The enduring charm of the dinosaur: a lesson on Received Pronunciation

Abstract
Part of the expertise required for professional interpreters is a solid grounding in the phonetics of their L2(s), including a broad overview of L2 regional variations. If the L2 is English, then an important lesson within training of this nature, particularly in a European setting, is one that describes the British sociolect Received Pronunciation (RP), generally used as a target and model for learners and as a parameter with which to compare other accents. This paper presents a potential lesson to advanced learners of English designed to help them make critical reflections upon why, within a European context (though RP remains a language model in parts of Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Malaysia and many other places), this form of pronunciation is so 'received' by students and teachers of English as a foreign language, and why it has such a stronghold in ELT in general. I shall attempt an answer to this question by briefly considering (i) the relationship between the pronunciation and spelling of English in general, and (ii) the degree of suitability of RP as an international standard – again focusing on discrepancies between pronunciation and spelling – primarily with regard to (non-) rhoticity, to weak forms and to glottalling. I shall then move on to an analysis of RP in terms of non-linguistic issues, focusing firstly upon its status as a sociolect and as a traditionally prestigious accent which engenders very mixed reactions among people from the British Isles, and secondly upon pedagogical issues, in particular the predominance – again within a European context – of RP in ELT textbooks and dictionaries. Finally I consider attitudes to RP in pedagogical settings outside the UK, in an endeavour to shed light upon the continuing predominance of RP in ELT resources, which are of course crucial in providing learners, translators and interpreters with the necessary competence in L2.

1. Introduction

I am a speaker of Received Pronunciation. According to some phoneticians, I may shortly be joining the dinosaurs. Various scholars estimate that only 3 per cent of the British speak it, and that numbers are currently declining in favour of regional accents. This supposedly imminent demise notwithstanding, I find it consoling that my pronunciation is still sufficiently meritorious to warrant the nomenclature 'received', despite the fact that I'm not entirely sure what this means. Two hypotheses I have toyed with over the years are:

1. mindful of the rationale of the expression 'mother tongue', I may have 'received' RP from my parents. The snag of this argument is that my parents were raised in - - - and - - - respectively. Indeed as far as I know my family in its historical sense had never set foot in England until a couple of years before I was born, so it would be hazardous to claim that my RP was 'received' from my family or relatives
2. I 'received' RP as a prize from the British government for having washed up on the shores of the sceptr'd isle and having had the initiative to find my way to a village in the Home Counties. The snag of this argument is that I have no memory of an award ceremony, of financial remuneration, or of vouchers for W.H. Smith's.

Less controversially, 'received' is to be intended with the meaning it carries in collocations such as 'received wisdom' and 'received opinion', i.e., 'accepted'. By whom RP is accepted, however, is a matter of some debate, as will be discussed later in the lesson.
Guy Aston, one of the scholars to whom this collection of essays is dedicated, speaks Received Pronunciation too, the only trace of his regional origins being the /u:/ he produces with such abandon in the first syllable of the word *July*. I am pleased to report that this reckless conduct has only marginally affected our friendship, and only in the summer. In any case why would this be an issue between us, when we both boast an accent which is, it seems, so widely received? During my frequent travels to other European universities within the Erasmus programme, my Received Pronunciation has unfailingly gone down a storm, being variously described as lovely, beautiful, wonderful, perfect, immaculate, and in other ways which only reserve and propriety prevent me from conveying. My headiest achievement in this regard was when a

Hungarian ice-cream vendor in Debrecen asked me for my autograph because I sounded like Colin Firth, and then hollered to her colleagues at a nearby café to come and savour my quintessentially English realisation of 'strawberry yogurt'. Sadly fortune's wheel turned shortly after when the young lady added – a tad superfluously in my view – that the resemblance to Firth concerned my vocal cords alone. Another of life's harsh lessons. In future when I choose flavours of ice-cream I shall stick to *vanilla*, whose rather miserable combination of the brief, lacklustre /ɪ/ flanked by a brace of unprepossessing schwas should act as a safeguard against further outbursts of enthusiasm.

Part of the expertise required for professional interpreters is a solid grounding in the phonetics of their L2(s), including a broad overview of L2 regional variations. If the L2 is English, then an important lesson within training of this nature, particularly in a European setting, is one that describes Received Pronunciation, generally used as a target and model for learners and as a parameter with which to compare other accents. This paper presents a potential lesson to advanced learners of English designed to help them make critical reflections upon why, within a European context (though RP remains a language model in parts of Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Malaysia and many other places), this form of pronunciation is so 'received' by students and teachers of English as a foreign language, and why it has such a stronghold in ELT in general. I shall attempt an answer to this question by briefly considering (i) the relationship between the pronunciation and spelling of English in general, and (ii) the degree of suitability of RP as an international standard – again focusing on discrepancies between pronunciation and spelling – primarily with regard to (non-) rhoticity, to weak forms and to glottalling. I shall then move on to an analysis of RP in terms of non-linguistic issues, focusing firstly upon its status as a sociolect and as a traditionally prestigious accent which engenders very mixed reactions among people from the British Isles, and secondly upon pedagogical issues, in particular the predominance – again within a European context – of RP in ELT textbooks and dictionaries. Finally I consider attitudes to RP in pedagogical settings outside the UK, in an endeavour to shed light upon the continuing predominance of RP in ELT resources, which are of course crucial in providing learners, translators and interpreters with the necessary foreign-language skills.

