

# Regional differences in english accents



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## INTRODUCTION

Foreign learners of English go to the United Kingdom to practice their knowledge; but when they are there, they realize that it is not the same pronunciation they have learnt, and the way of speaking vary from that they know.

In English, there are two terms whose meanings are confused when talking about regional variation; these are dialect and accent. According to Hughes, Trudgill and Watt (2005), they differ since dialect refers to the distinction between varieties but in terms of grammar and vocabulary; while accent refers to pronunciation.

In the United Kingdom, not many of the inhabitants speak RP; they have different forms of regional accent, that is, speakers from one area (North) share pronunciation features which they do not share with speakers from other areas (South), making the pronunciation slightly different. However, the change is not abrupt or because of the limits between regions, instead it is gradual, and called accent continuum.

RP is considered to be the greatest accent in the United Kingdom, just because it is the one that people are taught in school and university, so its social range is higher, compared to other accents; for example, people from a high position will not have his regional accent as marked as one from a low-class, and its English will be more similar to RP. Besides, some people see RP as the most correct form of English accents, while the others are just deviations and not correct English; however, Hughes, Trudgill and Watt (2005) explain that even if it is the most understood of all the accents, it has

been losing the prestige it had, and RP is becoming an accent that a minority in the United Kingdom uses. On the other hand, Scottish has always been different from that of the South, but after 1707 Scotland was an independent state; so, this made the accent develop in a way apart from RP accent. This created differences between both accents mainly in terms of pronunciation.

## BODY

### -VOWELS

### QUANTITY

Monophthongs are distinguished for vowel description parameters such as quantity and quality. Firstly, one of the differences between RP and Scottish Standard English is the length of vowels. While RP has phonemic vowel length, SSE has allophonic, which changes depending on the context. Received Pronunciation's vowel system includes as much as short vowels such as /ɪ/, /ʊ/, /e/, /ə/, /æ/, /ʌ/ and /ɒ/ as long /i:/, /u:/, /ɜ:/, /ɔ:/, /ɑ:/. Vowel length in RP is phonemic, so the pairs of vowels differ in length for example /i:/ is the longer one and /ɪ/ the shorter; this has made vowels combine creating minimal pairs such as beat /bi: t/ and bit /bɪt/. Whereas in Standard Scottish English, according to Wells (1982), there are monophthongs of /i/, /ɪ/, /ə/, /ɛ/, /ɑ/, /ɔ/, /ʉ/, /o/, /a/, /ə/ and /ʌ/. There is no distinction between quality and quantity, just in terms of the latter one, thus the minimal pairs that arose in RP, are in Scottish from the same length. Unlike Received Pronunciation, vowel length of Standard Scottish English is not phonemic but largely allophonic, and therefore depends on the environment in which the vowels occur. That is why, Wells (1982) claims that depending on the

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phonetic environment, the vowel duration varies; and it is the Scottish Vowel Length Rule (SVLR), formulated by Aitken, which includes those environments. It refers to a rule in which certain vowels are phonetically long before /r/, voiced fricatives or a morpheme boundary; for example, long variants occur in final position in verbs in past tense suffixed by -d, so need [nid] has a longer vowel than kneed [nid]; and ɪ, ʌ, ε and ə are short in every position even when in the context of SVLR, /ɪ/ being only in closed syllables. Also, a change in quality can be linked to vowel length.

## QUALITY

As Cao and Jin (2017) state that in RP there is a difference between the phonemes /ɒ/ and /ɔ/, so the words cot and caught are pronounced differently; while in Scottish the phoneme is the same /ɔ/ and as Wells (1982) adds this has led to the appearance of homophones such as knotty/naughty or don/dawn. But there are others who distinguish between two possible phonemes with /ɔ/ in thought and so other vowel in LOT which is /ɒ/ a back rounded vowel. Although even those speakers who have the opposition between /ɔ/ and /ɒ/ may nevertheless use /ɔ/ not /ɒ/ in certain LOT words such as yatch or wash /wɔʃ/.

The vowel /ɪ/ has the same realisation in RP as in Scottish, it is a short half-close front unrounded-neutral monophthong. Although in Standard Scottish English (SSE) this can differ and the phoneme can become opener or more retracted depending on the context in which it is used; and according to the class, Cao and Jin (2017) discuss that those with a lower-class used more retracted variants of this phoneme than those with a higher-class. Also, in the

North-east part of Scotland the phoneme /ɪ/ has become [ɛ]-like, especially before /r/ and in between educated speakers.

In many positions where RP has /ə/ or 'schwa' which is short 'half-close to half open' central unrounded-neutral, in Scottish, it becomes in /ʌ/ so words pronounced with a schwa in RP such as letter or comma which have that phoneme in final position, in SSE are pronounced with /ʌ/; although sometimes it can be realized as /ɪ/ or /ɪr/ such as in pilot /pælit/.

