

The Sound Shifting of British English Accent: A Phonological Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This research aims at identifying the English words pronounced by the Brits which did not follow the standard of Received Pronunciation (RP). The received Pronunciation is proposed by Finegan (2015). The specific sound shifting taken becomes the accents of British English. These accents were sometimes used by the EFL learners while speaking English as they thought it was the standard English. This qualitative research took the data from the English speeches spoken by the famous Brits on YouTube. This research applied the observational method to collect the data, and phonological approach, identity method, and articulatory phonetic identification to analyze the data. It is summed up that the glottal stop [ʔ] replaces the alveolar [t^h] at the final and between vowels. The dental [θ] and [ð] are shifted by the labiodental [f] and [v]. The velar [x] replaces the velar [k], the final velar [ŋ] becomes [n], and the final [t^h] is shifted by the glottal [h]. In the case of vocalization, the diphthong [eɪ] becomes [aɪ], the vowel [æ] becomes [ʌ], the schwa [ə] becomes [æ], and the vowel [ʌ] becomes [ʊ]. These changes are not for the British English in general. The accents depend on the regions where the speakers come from. However, the glottal stop [ʔ] are almost used by the speakers. This finding gives information that these accents are not the standard English. Moreover, these British English accents are not the mistakes.

Keywords: *accent, Brits, British English, Received Pronunciation*

1. INTRODUCTION

“What English do you use?” the female lecturer asked. “Eemm...” the male EFL student hummed. He once pronounced the word *important* as [ɪm.ɪpɔː.ɾənt] instead of [ɪm.ɪpɔː.tənt]. He articulated the voiceless alveolar stop [t] as a glottal stop [ʔ]. Nevertheless, when he pronounced the word *better* and *water*, they were

pronounced as [ˈbɛ.t̚ər] with the flap-t and [ˈwɔː.t̚ər] with the normal [t]. That is the reason why she asked him.

And there is a female Indonesian singer pronounced *mineral water* as [ˈmɪn.rəl ˈwɔː.t̚ər] instead of [ˈmɪ.nə.rəl ˈwɔː.tər] in one of her adds on Telly. She dropped [ə] in mineral and changed

voiceless alveolar stop [t] into flap [ɾ]. Then, most of the EFL students pronounced [t] as [ɾ] as they thought that [ɾ] in *water* was correct.

This issue brings a thought that what the EFL students listened to English on TV, films, or songs is correct. And they followed the English the way to pronounce. As the words *body* or *god*, they pronounced as ['bɑ:.di] or [gɑ:d], and when the others pronounced them as ['bɒ.di] and [gɒd], those were incorrect. In fact the American English exposes to a lot of TV programmes, in films, and in literature more than British English (Ambalegin & Hulu, 2019).

Some EFL students adapted mostly the English from the films or English songs which they came from America. As the consequence, they brought English which is used by the Americans in America. Moreover, the famous people use English with the American accent known as American English (AE).

There are a lot of English accents produced by the speakers based on where they are from. Britons, Americans, Indians, Australians, Singaporeans, Filipinos, and South Africans bring their own accents while speaking English. In the country where English is from, United Kingdom (UK), has some accents such as Southern English, Cockney, East London, Posh, West Country, Northern English, The Scouser, Welsh, Scottish, and Brimmie. However, there is a standard English used globally which is known as Received Pronunciation (RP) when speaking English. The Formal Received Pronunciation is taken from the British Southern English.

One of the characteristics of Formal Received Pronunciation is the sound /t/. Based the Received Pronunciation (RP), the letter <t> is pronounced as a pure or true [t]. The

production of the [t] is the position of the tip of the tongue on the alveolar ridge. The airflow is stopped then released fast by opening the block between tip of the tongue and alveolar ridge. The air flows normally and voicelessly.

However, the English [t] will have the characteristic in which there is a clear friction sound between the stop and the plosive. Thus, English [t] is sometimes symbolized as [t^h] or it is said as aspirated [t]. The [h] is symbolized as the friction. The normal Indonesian [t] and the normal English [t^h] can be compared when they are articulated (Ambalegin & Afriana, 2023).