2. English pronunciation and spelling

It seems uncontroversial to affirm that for a number of reasons the English language is a poor choice as the global vehicle of communication. Although it has a relatively uncomplicated basic grammar, its phonetics and orthography belong to parallel universes. Some obvious examples of this divide are *foreigner, cupboard, drought, draught, mortgage, cousin, onion, queue, flood, Graham, Hugh,* as well as place names such as *Worcester, Gloucester, Greenwich* and *Thames*, while the pronunciation-spelling discrepancy of *Loughborough*[1] may suffice to persuade students of English that it would be less hazardous to study Chinese or Hungarian. Whichever accent of English one takes as an example, the letter 'o' has multiple phonetic realisations (*comb, tomb, bomb, some, Swindon* and of course *women*, not to mention its combination with other letters (*town, toy*)), as does the orthographic combination 'ea' (*heat, jealous, break, heart, research, fear, bear, sergeant, nausea*)[2]. English orthographic double consonants are generally produced as single phonetic consonants (Welsh English is an exception) with resulting confusion, notably for Italian students of English, about the spelling of words such as *literally, illegible* and *mattress*. Such are the inconsistencies between pronunciation and spelling that even native speakers of English may oscillate – at least initially – when confronted by names such as (i) Bowie, Rowling, Bowker, due to oppositions of the type *row* /rəʊ/ vs *row* /raʊ/, and (ii) Farage, owing to different pronunciations of the suffix –age, for example *village, heritage* (/ɪdʒ/), *camouflage, massage* (/ɑːdʒ/).

One could continue the list of the many discrepancies between spelling and pronunciation that feature in the main accents of English on the global stage, for example the different phonemic realisations of 'th' in *this, think* and *thyme*, the two different phonemic realisations of 's' in *horses*, or even of 'ss' in *possess*, but enough has been said.

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[1] The RP transcriptions of these words are: *foreigner* /ˈfɒrənə/, *cupboard* /ˈkʌbəd/, *drought* /draʊt/, *draught* /drɑːft/, *mortgage* /ˈmɔːgɪdʒ/, *cousin* /ˈkʌzən/, *onion* /ˈʌnjən/, *queue* /kjuː/, *flood* /flʌd/, *Graham*, /ˈgreɪəm/, *Hugh* /hjuː/, *Worcester* /ˈwʊstə/, *Gloucester* /ˈglɒstə/, *Greenwich* /ˈgrenɪtʃ/, *Thames* /temz/, *Loughborough* /ˈlʌfbrə/.

[2] RP transcriptions: *comb* /kəʊm/, *tomb* /tuːm/, *bomb* /bɒm/, *some* /sʌm/, *Swindon* /ˈswɪndən/, *women* /ˈwɪmɪn/, *town* /taʊn/, *toy* /tɔɪ/, *heat* /hiːt/, *jealous* /ˈdʒeləs/, *break* /breɪk/, *heart* /hɑːt/, *research* /ˈriːsɜːtʃ/ or /rɪˈsɜːtʃ/, *fear* /fɪə/, *bear* /beə/, *sergeant* /ˈsɑːdʒənt/, *nausea* /ˈnɔːzɪə/.

In addition to all this, English word-stress patterns are often unpredictable. Although suffixes can be a guide – learners rarely stress the wrong syllable in words like *congratulations, decision, solution, appointment* – the stress of so many words is opaque. Over the years my Italian students have experienced major difficulty with, among many others: *percentage, adjective, component, centimetre, lunatic, afternoon, recipe, canal, subsequent, Protestant, Catholic*.
In this respect we are light years away from a language such as Spanish, whose correspondence between pronunciation and spelling is striking: assuming that the learner has assimilated a few basic rules, the pronunciation of a Spanish word, stress included, is derivable from its spelling, and the correspondence in Italian too is far more transparent than in English, though word stress is often capricious (*angelo* vs *vangelo, mignolo* vs *pignolo*, *zaino* vs *abbaino*).

3. RP as a pronunciation model

Since RP is held up as a model of English pronunciation, one might perhaps cherish the hope and expectation that it would hoover up at least some of the mess described above. Yet from an exclusively linguistic point of view, of all the accents of English in the world, the RP accent too is perhaps a flawed choice as an international standard, a point occasionally emphasised by scholars. Abercrombie (2009: 227) stresses its more complex vowel system – mainly owing to its array of diphthongs – when compared with other pronunciations of English, and according to Roach (2009: 5):

I feel that if we had a completely free choice of model accent it would be possible to find more suitable ones: Scottish and Irish accents, for example, have a more straightforward relationship between spelling and sounds than does the BBC accent [RP]; they have simpler vowel systems, and would therefore be easier for most foreign learners to acquire.

Roach takes us back once again to the relationship between spelling and sounds. Let us consider the potential problems arising from this in more detail.