#### -CONSONANTS- RHOTICITY

Furthermore, distinctions also occur in consonants, mostly with the phenomenon of rhoticity. According to Cao and Jin (2017), rhoticity is defined as the situations in which the post-alveolar approximant /r/ or historical rhotic consonant is pronounced. English has rhotic and non-rhotic accents depending whether /r/ is pronounced in all contexts, then it is a rhotic accent, or it is just pronounced before a vowel, non-rhotic. In the United Kingdom, rhotic accents are comprised by the regional accents of the North (Scottish, Irish) and regional accents of the West Country of England, while the non-rhotic ones are those from England and Wales.

Besides, all English accents allow /r/ before a vowel; but in the case of the post-vocalic /r/, some accents differ. For example, RP does not use post-vocalic /r/, so words such as letter or butter are now pronounced with schwa /bʌtə/, /letə/; Hughes, Trudgill and Watt (2005) point out that in rhotic accents the use of schwa is just for the end of proper names, so they use /a/ instead of schwa when words such as \*. This is what differences rhotic and non-rhotic accents because Scottish accents /r/ in this position.

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According to Hughes, Trudgill and Watt (2005), rhotic accents are now losing their prestige and nowadays it is confined to the areas of Scotland and Northern Ireland spoken by older, working-class rural people. This loss began centuries ago in the South of England and spread to other regions of Wales. But non-rhotic accents keep pronouncing the /r/ before a vowel or a consonant such as in carry /kari/. Although RP do not have post-vocalic /r/ in the pronunciation of a word itself, it has linking /r/ which acts as a link across boundaries and although a word is not pronounced with /r/ itself, when it is followed by a word beginning with a vowel, the /r/ is pronounced as in car alarm /ka: rəla: m/. Also, it has the phenomenon intrusive /r/ which is used when there is no /r/ in the spelling accents, for example /ɪndiər en pa: kɪ'sta: n/. It has been thought as incorrect by Scottish speaker since they do not have it.

As it has been said before, Scottish is a rhotic accent, this means that /r/ is pronounced in the syllable coda after vowels. Wells (1982) points out that it can be realized differently depending on the position of the vowel as a retroflex approximant /r/ or post alveolar approximant /r/ with the context V\_C and V\_# as in word or care; a tap /r/ within-word contexts V\_V and C\_V such as in sorry and agree; also as a trill or voiced alveolar roll /r/ but it is more formal and less used.

#### -PROSODY

Prosody is a term which concerns stress, intonation and rhythm. However, the differences between accents which deal with prosody do not have to be really different, since it would also change English itself. Firstly, in Scottish,

the stress of some words changes in contrast to that of RP, it does not share the same position in both accents. For example, the suffix -ize of some verbs such as organize, which in SSE, the stress occurs before the suffix (organ'ize) and in RP is at the beginning ('organize); the same happens with the suffix -ate, in SSE, adjudi'cate, and in RP, ad'judicate. However, Jin and Cao (2017) argue that not all are differences, there is also similar issues such as the stress in words that can be a verb and a noun such as report, both accents have the primary stress in the first syllable in the case of nouns and in the second syllable in verbs. Secondly, according to Wells (1982), there has never been a completed study of intonation. Intonation does not change as much as it is thought in between accents. Although depending on the distance, the differences can be more evident as happens between Received Pronunciation and Scottish; In RP, the intonation follows high-falling patterns. While in Scottish is different; Neroldova (2013) claims that with affirmative or negative statements, the intonation raises, and with questions, it falls. Wells (1982) agrees with Neroldova (2013) about questions but he adds that in wh-questions the pattern is the same even though in yes/no questions, the stress is in the last accented, so it changes and it becomes mid-fall and rise-fall. Whereas, the intonation also changes in the same territory, for example in Glasgow the tone is high-rising despite the fact that in Edinburgh it is different becoming a mid-to-low tone. In addition, every language has its particular rhythm, which also happens with accents; helping speakers to distinguish between them. It is linked to stress in connected speech, since stressed syllables take place at the same time. Neroldova (2013) states that RP has a stressed-time language, which means that the stressed syllables occur at regular intervals of time, while Scottish presents a no regular

rhythm. It has disyllabic words which are short in the first syllable and long in the second one.

## CONCLUSION

Regional differences between accents are not as marked as it is thought, since they are gradual. Although they can be more notorious when contrasting two accents that are far from each other such as Scottish, a northern accent and Received Pronunciation, one of the South. Their differences are appreciable in terms of vowels, consonants and prosody. As it has been stated before, RP does make difference of length between vowels, while Scottish uses a vowel system than depending on the environment. In terms of quality, each accent has its realisations of a phoneme although there can be differences as in the phoneme /ɒ/ and /ɔ/ as well as similarities with the vowel /ɪ/. Besides, Scottish is a rhotic accent which means that it employs the post-vocalic /r/ while RP not; although it uses linking and intrusive /r/ to replace rhoticity. Prosody embraces stress, rhythm and intonation; stress vary in each accent because of the position of the stress with suffixed words, while in RP it is in the first syllable, in Scottish before the suffix, as happens in the examples of the verbs organize and adjudicate. The same happens with rhythm in RP is regular occurring at stressed time syllables while Scottish is not regular. But intonation cannot be that different between accents unless they are from the same area. Consequently, English learners cannot understand the pronunciation of British people, when going to the United Kingdom to practice it; because they learn the RP pronunciation despite the fact that every region has its accent.



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