limitations of the description of RP exclusively to the norms of southern England [...] for the extremely low estimates normally given of the number of RP speakers in Britain’ (2001: 361). There is a certain traditionally non-RP variant (short BATH [a]) that speakers from the North never give up (it carries no negative social connotations) and thus, if we stick to the older model of RP, there are no speakers of RP in the North (for a fuller discussion see 4.2.1.7).

2.7.2 Estuary English

It is now time to discuss Estuary English (often abbreviated as EE), a recent south-east accent that has gained considerable attention in the media in the past decades. Nevertheless, we only seemingly lose sight of Received Pronunciation since Estuary English has been dubbed ‘the new RP’ (Rosewarne 1994). Rosewarne is the person who had coined the term ten years earlier as

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. (Rosewarne 1984: 2)

This accent, as the name suggests, is based ‘around the Thames Estuary, but said to be spreading throughout the south-east of England’ (Beal 2004a: 197). Its typical features include happyY tensing, /t/-glottalisation (in certain environments), /l/-vocalisation, the lowering of TRAP (Przedlacka 2002). Wells (1992) and Coggle (1993) add yod-coalescence and several diphthong shifts (PRICE, GOAT, FACE) as well. Finally, Rosewarne in a revision of his 1984 article then adds /th/-fronting as a newly-established Estuary English phenomenon (2009).

It is true that some of the features have made their way into the modern model of RP (cf. Upton 2008). On the whole, it is safe to say that Estuary English ‘has captured public imagination’ (Przedlacka 2005: 27). Przedlacka’s paper provides a number of both positive and negative reactions to Estuary English in the press.

Some view it as ‘the classless dialect sweeping southern Britain’, others find it ‘somnambulant and slack-jawed’ (2005: 27–8). Among scholars, Estuary English has received little support as a possible replacement of RP (cf. Rosewarne 2009 with a rather pompous title *How Estuary English won the world over*).

The very name of the accent has come in for a lot of criticism. Trudgill (2002: 177–8) finds it extremely misleading since, judging by the label, the accent ‘is confined to the bank of the Thames Estuary’ whilst, as a matter of fact, it also includes ‘parts or all of Surrey, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Hertfordshire’. More importantly still, replacing RP is, according to Trudgill, impossible since EE will always remain a regional one: ‘the sociolinguistic conditions are not such that it [=Estuary English] could turn into the new RP’ (2002: 178–9). The sociolinguistic conditions refer to the unique role of residential public schools, which, of course, still exist, but their social role as the sole providers of high-level education has largely diminished.

2.7.2.1 Estuary English as a source of innovations in RP

Estuary English and, sometimes, even the popular speech of London, known as Cockney, are popularly believed to be sources of innovations in RP and regional dialects of English (Wells 1994). To give a relatively recent example from the press, Gillian Harris (*The Times* 20th Feb 1999) paints an apocalyptic vision of the future of the Glaswegian dialect. The article is called *Glasgow puts the accent on Estuary* and she reports on a sociolinguistic study carried out by Jane Stuart-Smith (1999). Harris seems to be convinced that ‘[e]arly indications suggest that traditional Glaswegian will struggle to survive. The researchers say that the insidious spread of Estuary English, which has its roots in Essex and Kent, has been felt in such cities as Derby, Newcastle and Hull’.

The article also draws on several papers published in *Urban Voices* (1999). A number of linguists report there that a few salient Estuary English features (/θ/-fronting and /t/-glottalisation, in particular) have made their way into urban accents in various parts of England (cf. Stoddart et al. 1999, Docherty and Foulkes 1999, Mathisen 1999, Williams and Kerswill 1999). Barber predicts that

[w]hat is perhaps most likely [...] is that one of the regional standards will come to be recognised as the new national standard, perhaps coalescing with the present R.S. [= Received Standard] in the process. The regional standard which is taking on this role is that of the most populous and influential part of England, London and the south-east, which of all the regional standards is the one closest to R.S. (so much so, indeed, that many people cannot distinguish between them). (1964: 28)

It has already been noted that Wells admits RP might be on the way out; he also envisages ‘some new non-localizable but more democratic standard [which may arise] from the ashes of RP: if so, it seems likely to be based on popular London English’ (1982: 118). As far as Estuary English is concerned, Wells remarks that ‘it is a new name [b]ut it is not a new phenomenon. It is the continuation of a trend that has been going on for five hundred years or so – the tendency for features of popular London speech to spread out geographically (to other parts of the country) and socially (to higher social classes)’ (Wells 1997: 47). Finally, the boldest of all Estuary English advocates is Crystal, who admittedly also finds the name relatively unfortunate, but the reason is that several of Estuary English features are ‘spreading around the country, as far north as Yorkshire and as far west as Dorset’ (2005: 472). The name is thus rather too restrictive. Crystal further cites Daniel Jones, who commented on the future of RP on the BBC radio as far back as in 1949: ‘it seems quite likely that in the future our present English will develop in the direction of Cockney’ (qtd. in Crystal 2005: 472).