3.1. RP is non-rhotic

Brown (1991: 33) writes that "one advantage of the irregular nature of English spelling is precisely that it does not place speakers of any one particular [English] accent at an overall advantage or disadvantage in the process of learning to read and write". I know from personal experience that this point of view is debatable. I recall that when I was a five-year-old budding wordsmith I took it into my head to attach labels to the doors of all the rooms in the house. Now whereas 'kitchen', 'bathroom' etc. were manageable enough, my callow youth betrayed me when I reached the cellar, which I labelled 'sella'. The absence of the final 'r' in the spelling stemmed from the fact that I was already a non-rhotic speaker, because had I been a rhotic speaker I would have known that an orthographic 'r' was required.
It is true that the non-rhoticity of Received Pronunciation (for example the letter 'r' is not pronounced in words such as *stir*, *distort* and *farmer*) means that non-native speakers of English who use it as a model are saved the trouble of producing the /r/ (phonetically [ɹ] in RP) in words such as *performer*, whose three 'r's are mute in RP but which can be something of a mouthful for the learner of a rhotic accent. However, it is equally true that comprehension may be hampered by the absence of /r/ in words such as *choir, nurtured, purport, mortar, mourners, worthier, repertoire* and of course *performer*. Listening to a BBC news report about South Korea, an Italian student of mine once interpreted *career-based decisions* as *Korea-based decisions*.
A related obstacle in this regard is the existence of multiple orthographic variants corresponding to the sound /ɔː/ in RP. The main obstruction to efficient comprehension is that many words with /ɔː/ have an 'r' just after the vowel in the spelling, e.g., *door, wore, born, tournament, warm, sure*, while many others do not, e.g., *ball, talk, water, bought, daughter, sauna, law, Sean*. Learners hearing for the first time the RP realisation of the relatively uncommon words *thwart* or *slaughter* might not only be at pains to understand them but may even struggle to locate them in the dictionary (*slorter*? *sloarter*? *slorta*? *sloughtar*? *slautor*? *slawtor*?). Along the same lines, confusion may arise from failure to distinguish between RP homophones, some with an 'r' in the spelling, some without: *source* vs *sauce*, *court* vs *caught*, *fort* vs *fought*, *stork* vs

stalk, poor/pour/pore vs *paw, sore/soar* vs *saw*. (Interestingly, the difficulty for learners here is not only one of comprehension but of production: EFL teachers using RP as their model will doubtless have been struck by the way some learners struggle to produce /ɔː/ in the word *law*, and yet produce the same sound effortlessly in *door, more* etc.) Rhotic accents, on the other hand, distinguish unproblematically between *source* and *sauce, court* and *caught* etc., not only owing to the realisation of 'r' but also owing to the different respective vowels.
Naturally learners of rhotic accents too need to be alert to such distinctions in order to be able to understand non-rhotic pronunciations of English. But as far as English as a *lingua franca* is concerned, it goes without saying that if all non-native speakers of English had a rhotic accent as their model then they would be likely to *understand each other* more successfully in English, simply because rhoticity realizes orthographic 'r' whereas non-rhoticity entails only a partial realisation of it. (Naturally if the non-native speakers in question were to learn the pronunciation of English without having any contact with the written language, a situation which these days is rare, then it would make no difference in this context whether the accent they learn is rhotic or not.)
There are phonetic vowels in RP other than /ɔː/ which may or may not connect with an 'r' in the spelling (including schwa, which I shall discuss separately below), for example /ɑː/ in *part, seminar, shark*, where the orthographic 'r' is present, and in *castle, laugh, daft, sabotage*, where the orthographic 'r' is absent. However, in my experience with Italian students of RP the chance of misunderstandings is limited, notwithstanding a restricted set of homophones such as *barmy* vs *balmy, arms* vs *alms, aren't* vs *aunt*. The vowel /ɜː/, on the other hand, always links with an 'r' in the spelling (*occur, pearl, adjourn, purpose*), and although this again emphasises the distance between English spelling and RP, the fact that this vowel consistently corresponds to an orthographic 'r' makes it much easier to interpret. Even the filler /ɜː/ is written with an 'r', i.e., 'Er, I'm not sure I'm following you.'

3.1.1. The linking /r/ in RP

Some solace for the floundering learner is that in a non-rhotic accent a word-final /r/ can be welcomed back like the prodigal son if immediately followed by a vowel at the start of the next word, as in *for ever, Sir Anthony, nature or nurture* (see for example Roach, 2009: 115-116; Gimson, 1989: 302-304), thus a word such as *choir* might be more recognisable to the learner in a sentence such as *I could listen to that choir all day*. This also applies when the following word has silent initial 'h', (*four hours, more honest*), which learners can normally handle. Comprehension may be obscured, however, when RP speakers omit word-initial aspiration, for instance *I'd prefer 'er to contact me straightaway*. The phenomenon of /h/ dropping, and thus of linking /r/ prior to /h/ dropping, is folkloristically associated with London English (*she's laughing 'er 'ead off*, where *head* sounds like *red*), but is in actual fact common among RP speakers in the environment of function words such as *her* / *him* / *his* (see Section 3.5 below).
Sadly, the above-mentioned solace for the learner is offset by the complication that in listening contexts it may not be clear whether the second word has initial 'r' in the spelling or not. The names Peter Osgood and Arthur Ash could be misconstrued as Peter Rosgood and Arthur Rash, while vice-versa Christopher Reeves and Mr Reddington could be interpreted as Christopher Eves and Mr Eddington. Similarly homophonic are *another alley* / *another rally, more eagle sightings* / *more regal sightings*, and the mind-boggling *he produced an even longer rant than usual* / *he produced an even longer ant than usual*.
Other similar liaisons are common in RP and in other English accents, for example linking /w/ in *how is she?* and linking /j/ in *Guy Aston*, but these are unlikely to hinder comprehension.