The /t/ sound has a few different sounds. The difference may be said an accent (Crystal, 2008). The Brits have glottal stop [ʔ], the Americans have flap [ɾ], Indians have retroflex [ɽ], Indonesians have normal [t]. From the accents, the hearers may identify where the speakers are from. However, the meaning of the word does not change such as in the word *water* in different [t] sounds ['wɑ:.ɾə], ['wɑ:.ɽə], ['wɑ:.tə], and ['wɑ:.tə].

This research identified the patterns of British English accent spoken by the famous Brits such as celebrities, artists, singers, and footballers. To know the differences or the changes, they are compared with British Received Pronunciation. One of the data showed the British English accent spoken by Ed Sheeran. He is a singer and song writer from Britain. Taken from one of his interviews on YouTube, he produced a glottal stop to replace the ending sound [t] and between vowel and consonant such as in the words *it* [ɪt] to [ɪʔ], *little* ['lɪ.tə] to ['lɪ.ʔ].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8rVPI10Vg>.

In British English accent, sometimes the letter <t> is pronounced as a glottal

stop such as in the word of water [wɑ:.ɔə]. [ʔ] replaced [t] when the letter <t> is at the end of the words such as light [laɪt], at [æt], that [ðæt], cat [kæt], and report [rɪ.'pɔ:t], and in the middle syllable such as water ['wɑ:.ɔə], bottle ['bɒ.ɔl], twitter [twɪ.ɔə], daughter ['dɔ:.ɔə], and forgotten [fə'.gɒ.tən]. However, there are some words which glottal stop cannot replace [t]. If [t] appears before unvoiced consonant, the glottal stop cannot replace it such as in the words *Instagram* ['ɪns.tʰə.græm], *sister* ['sɪs.tə], *lift* [lɪftʰ], etc. The glottal stop cannot be produced in the beginning of the words such as teacher ['ti:tʃə], top [tɒp], tongue [tʌŋ], etc. Additionally, the true [t] and the glottal stop can appear in a word such as in *potato* [pə.'tʰeɪ.ɔəʊ].

Specifically, the glottal stop is the accent from East End of London known as Cockney accent but this accent can be heard all over the London. By trapping the air in the back of the throat then the glottal stop can be produced.

There are some scholars discussed the phenomena of British English which impact to the students' pronunciation, language teaching, or the students' writing ability. Bestari et al. (2021) identified the use of American and British English in term of vocabulary on the Nahdlatul Ulama University Purwokerto students' writing on Instagram. And mostly the students used American English vocabulary. Gunawan & Aminah (2020) discussed the awareness of the use of American and British English on the students of As-syafi'iyah Islamic University. The students tended to use American English and they got difficulties in distinguishing both American and British English

Grieve et al. (2019) studied the use of British lexical dialect on UK Twitter and BBC Voices. They identified 139 lexical dialects maps. The 139 map pairs found a

broad alignment between these two data sources. Talenta & Wibowo (2022) identified that EFL learners were not able to apply British English in their English speeches due the interference of the mother tongue, Javanese.

Weisi et al. (2019) discussed the perception of EFL Iranian students to American and British English use when speaking English. The students preferred using American English to British English. Baratta & Halenko (2022) identified the students and teachers' perception about the regional British accent while teaching in the class. Based on the interview the northern teachers, it was found that the EFL learners found difficulties their accent, the EFL learners thought contrast when the teachers were instructed to use Southern English, and the teachers were proud to their accent. Shu & Liu (2019), finally discussed the differences between American English and British English.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Received Pronunciation (RP)

Received Pronunciation (RP) is a variety of British English spoken without an identifiable regional dialect (Roach, 2004). Standard British English is also the same as RP. Previously, RP firstly named as public-school pronunciation in 1917. Then it changed into RP. Then, the name was proposed as General British and Educated Southern British English. RP is also known widely as BBC Pronunciation, Quen English, and post accent.

The RP has been used oxford dictionary pronunciation. It has 24 consonant sounds, 12 vowel sounds, 8 diphthongs and 5 triphthongs. The RP will use these sounds to pronounce English words (Low, 2015).

2.2 Vowels

Vowel sounds are produced by passing air through different shapes of the mouth, with different positions of the tongue and of the lips, and with the air stream relatively unobstructed by narrow passages except at the glottis (Finegan, 2015). According to (Kelly, 2004) that based on the characteristics of the articulation, there are three categories vowel sounds; closed vowel sounds /i:/, /ɪ/, /ʊ/, /u:/, mid vowel sounds /e/, /ə/, /ɜ:/, /ɔ:/, and open vowel sounds /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɑ:/, /ɒ/.