Beal remarks that if these claims equalling the prestige accent with that of London were true we would ‘seem to have come full circle, back to “the usuall speech [...] of London and the shires lying about London within lx myles” ’ (2004a: 189). All these observations and remarks have probably made McMahon (2002) adopt another name for the prestige variety, namely that of Standard Southern British English. She leaves an important question unanswered: is there any ‘standard’ pronunciation model in other parts of Britain or are these simply disregarded as regional? McMahon must presume that her Standard Southern British English will eventually flood out all regional features in other parts of Britain, thereby making the accent supraregional again. While this remains to be seen, we have to ‘confront the inconsistency of claiming that a non-localizable accent model can have one geographically-locatable origin or focus of change’ (Upton 2004: 32).

Current sociolinguistic research provides data which may elucidate the influence of the capital upon other regional varieties and RP alike. It is this kind of data that make Altendorf and Watt claim that the British media and linguists ‘have had a tendency to attribute, in a very simplistic way, the presence of these features [= /t/-glottaling, /th/-fronting, labiodental [v]] in the speech of younger speakers of these accents [= urban accents in Hull and Glasgow] to the direct influence of London’ (2008: 201). In the next section I briefly look at five such studies, the first of which re-examines old data to find surprisingly new information about changes allegedly connected with RP; the remaining ones are more recent and they discuss changes allegedly brought about by Estuary English.

Upton/Houck: 'recent' RP changes

Upton (2004) analyses data gathered in Leeds, Yorkshire, by Houck in the 1960's (for a full account of the original research see Houck 1968). Houck's subjects were predominantly from Leeds and its environs; all of them had been residents there for a substantial part of their life and were at least fifteen years of age. A number of variants that appeared in Houck's data are now part of modern RP transcriptions (Upton 2008): lowered TRAP [æ] → [a], back-mid starting point of PRICE [aɪ] → [aɪ̯], monophthongal SQUARE [eə] → [ɛ:], and, last but not least, monophthongal CURE [ʊə] → [ɜ:]. All of these sounds (as discussed in the relevant sections of chapter 3.2.1) are now established as RP sounds, even though the preferred transcription model might not always reflect that. Since these sounds are thus attested in Yorkshire in the 1960's, it is more than likely that these seemingly modern changes are not connected with the influence of London speech (or Estuary English), but, as Upton (2004: 33) suggests, they 'might well be social in origin rather than regional'. Upton concludes that

[w]hilst it would be unsound to point to Leeds as the source of any particular innovation of RP, it would be reasonable to assume that this city, and so others too, have fully participated in its development, testimony to the accent's status as a social rather than a regional entity. (2004: 38)

Finally, he rejects attempts to see the source of innovations in the capital as 'simplistic geocentric assumptions [to which] the story of Received Pronunciation is not reducible' (Upton 2004: 38).

Llamas: /t/-glottalisation in Middlesbrough

Another phenomenon that is said to have been spreading and that is popularly linked with the dominance of London and Estuary English is /t/-glottalisation (Wells 1982: 323). It is to be found in RP in certain environments, while in others (in the intervocalic one, in particular) it remains a strictly non-standard sound (cf. 3.2.2.1). The very link with London, however, is rather dubious: whilst there can be very little doubt about how frequently this feature occurs in today's London urban dialect, the glottal stop was, in fact, first spotted in Scotland in the 1850's, later making its way down to London (the first explicit mention in the capital dates back to 1909) via the North of England and the Midlands (cf. Jezek 2006).

The presence of the glottal stop in some regions is now stronger than it used to be. Llamas's (2007) research in Middlesbrough shows that the reason for the

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sudden upsurge of the use of the glottal stop there is probably not connected with the speech of a place distant some 250 miles, but rather with local identities. As Middlesbrough is a relatively new city with ‘a complex recent history of reassignment to a succession of different local and regional authorities’ (Beal 2010: 95), it is an ideal place for a sociolinguist interested in the relationships between language and identity. By means of an identity questionnaire Llamas found out that older people identified themselves as Yorkshiremen, middle-aged people grouped themselves with Tyneside (feeling closer to Newcastle and/or Sunderland), and the youngest respondents then claimed to belong to Middlesbrough (developing their own identity, independent of either Yorkshire or Tyneside). These identities, as Llamas observes, have different variants of the /t/ variable attached to them. While in Yorkshire /t/ is a fully released stop [t], Tyneside is famous for glottally reinforced variants [ʔt] (Watt and Milroy 1999: 29–30). Young respondents in Middlesbrough index their unique ‘Middlesbrough’ identity by choosing the full glottal stop [ʔ], which, incidentally, happens to have been spreading through other parts of Britain, too. Llamas concludes that