3.1.2. The intrusive /r/ in RP

Still less manageable for the learner are those cases where /r/ is produced when there is no 'r' in the spelling at all. No longer the prodigal son but the dark stranger at the door, this is known as intrusive /r/, present both within single words (*drawing*) and, much more commonly, between two words: *I need a saw and a ladder, Australia and New Zealand, an idea of mine* (Roach, 2009: 115-116; Gimson, 1989: 302-304). As a result, the learner may be confused by combinations such as *raw energy* (*roar energy*?), *Julia ached all over* (*Julia raked all over*?), as well as by combinations of name + surname, which are again a source of misunderstanding: Anita Ekberg (Anita Rekberg?), Sheena Easton (Sheena Reaston?) Laura Ashley (Laura

Rashley?). Trask (1996: 185) was amused to hear the name of the squash player Lisa Opie written as Lisa Ropie. Vice-versa, the name Paula Rickman might be understood as Paula Ickman.
Note that the intrusive /r/ is mostly absent in rhotic accents: indeed I have heard (rhotic) Scots stigmatising non-rhotic English speakers for excessive use of /r/!
Other intrusive linkers are widespread in RP and in other English accents, for example intrusive /j/ in *high up* and *lie in*, and intrusive /w/ in *doing* and *go on*, but once again these are unlikely to hamper comprehension.

3.2. Schwa in RP

Schwa, transcribed as /ə/, is the most common vowel sound in RP, as well as in many other accents of English. It is also the most unappealing, more akin to a suppressed belch than a vowel, light years away from, for example, the full, pure vowels of Italian. Further, schwa appears everywhere like a rash: in rapid speech, native speakers can produce an average of one schwa per second, a frequency which may severely affect comprehension on the part of non-native speakers. In RP schwa may be:
1. fixed, i.e., you find it in the phonemic transcription supplied by a dictionary, as in *again* /əˈgen/, *effort* /ˈefət/, *banana* /bəˈnɑːnə/, *Madonna* /məˈdɒnə/, *assessment* /əˈsesmənt/, *Christopher* /ˈkrɪstəfə/, borough /ˈbʌrə/. In *Jerusalem* three of the four vowels are schwas.
2. variable, for example grammar words such as *of* /ɒv/, *and* /ænd/, *but* /bʌt/, *for* /fɔː/, *than* /ðæn/, *to* /tuː/, and *them* /ðem/ usually have schwa when in unstressed position: /əv/, /ənd/, /bət/, /fə/, /ðən/, /tə/, /ðəm/, for example in *pint of lager*, *rock and roll*, *larger than life*, *for good*, *quarter to five*. The negative suffixes in *hasn't*, *needn't* etc. also feature this reduced vowel: /ˈhæzənt/, /ˈniːdənt/. Further, schwa may be swallowed up, especially mid-word, for instance in *preposterous* /prɪˈpɒstᵊrəs/, *reasonable* /ˈriːzᵊnəbəl/, *marvellous* /ˈmɑːvᵊləs/, *national* /næʃᵊnəl/, *chocolate* /tʃɒkᵊlət/, *basically* /ˈbeɪsɪkᵊli/.
It could be objected at this stage that given that schwa has a predominant role in most of the best-known pronunciations of English internationally – Scottish, Irish, General American, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, South African – why in this respect point the finger at RP as an unsatisfactory model of pronunciation? There are two main reasons. Firstly, like /ɔː/ and /ɑː/, schwa often ties in with an 'r' in the spelling in non-rhotic accents, for example in *persist*, *teachers* and *modern*, but also in word-final position: *gear*, *there*, *plumber*, *tractor*, *lower*, *harvester*, *culture vulture*. Once again, this can create important comprehension problems for learners of a non-rhotic accent: indeed many of the difficulties associated with linking and intrusive /r/ are linked to word-final schwa. Secondly, there is an abundance of Englishes around the world in which schwa is far less recurrent, for example in the majority of Indian, African, West Indian and Malaysian accents of English (Collins & Mees, 2009: 188-193), and it seems legitimate to argue that a variety with scarce use of schwa might be more eligible as an international standard than one with prolific use of schwa.

3.3 *push* and *crush* in RP

In RP the pronunciation of the letter 'u' is often hard to predict. In order to illustrate this, let us examine some words with the sequence of letters -ush-: *ambush, blush, brush, bush, crush, cushion, cushy, flush, push, rush, slush, mushy*. Of these, *blush, brush, crush, flush, rush, slush* and *mushy* have /ʌ/ in RP, while *ambush, bush, cushion, cushy* and *push* have /ʊ/. As a result of this, learners may not only experience problems of comprehension but also of production, for instance producing /bʌʃ/ and /ˈkʌʃən/ instead of /bʊʃ/ and /ˈkʊʃən/.
Even among native speakers of RP this inconsistency regarding the pronunciation of 'u' may provoke uncertainty concerning proper nouns (not long ago I was surprised to discover that the 'u' of Cuckmere Haven, a place on England's south coast - - - - - - , is realised by /ʊ/ rather than /ʌ/), but for learners of RP the distinction can be baffling. The accents of the centre-north of England, however, do not feature /ʌ/ at all, the vowel adopted in all the above cases being /ʊ/. And this applies not only when the corresponding orthographic vowel is 'u', but to all those words with /ʌ/ in RP, whatever the spelling, for example *oven, stomach, thorough, onion, sponge, southern, cousin, does, blood, flood*.