Kelly (2004) also emphasized that a diphthong is two vowel sounds together. There are three types of diphthong sounds based on the articulation characteristics: centering diphthongs ending in [ə]; /ɪə/, /ʊə/, /eə/, closing diphthongs ending in [ɪ]; /eɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /aɪ/, and closing diphthongs ending in [ʊ]; /əʊ/, /aʊ/.

Roach (2012) mentioned that triphthong is a swift, uninterrupted transition from one vowel to another and then to a third. The triphthongs can be thought of as consisting of five closely spaced diphthongs with the schwa sound. He lists the triphthongs [eɪə] in *layer* or *prayer*, [aɪə] in *liar* or *fire*, [ɔɪə] in *loyal* or *royal*, [əʊə] in *lower* or *mower*, and [aʊə] in *power* or *hour*.

2.3 Consonants

Consonants are sounds made with a lot of constriction in the mouth, so the air coming up from the lungs gets squashed. Where and how they are produced in the mouth, consonant sounds are described in terms of three characteristics: voicing, place of articulation, and manner of articulation (Finegan, 2015).

For voiceless sounds, the vocal cords are far apart, allowing air to flow easily such as [p], [f], [θ], [t], [s], [ʃ], [tʃ], [k],

and [h]. Voiced sounds happen when the vocal cords are close together, causing them to vibrate as air pushes through such as [b], [m], [w], [v], [ð], [d], [z], [l], [r], [ʒ], [dʒ], [j], [g], and [ŋ].

The place of articulation is where the sound is produced in the mouth or throat. There are seven main places:

1. Bilabial sounds are created by touching your upper and lower lips together, as in [p], [b], [m], and [w].
2. Labiodental sounds involve touching your lower lip to your upper teeth, as in [f] and [v].
3. Dental sounds are made by placing your tongue against your upper teeth, seen in [θ], [ð].
4. Alveolar sounds are produced by touching the tip or blade of your tongue just in front of the alveolar ridge, found in [t], [d], [s], [z], [n], [l], and [r].
5. Palatal sounds are created by touching the front part of your tongue to the hard palate and tongue blade, as in [ʃ], [tʃ], [ʒ], [dʒ], and [j].
6. Velar sounds happen when the body of your tongue touches the hard or soft palate, like in [k], [g], and [ŋ].
7. Glottal sounds are produced by bringing your vocal cords close together, as in the [h] sound.

Manner of articulation is how the airflow is interfered with during sound production. Consonants are categorized into six manners:

1. Stops, such as [p], [b], [t], [d], [k], and [g] involve briefly blocking the airflow through the mouth.
2. Fricatives, such as [f], [v], [θ], [ð], [s], [z], [ʃ], and [ʒ] create a tight constriction, causing turbulent airflow and a hissing noise.
3. Affricates combine a stop and a fricative at the same place in the mouth, such as [tʃ] and [dʒ].

4. Nasal consonants, including [m], [n] and [ŋ] allow air to escape through the nose by lowering the velum.
5. Liquids produce sounds with characteristics such as [l] and [r]
6. Glides or semivowels include central approximants such as [j] and [w].

2.4 British English

United Kingdom is a country with many dialects are produced. The diversity of accents and dialects implies a different way of using English. The difference highlights the social belongings.

People In United Kingdom use Standard English in speaking and writing. It is spoken by the most powerful and educated UK population. Standard English is associated with Received Pronunciation (RP). RP is the English of middle and upper classes in the English society. RP is known as Queen's English or BBC English.

English which is used in London and East Midlands becomes the Standard English because it is accepted use in the law, government, literature, and education in Britain. There are some features of Standard English such as non-rhoticity, rounded vowel [ɒ], broad vowel [ɑ:], and diphthong [əʊ].

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research applied a phonological approach as this research completed the objectives of the research by analyzing the sounds articulated phonologically (Burquest, 2006). The aim of this study was to determine the use of British English accent on speeches. The data were taken from the English speeches spoken by the British natives or the Brits.

This is a qualitative research because the data, the way to analyze, and the way to display the result are in term of words, phrases, and sentences that is

described narratively (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The way to collect the data applied the observational method (Sudaryanto, 2015). The senses of the researchers were involved such as hearing, insight and feeling in collecting the data. The researchers did not involve in the dialogue as the researchers scripted it. The researchers noted all the accents into the script. The way to taking note is to ease to follow the flow of the dialogue while conducting the research.