[w]e thus see a focusing of linguistic choices and convergence onto a Middlesbrough form, which coincides with the rise in profile of Middlesbrough as a place with its own identity in terms of local administrative boundaries and in terms of its prominence on a national scale. (Llamas 2007: 601)

The full significance of Llamas’s research is nicely summed up by Beal (2010: 99), who says that ‘without the detailed qualitative data provided by responses to the IDQ [=identity questionnaires], it would have been easy to interpret the young Middlesbrough speakers’ use of glottal [...] variants as simply part of a wider regional or national trend’. To put it another way, it would have been easy to say that young people in Middlesbrough have been swallowed by Estuary English, thereby *losing* their regional identity. In reality, nothing could be further removed from the truth as their adoption of the glottal stop is a positive step towards *constructing* their own local identity.

Watson: /t/-glottalisation in Liverpool

A similar conclusion is reached by Watson in his research in Liverpool, where /t/-elision ‘is showing signs of moving, not *towards* a putative regional standard, but [it] is in fact diverging from phonological norms’ (2006: 55). Drawing on a previous study by Knowles (1973), Watson interprets this elision as the replacement of /t/ for /h/, because ‘there is absence of both an oral gesture and a glottal closing gesture [and] an audible release of breath’ (2006: 86). Interestingly,

this /h/ was used as the final sound in short words like *get, got, bit*, etc. in 1973; i.e. exactly in those positions where the glottal stop is now frequently found in such a large number of places throughout Britain. Watson finds out that this singularity of Liverpool urban speech not only holds on to its own, but it is even more frequent than before: he finds it even in longer words such as *maggot, Robert, target*.

What can this divergence from supra-local norms be attributed to? A number of possible explanations is discussed in Beal (2010: 84–5); she finally tentatively suggests that ‘the sociolinguistic meaning of glottalisation in other accents of English is already carried by “t>h” in Liverpool, so there is no incentive for young Liverpudlians to adopt glottalisation’ (2010: 85). Again, what is observed here is not a reaction to a very distant accent, but social meaning attached to a particular feature. The glottal stop is absent in urban Liverpool speech not because young people do not want to sound Estuary, but because the social meaning that the glottal stop has in other accents is already occupied by a different sound in Liverpool English.

Johnson and Britain: /l/-vocalisation in Norwich, Hull and Newcastle

The next feature to be discussed in this part is /l/-vocalisation, in which the pronunciation of dark /l/ becomes vowel-like in quality, rendering such spellings as *miuk* for *milk* pronounced as [miuk]. /l/-vocalisation is another feature that is popularly believed to have its epicentre in London, and it has been observed in a number of cities (cf. Foulkes and Docherty 1999). Like the glottal stop in Liverpool, though, vocalised /l/ is notably absent in several other urban accents. In this respect, Norwich, Hull, and Newcastle are cited in Johnson and Britain (2007). According to the geographical interpretation of the data, it is only a matter of time before these accents incorporate vocalised /l/ as well and introduce it as an innovation. However, Johnson and Britain stress that the three accents in question lack the dark/clear allophony in the /l/ phoneme. They come to the conclusion that ‘[v]ocalisation [...] will only take place, it seems, once the dialect in question has acquired a dark /l/ in (at least) syllable rhyme contexts’ (2007: 302).

It thus seems that the spread of /l/-vocalisation has little to do with the alleged prestige and dominance of the capital, but is rather ‘a “natural” sound change [and] where the innovation has not spread, this is not due to the geographical isolation of Newcastle and East Anglia, but to the phonological structure of the accents of these places’ (Beal 2010: 83).