3.4 *pass* and *mass* in RP

Similar, if not identical difficulties arise when the learner of RP comes across, for example, *pass, brass, surpass, classy, mast, faster, downcast* (all with the long back vowel /ɑ:/ in RP) and *mass, crass, sassy, hassle, enthusiast, plastic, drastic* (all with the short front vowel /æ/ in RP, though I have also occasionally heard the posh-sounding /ˈdrɑ:stɪk/). The same applies to /ɑ:/ in *slant, grant, plant, can't* as opposed to /æ/ in *pant, rant, scant, ant*, as well as to /ɑ:/ in *sample, example* as opposed to /æ/ in *ample, trample* (for further details see Collins & Mees, 2009: 101-102). Once again, this can provoke difficulties of comprehension but also of production for the learner, for instance the realisation of /mɑ:s/ and /pɑ:nts/ instead of /mæs/ and /pænts/. In Italy I have sometimes heard the (adult) children – brought up in Italy – of my native English friends and colleagues produce /dæft/ instead of /dɑ:ft/ or /krɑ:s/ instead of /kræs/, notwithstanding their RP accent.
As for the first vowel in *translation, transposition, transport* etc., even RP speakers cannot seem to agree which of the two vowels should be adopted.
Once again, in centre-north accents of England there is much greater consistency here between spelling and pronunciation, since all of the above words have /æ/. Having said that, this south/centre-north distribution of /ɑ:/ and /æ/ is not as neat and tidy as the south/centre-north distribution of /ʌ/ and /ʊ/, the difference being that /ɑ:/ is common enough in the centre-north too, for example in *father, massage, palm, calm, spa, reservoir, derby*, and above all in words with the orthographic combination 'ar' in final position or followed by a consonant, such as *car, guitar, shark* and *artistic*, though it is often realised phonetically as [a:].

3.5 Glottalisation and h-dropping in RP

The RP features discussed above – non-rhoticity, schwa, the vowels of *rush, bush, mass* and *pass* – are all well-documented in EFL materials. Other characteristics of RP, however, are barely mentioned in such materials. The two most salient examples of this are (i) the glottal stop [ʔ] as an allophone of /t/ and (ii) h-dropping.
Since in Britain these two features are habitually stigmatised as forms of low linguistic life, evoking visions of Eliza Doolittle struggling to learn 'proper' English, it may come as a surprise to discover that both of them are paid-up members of the RP club. Naturally there are provisos. The glottal stop, though not phonemically distinctive in RP (Gimson, 1989: 151), is recognised as part of this sociolect in certain environments, for example when (i) it is a syllable boundary marker and the initial sound of the second syllable is a vowel (*re*[ʔ]*action*), (ii) it reinforces an initial accented vowel (*it was* [ʔ]*awful*), and (iii) it reinforces final fortis plosives (*hel*[ʔ]*p, rea*[ʔ]*ch*). Also very frequent in RP is glottal replacement (Roach, 2004: 240-241; Collins & Mees, 2009: 84), above all when morpheme- or word-final /t/ occurs before a consonant (*Gatwick, football, lately, department, a lot more*), a feature which I shall focus on below. Emphatically excluded from RP membership, on the other hand, is glottal replacement in intervocalic environments (*flattering, metal, a bit of a nuisance*) or between /n/ or /l/ and a vowel (*fainted, faulty*). For further details see Gimson, 1989: 168-172. In the same way, h-dropping is considered part of RP in a very restricted environment, namely when position-initial in the weak form of function words such as *he, him, his, her, have, has, had* (Collins & Mees, 2009: 17-21), whereas it is outlawed in other environments, for example at the beginning of lexical words (*the 'otels, an 'ospital*).
Later in this lesson I shall consider why these two features are not generally dealt with in EFL materials using RP as a pronunciation standard, but before that it seems best to provide an illustration of the use of non-rhoticity, schwa, glottal replacement and h-dropping on the part of RP speakers. The text proposed is the first part of an interview conducted by the radio and TV presenter Anne Robinson with the well-known actor Don Warrington as part of a show consisting in a discussion of works of literature which have had a formative influence on the guests[3]. The accent the two speakers use would usually be categorised by phoneticians as 'posh RP', particularly that of Warrington, but whether one wishes to describe it as posh or not, both Robinson and Warrington would unquestionably be considered speakers of RP.
Like all RP speakers he and Robinson produce schwa very frequently, whether it is fixed or variable. I have counted 98 occurrences in slightly under two minutes of dialogue[4]:

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[3] The interview is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98yV6Y1qmkg

[4] In a classroom setting I would first of all have the students listen to the clip with a simple, i.e., non-annotated transcription, before moving on to the analysis of specific features of pronunciation.