It was found several times of the same words with the same pronunciation in the speech. In this case, the researchers reduced the data (Sugiyono, 2013). While doing the analysis, the researchers identified the sounds which sounded different from RP. The change of standard sounds to the unreceived pronunciation were identified by matching them to the RP. This research adapted the identity method.

The accents will develop the organ speech. When the standardized sounds which were pronounced, were not articulate properly, then the sounds were produced differently. From these unstandardized sounds, the researchers started identifying the organ speech involved. As it involved the organ speech, researchers applied the technique of articulatory phonetic identification (Sudaryanto, 2015).

This research adapted the qualitative method as the descriptive paragraphs were displayed for presenting research result. This research displayed the research result descriptively. As the method of this research result presentation was descriptive-narrative method (Merriam, 2009) thus the result was displayed by using words or sentences in the form of narration.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Result

1. The alveolar [t^h] becomes the glottal stop [ʔ]
2. [t^h] will not be pronounced as [ʔ] if its position is at the beginning of the words such as in the word *teacher* ['ti:tʃə],
3. If [t^h] appears before unvoiced consonant, the glottal stop cannot replace it such as in word *Instagram* ['ɪns.tə.græm].
4. [ʔ] replaces [t^h] when its position is at the end of the words such as in the word *at* [æt].
5. [ʔ] replaces [t^h] when its position is in the middle syllable such as the word *water* ['wɑ:tə].
6. The dental [θ] and [ð] becomes the labiodental [f] and [v] such as in the words *thought* [fɔ:t] and *mother* ['mʌ.və]
7. The velar [k] becomes the velar [x]
8. [x] replaces [k] when its position is at the end of close syllable such as in the words *background* ['bʌk.graʊnd], and *black* [blæk].
9. [t] at the end of the word is pronounced as [h] such as in the word *that* [ðætʰ].
10. The final velar [ŋ] is pronounced as [ŋ] such as the final <ing> in the word *going* [gəʊɪŋ]
11. The diphthong [eɪ] becomes [aɪ].
12. [eɪ] in the initial is pronounced as [aɪ] such as in the word *eight* [aɪt^h] and in the syllable such as in the word *stay* [staɪ].
13. The vowel [æ] becomes [ʌ] such as in the word *back* [bʌk].
14. The schwa [ə] becomes [æ]
15. In RP, the end <er> is pronounced as [ə] such as in the words *water* ['wɑ:tə] and *better* ['be:tə] into ['wɑ:tæ] and ['be:tæ].
16. The vowel [ʌ] becomes [ʊ]

17. [ʌ] in the initial is pronounced as [ʊ] such as in the words *up* [ʊp], *much* [mʊtʃ], and *umbrella* [ʊm'bʁe:lə].
18. [ʌ] is pronounced as [ʊ] in the syllable such as in the words *love* [lʊv], *another* [e'nʊ.ðə], *coming* ['kʊ.mɪŋ]

4.2 Discussion

In this research, the data were taken from the words which the speakers shifted the sounds. The shifted sounds did not apply the Received Pronunciation (RP). Further, the participants are the famous Brits who were speaking on YouTube or the special programs. The Brits were from different regions in UK and they showed their British English accents.

a. Glottal Stop [ʔ]

The speakers pronounced the /t^h/ sound as the /ʔ/ sound. The glottal stop appears in the final as a close syllable such as in *not*, *got*, *what*, *lot*, and *it*. And the glottal stop appears between vowels in the words such as in *bottle*, *write*, *another*, *little*, *metre*, and *better*. However, the glottal stop will not be articulated if its position between consonant and vowel in the words such as in *sister*, *start*, *picture*, *after*, etc

b. Labiodental [f] and [v]

In RP, there are dental /θ/ and /ð/ sounds. [θ] and [ð] are the characteristic of English sounds. [θ] and [ð] are articulated as labiodental /f/ and /v/ sounds by the speakers. [θ] and [ð] are articulated when the tongue is between upper and lower front teeth. Meanwhile, [f] and [v] are articulated when the upper teeth touch the lower lip. The words the speakers pronounced with labiodental are *mother* /ð/ to /v/, *think* /θ/ to /f/. Based on the way to articulate, the voiced consonant /ð/ was replaced by the voiced consonant /v/, and the voiceless consonant /θ/ was

replaced by the voiceless consonant /f/. However, the speakers did not change the dental /ð/ to /v/ in the word *the*, but the word *the* was pronounced as /də/.