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Beal: long BATH [A:] in Northumbria

The last feature to be discussed in this section is the long BATH vowel in certain words in some parts of Northumbria. The BATH vowel ‘creates something of a marker of north-south distinction’ (Upton 2008: 272). Although it may seem that its short variant [a] is categorical north of the isogloss, there are words like *master* or *plaster*, which many Northumbrians pronounce as [ɑ:]. Wells offers this explanation: ‘one or two of the BATH words are particularly susceptible to Broadening [= lengthening] as a result of their association with school and school-inspired standards of correctness’ (1982: 354). Beal (1985: 33) admits that Wells’s ‘suggestion that this lengthening of [a] under the influence of R.P. speaking schoolmasters at first sight looks plausible, for in folk-linguistic mythology, Universal Education is blamed for the decline of traditional Northumbrian dialect features such as the “burr” or uvular fricative [ɞ]’. However, to expect such far-reaching influence of RP in Northumbria is rather absurd, particularly if one remembers that in most other parts of the North short BATH remains the norm.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to present the argument in its entirety; suffice it to say that Beal identifies as the source of [ɑ:] in *master* ‘an integral development within these dialects of the reflexes of ME [=Middle English] *ai*’ (1985: 42–3). Beal goes on to show that this long BATH serves, in fact, as a distinct marker of Northumbrian identity, which is in total opposition to what Wells’s suggestion implies. She then concludes that

the localised nature of the Northumbrian and Tyneside long back [ɑ:] has hitherto not been recognised because, quite coincidentally, it happens to sound like R.P. and because laypersons and dialectologists alike are so confident about the power and influence of R.P. on provincial dialects that they always assume that any change in the direction of R.P.-like pronunciation is due to this influence. (1985: 43)

What do these studies of urban vernaculars have in common? They all appear to demonstrate that when explaining the presence or absence of a particular feature in a particular accent, we have to search for clues with a fine-toothed comb. The explanation is often to be found at a micro rather than a macro level. To coin a well-known metaphor, there is then a big danger of not seeing the trees for the wood. I therefore argue that the oversimplifying ‘bird’s-eye’ approach is not universally acceptable since the process of linguistic diffusion has ‘locally specific outcomes, and [the process] may be resisted both by local identity practices and local linguistic structural pressures’ (Britain 2009: 139). To take all such practices and pressures into account, it is crucial to investigate separately the status of a given variable in one locality as well as to compare its status with different localities.

2.7.3 RP in the World of ELT

The discussion has so far been restricted to the roles of RP within the native environment; it is now time to turn outside Britain and focus on the roles RP needs to fulfil there.

RP (especially in its traditional form) is the pronunciation model presented to students of English in those countries where British English is given preference. There are over 360 million native speakers of English all over the world (Crystal 2012: 69) and since it has already been shown how low the number of RP speakers is, an inevitable question arises: why is RP taught to foreign students?

Trudgill comes up with a rather blunt answer when he replies (no doubt with tongue in cheek): ‘why not? After all, we have to teach something’ (2002: 172). Gimson takes a more serious stance pointing out one big advantage that RP has over its possible rivals. RP is

generally acceptable as a teaching norm because of its widespread intelligibility, because it has already been described in textbooks more exhaustively than any other form and because recordings used in teaching abroad are usually made in this accent. (1984: 53)

A brief comment is necessary here concerning Gimson’s quote above: it seems to suggest that RP is intelligible and therefore it is described exhaustively in textbooks. It is however, the other way round. Only because it was first adopted as the model for foreign learners of the English language is the accent so intelligible. RP is not intrinsically more intelligible than other accents. Had all the dictionaries, textbooks, and recordings been made in, for example, Scouse (the urban accent of Liverpool), foreign learners would now arguably regard Scouse very easy to understand.

Przedlacka is of the same opinion as Gimson. She also stresses RP as ‘the most thoroughly described accent of English [and also] readily available to the learner in the dictionaries, textbooks, recordings and the spoken media (2005: 29).

Both Przedlacka and Gimson highlight the fact that RP has been used as the model for a number of years and it is present in such a vast number of teaching materials that it would be downright impractical to replace it as the reference accent. Though one can hardly seriously doubt the relevance of this observation, it is not the end of the debate. Another question immediately arises: which variety of RP should be taught to foreigners?

When choosing the right variety for teaching purposes, it is appropriate to bear in mind the paradoxical situation mentioned by Roach: ‘most of our teaching is aimed at young people, but the model we provide them is that of middle-aged

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or old speakers' (2005: 394). Indeed, the model found in teaching materials is hardly any different from the one that Jones described back in 1917. It is hard to deny that a modern model of RP seems to be the right choice, though, because 'it is understandable that a young person might be reluctant to imitate a model which is contemporary of their grandfather's generation and would prefer to be taught the speech of their peers' (Przedlacka 2005: 30). More than thirty years ago Gimson proposed changes in the definition of RP so that

the re-defined RP may be expected to fulfil a new and more extensive role in present-day British society. Its primary function will be that of the most widely understood and generally acceptable form of speech within Britain which can serve as an efficient and common means of oral communication, whether or not this speech style carries with it social prestige. But, in addition and more importantly for the future, this standard form of British speech can function as one of the principal models for users of English throughout the world. (1984: 53)

It was Upton who undertook the task of redefining RP and his model is presented in Chapter 4.