Robinson: Don, it's quite surprising to learn that your background and early years are very different from that voice that has become so familiar to us.
Warrington: Yes, yes, well, I was, ahm, born in Trinidad in the West Indies, and I came to England when I was about eight. So I went from being a West Indian, a Trinidadian, to being a Geordie, to being this.
Robinson: What did your Dad do?
Warrington: My Dad was a politician. I didn't know him well, because he died when I was quite young, but that's what- that's what he did.
Robinson: And that prompted you coming to England.
Warrington: Well, I suppose it was something to do with the move. I think that my mother felt she needed a change, and at the time, because of the Windrush and things like that, England seemed to be the place to come to.
Robinson: The promised land.
Warrington: Yes it was, indeed. At school it was all about this glorious country.
Robinson: I mean a different climate, a different culture. How unusual in that era was it to be a small black boy in Newcastle?
Warrington: Well, it was very unusual, very unusual indeed, but I think the thing about being a child at that age was that one had enormous adaptability. Very quickly one could become part of the community. It was alien to me to be surrounded by all these white people, basically, because where I'd come from there were very few. There were more of me than there were of them, so things had changed, so I decided well, I'll become like them as quickly as I can.
Robinson: And how did you get round learning to speak the same way as everybody else?
Warrington: I simply- I simply heard the way they spoke and I spoke like them.

Thus as expected, Robinson and Warrington make abundant use of schwa rather than full vowels, while their non-rhoticity means that during this initial part of the interview they do not realise the letter 'r' on 24 occasions: *surprising, learn, your, early, years, are, familiar, born, Geordie, your, mother, culture, enormous, part, where, there, were, there, were, there, were, part, learning, heard*, though linking /r/ is used by Warrington in the sequence *more of me*.
We can already begin to note the surprising frequency with which this 'perfect', 'immaculate' RP does not produce sounds which, as underlined earlier in this paper, do feature in other types of English within the same environments.
Warrington and Robinson also make frequent use of glottal replacement of /t/ before a consonant. According to my calculations this occurs 28 times:

Robinson: Don, it's quite surprising to learn that your background and early years are very different from that voice that has become so familiar to us.
Warrington: Yes, yes, well, I was, ahm, born in Trinidad in the West Indies, and I came to England when I was about eight. So I went from being a West Indian, a Trinidadian, to being a Geordie, to being this.
Robinson: What did your Dad do?
Warrington: My Dad was a politician. I didn't know him well, because he died when I was quite young, but that's what- that's what he did.
Robinson: And that prompted you coming to England.
Warrington: Well, I suppose it was something to do with the move. I think that my mother felt she needed a change, and at the time, because of the Windrush and things like that, England seemed to be the place to come to.
Robinson: The promised land.
Warrington: Yes it was, indeed. At school it was all about this glorious country.
Robinson: I mean a different climate, a different culture. How unusual in that era was it to be a small black boy in Newcastle?
Warrington: Well, it was very unusual, it was very unusual indeed, but I think the thing about being a child at that age was that one had enormous adaptability. Very quickly one could become part of the community. It was alien to me to be surrounded by all these white people, basically, because where I'd come from there were very few. There were more of me than there were of them, so things had changed, so I decided well, I'll become like them as quickly as I can.
Robinson: And how did you get round learning to speak the same way as everybody else?

Warrington: I simply- I simply heard the way they spoke and I spoke like them.

There is even an example of glottal replacement of /t/ in intervocalic position when Robinson produces the sequence *in that era*, making for a total of 29 occurrences. As for h-dropping at the beginning of function words, we find just two instances, one from Robinson (*that has become*), and one from Warrington (*things had changed*).
Summing up, in just under two minutes of dialogue, these two posh RP speakers (i) do not produce full vowels on 98 occasions, (ii) do not pronounce 'r' on 24 occasions, (iii) do not realize the letter 't' with [t] 29 times, and (iv) do not produce initial 'h' twice. On top of all this, final 'd' is not pronounced at least 7 times, mostly as a consequence of assimilation (*and I came to England, And that prompted, Windrush and things like that, promised land, so things had changed, And how did you get round, and I spoke like them*), and one could argue for around 7-8 examples of glottal replacement of /k/, for example *background, black boy, like them, speak the same*. Once and for all, we should dispense with the belief, as widespread as it is fatuous, that RP represents written English more faithfully than other accents. As Hughes *et al*. (2013: 4) state:

Oddly, and misguidedly, many people believe it to be the accent that is closest to the standard written form, as though the connection between spelling and pronunciation were somehow more direct for RP than for other accents.

Admittedly I am exaggerating the drawbacks of RP. The moment one undertakes an analysis of features of connected speech in RP – for example weak forms, glottal replacement, assimilation – is the moment that one's objections to it become weaker: after all, all pronunciations of English show features of connected speech to a considerable degree. Having said that, it is incontestable that many of the unpronounced orthographic elements highlighted above are instead realised in at least some other kinds of English, so it is legitimate to wonder with what credentials RP manages to qualify as a pronunciation model at all. If nothing else, analyses such as this may dissuade fans of RP from describing it as flawless.
Of course those very fans might object that a model of pronunciation is exactly that – a collection of clear and manageable sounds – and not (necessarily) a model of consistency between phonetics and orthography. Yet if we were to accept this reasoning and exclude orthography from the equation, it would become implausible to argue that linguistically speaking any one accent of English is better suited as an international standard than any other, something which in the opinion of most phoneticians is very far from being the case. Further, as hinted above, what may be a useful model for native speakers of a language will not necessarily be a useful model for learners of that language. I shall turn to this issue in the next section.