c. Velar [x]

In RP, there is not the sound of /x/. The closing syllable sound /k/ are articulated as /x/. /k/ and /x/ are the velar but they are in different manner, stop and fricative. The speaker articulated the /k/ sound as the /x/ in some words such as in *back* [bʌx] and *background* [ˈbʌx.graʊnd]. The sound /x/ is pronounced by placing back of the tongue on the velum. The meet forms the constriction to the let air pass through this tiny path.

d. Glottal [h]

The speaker pronounced the end /tʰ/ as /h/. However, there were not all speakers shifted the end /tʰ/ as /h/. The speaker pronounced *that* as [ðʌh], *lot* as /lɒh/, and *got* as /gɒh/.

e. Velar [ŋ]

The English verbs with -ing are pronounced with ending [ŋ]. However, the [ŋ] sound was pronounced as [n]. The speakers dropped the <g> in the <ing> to <in> thus the <ing> was pronounced as [ɪn] such as in words *going* [gəʊɪn] and *coming* [ˈkʊ.mɪn].

f. Diphthong [aɪ]

There are some English words with diphthong [eɪ] such as in the words *eight*, *height*, *take*, *bake*, *cake*, etc. The speakers pronounced the words *eight*, *take*, *cake*, as /aɪtʰ/, /tʰaɪk/, /kaɪk/. The speaker changed the [e] into [a]. Meanwhile the [i] was not changed. To articulate [aɪ], the mouth has to open wide with the round lips because the position of [aɪ] is at the back to the front tongue. The change occurs in the initial words and the syllable.

g. Vowel [ʌ]

The sound /æ/ is articulated as /ʌ/. The speakers pronounced some words with /æ/ such as *back* [bʌx], *have* [hʌv], *cat* [kʌtʰ]. The /æ/ sound is changed mostly when the position is in the syllable.

h. Vowel [ə]

In RP, the close syllable [r] sound is not pronounced. The /r/ sound is dropped down while pronouncing that is known as rhoticity. Thus, the end /r/ sound will be schwa sound /ə/ such as in the word *runner* [ˈrʌ.nə], *water* [ˈwɔː.tə], *brother* [ˈbrʌ.ðə], and *hamster* [ˈhæm.stə]. The speakers articulated the sound /ə/ as /æ/. This sound only occurs to the schwa created by ending <r>. Thus, all words ended by close syllable [r] will be pronounced as [æ] such as in *brother* [ˈbrʌ.ðæ], *water* [ˈwɔː.tæ], *rather* [ˈrɑːðæ], and *over* [ˈəʊ.væ].

i. Vowel [ʊ]

This [ʊ] is familiar to the British English accent. However, some of the Brits from different region do not pronounce this sound as their accent, so the accent in one region may not be articulated in the other REGIONS. The speakers articulated the sound /ʌ/ in the syllable as [ʊ]. There are some English words such as *love*, *another*, and *come* pronounced as /lʊv/, /e.ˈnʊ.ðə/, and /kʊm/. This accent makes the lips round and half-open.

5. Conclusion

English as a global language is spoken to all people in the world. English is brought by combining it with the speakers' dialects. As a result, English has its own accent. However, there is a standard of English that it is Received Pronunciation (RP). The RP which is divided into conservative and contemporary RP is the core of teaching English in schools. The conservative RP is used by the Elites in UK

meanwhile contemporary is used by the ESL or EFL teachers.

Moreover, English in its country, UK, has different accents depending on the regions such as cockney accent, west country accent, multicultural London English (MLE), west country, Brummie accent, estuary English, Welsh, Scouse accent, Geordie accent, and son on.

There are 20 famous Brits chosen for having the data by listening their British English. The speakers are from different regions in UK. The speakers shifted some Received Pronunciation sounds based on their accent. The glottal stop [ʔ] are mostly pronounced by the speakers to shift the alveolar [t^h]. The diphthong [eɪ] becomes [aɪ]. And the speakers pronounced the final [ŋ] as [n].

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