3.6. RP for learners of English

Many years ago when I was an undergraduate I was having dinner in the student canteen with some friends. We were discussing the Catholic church, and I opined that it was unrealistic to imagine that the Catholic faithful could adhere *in toto* to the moral conduct advocated by the church. A mature student rebutted that I was being naïve, taking the role of the church too literally. Its tenets, he went on, were a guide to being a good Catholic, but even if you were unable to fully observe all these tenets all the time you could still be a Catholic.
Much the same logic could be applied to the RP church and learners of English: the impression is that no learners adhere to the RP model completely, though one should have no qualms with the claim that learners do nonetheless use RP. The reader may find this observation trite: surely it is obvious that learners can be said to use RP even if they find it difficult to produce certain sounds perfectly, for example the initial consonants of *thin* and *these*. My point, however, is another. Learners are unlikely to produce certain RP sounds for the simple reason that they are never taught to adopt them. In all my years of teaching pronunciation at university level in Italy I have never explicitly advocated, for example, that my students glottalise, h-drop or assimilate, and neither – as far as I know – do EFL pronunciation manuals. Indeed in EFL materials these features may not be discussed at all.
The whys and wherefores of this would require a broader discussion than is possible here. Suffice it to say that if such phenomena are not contemplated in EFL materials, it is in part because they are features of connected speech, which (i) tend to belong to a more advanced phase of learning and (ii) are not indispensable elements of EFL, so they may have to give way to more rudimentary elements. Further,

connected speech is not present in pronunciation guides in dictionaries, which for obvious reasons restrict themselves to phonemic transcriptions of single words.
It would seem to be the (confusing) case, therefore, that there is one model of RP associated with native speakers of English, and another model of RP associated with learners of English.

4. The argument so far

In view of all the issues outlined during this lesson, one is more than entitled to question the wisdom of persisting with RP, an accent adopted by a tiny minority of the enormous number of native speakers of English around the globe, as an international standard. Riding on the back of the bizarre relationship between the spelling and pronunciation of English in general, RP speakers appears to have a particular talent for not pronouncing letters (for example 'r', 'h', 'd'), or for not pronouncing them in a way that the learner might be entitled to expect (for example 't', 'k', as well as vowels constantly reduced to the evanescent, barely audible schwa); additionally, there is a very unpredictable realisation of the vowels in *push*, *crush* etc. and *mass*, *glass* etc. Further, it would appear that there are in practice two models of RP, one for native speakers of English and one for learners of English. These and other factors arguably render this sociolect unfit for international consumption. It is of course true that all accents of English have at least some of the drawbacks outlined, but it is uncontroversial to affirm that from a linguistic point of view a more judicious choice as an international standard would be, for instance, a rhotic accent such as Irish or Canadian, and/or an accent with a sparing use of schwa such as many African and Indian accents of English.
It is clear, however, that the choice of pronunciation models is not traceable solely to linguistic issues. The prevalence of RP as an international standard in Europe connects powerfully with non-linguistic questions, which will be discussed in the next section.

5. RP as a lingua franca accent: non-linguistic issues

5.1. RP and social issues

5.1.1. RP is a sociolect

Trudgill (1999: 118) writes that RP is

sociolinguistically unusual when seen from a global perspective in that it is not associated with any geographical area, being instead a purely social accent associated with speakers in all parts of the country [Britain], or at least in England, from upper-class and upper-middle class backgrounds.

It is, however, sometimes acquired as an adult, as is the case of Don Warrington in the interview examined above, who moved from Trinidad to England when he was eight and then grew up in predominantly working-class Newcastle, but who then acquired RP as a result of his training as an actor – an example of what Wells (1982: 283-285) termed "adoptive RP".
Roach (2004: 239), though not disputing the status of RP as a sociolect, stresses that the majority of its speakers live in, or originate from, the south-east of England. Indeed some linguists favour discarding the term RP, preferring the nomenclature Standard Southern British English. Trask (1996: 301) points out that "RP is usually described as having no regional associations, even though in most respects it exhibits the structural features of the accents of the south-east of England".

5.1.2. RP is a prestigious accent

RP has traditionally been associated with wealth, prestige, good education, the royal family, the aristocracy, army officers, the BBC (Trask, 1996: 301; Roach, 2004: 239), and as Hughes *et al*. (2013: 3) assert, it is still the accent of "those at the upper reaches of the social scale, as measured by income and profession, or title". Szpyra-Kozłowska (2015: 30) points out that RP is still associated with good education, prestigious professions and economic success.

However, a survey carried out by Coupland & Bishop (2007) suggests that RP has lost much of its erstwhile appeal and status, and that it is no longer considered to be essential for success in certain careers and walks of life. Hughes *et al*. (2013: 13) go so far as to predict that

if trends continue there may come a time when the elevation of RP above all other British accents is viewed as little more than a puzzling or amusing historical curiosity […] The shelf-life of Received Pronunciation may turn out to be much shorter than anyone could have predicted even 30 years ago.

5.1.3. RP is an irritating accent

As emphasised above, RP has traditional associations with the south-east of England. Since the south-east is the seat of government, the heart of the economy and has greater wealth per capita than the rest of the British Isles, RP can provoke irritation (i) in the traditionally poorer and more industrial centre-north of England and (ii) in other parts of the British Isles historically subject to the power and to the whims of the central government.

According to a survey carried out by Giles (1987) designed to gauge the reactions to RP of people with other accents from the British Isles, RP speakers are perceived as being diligent, self-confident and professionally competent but also as unfriendly, arrogant and insincere (see also Honey (1989: 60-61); Mugglestone (2003)). Gimson (1989: 86) notes that some potential young speakers of RP reject it because they perceive it to be redolent of the Establishment.

Trudgill (2001: 8) writes that the historical connection of this accent with the English upper class means that it is still perceived by many sections of British society as posh or snobbish (epithets adopted to describe it include 'plummy', 'lah-di-dah', 'Kensington' and 'cut-glass'), and as spoken by 'superiors' who are not to be trusted. It is perhaps no coincidence that in so many American films the confident but evil characters often speak RP – one need only recall the voices assigned to Shere Khan in *The Jungle Book* and to the evil brother Scar in *The Lion King* (see Lippi-Green 1997 for discussion).

6. RP and pedagogical issues

In Section 1 of this paper it was suggested that from a linguistic standpoint RP is a dubious choice as an international standard, while Section 2 reported authoritative views that RP has not only lost much of its prestige in Britain, with the result that it is less widespread than it used to be, but also that it can antagonise people from the British Isles who do not speak it, and even those who do speak it: mainstream RP speakers are often irritated by posh RP (or U-RP, as described by Wells (1982: 283-285). It has also been noted that as a model it is not particularly consistent. While it is true that no living language variety is static, there is a case for arguing that there is one model of RP for native speakers of English and one for non-native speakers. In the light of this muddled, unsatisfactory, scenario it is worth asking ourselves why RP remains so firmly established as the standard for EFL, at least in Europe.

It could be a simple question of marketing. In this era of selling English by the pound, the projection of 'Oxford English' or 'the queen's English' is a winning formula which exploits the stereotype of a traditional, quintessential England as captured by films such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* in which most of the characters speak RP. Aside from impressions culled during Erasmus exchanges, my more than 30 years' experience of teaching English in Italy and in Spain is that students' preferred English pronunciation is RP, followed at some distance by General American (though with increasing exposure to films in the original language – so many of them from the U.S. – this situation is liable to change), a preference which surely connects in some way with quaint scenarios of England and how publishing houses have responded to this situation.

For this reason RP is also the accent to which learners are most frequently exposed during their studies at school and university, whether it be during listening comprehension exercises, in pronunciation manuals, or in the phonemic transcriptions supplied by dictionaries – see Hughes *et al*., 2013: 4. Since it is the accent which is most familiar to learners in Europe they naturally feel more comfortable with it: they understand it better than other accents and find it easier to reproduce, the result being a circle – whether vicious or virtuous – from which it is hard to break free.

These are important factors, perhaps accounting for the fact that objections to RP of the type outlined in this paper have, over the years, largely been overridden. Most students of English as a foreign language are not aware, for example of RP's particularly irregular relationship with orthographic forms, or of its complex social associations in the British Isles. For the majority of students it is simply a standard, non-regional pronunciation model (Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2015: 31) that they find relatively easy to understand and use.
More significant in this regard is the attitude of non-British TEFL teachers in Europe. As stated above, the impression is that there is widespread adoration of RP amongst such teachers, to the exclusion of General American, Standard Scottish etc., which come across as the bastard brothers of RP. It would be disingenuous, I believe, to hypothesise that this adoration derives from linguistic factors. As argued above, a linguistic justification of RP is hard to uphold, and even the common wisdom that learners of English, say from the Baltic countries, find RP easier to comprehend than General American or General Canadian is little more than a myth. After hearing my Erasmus counterparts declare for the hundredth time 'Here we teach only Oxford English!', or 'Our model is the queen's English!', I'm sure I will be forgiven by my Erasmus colleagues if I state that their preference is tantamount to a remote form of received snobbery which owes its existence to the royal, lordly, there'll-always-be-an-England overtones of this accent. Furthermore, RP is associated not only with professional success but with fame and beauty, since it is the type of English most commonly spoken by celebrated British actresses and actors such as Emma Watson, Daniel Radcliffe, Tom Hiddleston, Keira Knightley and of course that Hungarian ice-cream vendor's icon Colin Firth. For so many teachers of English in Europe, what in reality is 'perfect' and 'beautiful' about RP is not its form or content at all, but the elevated social status it evokes, and the people who speak it. The appeal of Colin Firth's accent is the appeal of Colin Firth.

Conclusions

The most straightforward conclusion to this lesson is that RP has no special claim to eligibility as an international standard. It is spoken by a tiny minority of all the native speakers of English around the world, its relationship to English spelling conventions is particularly precarious, it is inconstant as a model, and it would seem that most British people are antipathetic to it. The current vigour and vitality of this accent is due to its enduring allure in EFL scenarios, which cling to RP as the mouthpiece of the traditional character, mores and institutions of the green and pleasant land of yore, cherishing those sounds of which the British themselves are so increasingly intolerant. One might go so far as to envisage stereotypical portrayals of the English as manifested by the sounds of RP: the self-effacing, mustn't-grumble schwa; the reserve and modesty of those unspoken consonants born to blush unseen, or better unheard; the quaint, drive-on-the-left, Brexit-toting oddity of *mass* and *pass* and of *bush* and *crush*; the abhorrence of anything as brash and invasive as the American /r/.
A flight of fancy? Perhaps. But by a paradox, those reasons for which the British are increasingly hostile to RP are those very reasons which favour its survival in the rest of Europe. If There'll always be an England, There'll always be RP.

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