

Lecture 8

20th-Century English. Received Standard English

The 20th century was a transformative era for the English language, marked by both global expansion and internal standardization. Rapid developments in technology, science, and communication—including radio, television, aviation, and later the internet—introduced a wealth of new terminology and facilitated the spread of English across continents. English became the language of diplomacy, science, trade, and international media, reinforcing its position as a global *lingua franca*.

At the same time, Received Standard English (RSE), also known as Received Pronunciation (RP), emerged as the prestige variety in Britain. RSE provided a neutral, non-regional standard, particularly in education, professional communication, and broadcasting. Its development reflected social factors, including class, education, and professional norms, and helped unify English usage in formal contexts. The BBC, public schools, and dictionaries all contributed to codifying RSE as a model for pronunciation, grammar, and formal vocabulary.

Despite the influence of RSE, English continued to diversify into numerous regional and international varieties, reflecting local cultures, social changes, and linguistic innovations. For example, American English, Indian English, and Australian English developed distinct vocabulary, pronunciation, and stylistic norms, while informal registers of English, including slang and digital communication, became increasingly influential.

Overall, 20th-Century English illustrates the dynamic balance between standardization and diversification. While RSE maintained formal and educational norms, global, technological, and cultural factors drove continuous change, expansion, and adaptation. This period set the stage for contemporary English, a globally connected language that remains flexible, innovative, and socially and culturally influential.

The 20th century was a period of rapid change and globalization for the English language. Key factors influencing English during this period included:

Technological and scientific advances: New inventions, discoveries, and industries introduced vocabulary for automobiles, aviation, computers, and medicine. Examples: radio, television, radar, internet, antibiotic.

Global communication and media: Newspapers, radio, film, and later television spread English worldwide, influencing pronunciation, vocabulary, and style.

World events: World Wars, decolonization, and international organizations (UN, NATO) made English a global *lingua franca* for diplomacy, trade, and science.

Cultural influence: Literature, music, and film contributed to the international popularity of English and spread idiomatic expressions, slang, and stylistic conventions.

RSE/RP developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, influenced by public schools and the BBC. It became a model for teaching English to non-native speakers

and for professional or formal contexts in the UK. While its influence has declined somewhat in recent decades, RSE remains a reference point for formal British English pronunciation.

Widely differing regional and local dialects The abbreviation RP (Received Pronunciation) denotes the speech of educated people living in London and the southeast of England and of other people elsewhere who speak in this way. If the qualifier educated be assumed, RP is then a regional (geographical) dialect, as contrasted with London Cockney, which is a class (social) dialect. RP is not intrinsically superior to other varieties of English; it is itself only one particular regional dialect that has, through the accidents of history, achieved more extensive use than others. Although acquiring its unique status without the aid of any established authority, it may have been fostered (elisegít) by the public schools (Winchester, Eton, Harrow, Rugby, and so on) and the ancient universities (Oxford and Cambridge). Other varieties of English are well preserved in spite of the levelling (különbségeket eltönteti) influences of film, television, and radio. In the Northern dialect RP /a:/ (the first vowel sound in “father”) is still pronounced /æ/ (a sound like the a in “fat”) in words such as laugh, fast, and path; this pronunciation has been carried across the Atlantic into American English.

3. Key Points:

1. 20th-Century English is marked by global spread, rapid vocabulary expansion, and standardization.

2. RSE provides a socially and regionally neutral standard for formal communication and education.

3. English continued to diversify with regional and international varieties, but RSE remained influential in broadcasting, education, and formal speech.

In the words run, rung, and tongue, the received-standard pronunciation of the vowel is /ȳ/, like the u in “but”; in the Northern dialect it is /u/, like the oo in “book.” In the words bind, find, and grind, the received standard pronunciation of the vowel sound is /ai/, like that in “bide”; in Northern, it is /i/, like the sound in “feet.” The vowel sound in the words go, home, and know in the Northern dialect is /ȳ:/, approximately the sound in “law” in some American English dialects. In parts of Northumberland, RP “it” is still pronounced “hit,” as in Old English. In various Northern dialects the definite article “the” is heard as t, th, or d. In those dialects in which it becomes both t and th, t is used before consonants and th before vowels. Thus, one hears “t'book” but “th'apple.” When, however, the definite article is reduced to t and the following word begins with t or d, as in “t'tail” or “t'dog,” it is replaced by a slight pause as in the RP articulation of the first t in “hat trick.” The RP /tʃ/, the sound of the ch in “church,” becomes k, as in “thack,” (“thatch, roof”) and “kirk” (“church”). In many Northern dialects strong verbs retain the old past-tense singular forms band, brak, fand, spak for RP forms bound, broke, found, and spoke. Strong verbs also retain the past participle inflection -en as in “comen,” “shutten,” “sitten,” and “getten” or “gotten” for RP “come,” “shut,” “sat,” and “got.” In some Midland dialects the diphthongs in “throat” and “stone” have

been kept apart, whereas in RP they have fallen together. In Cheshire, Derby, Stafford, and Warwick, RP “singing” is pronounced with a g sounded after the velar nasal sound (as in RP “finger”).

Pronunciation: Non-regional, “neutral” British accent; avoids strong local dialect features.

Vocabulary: Standard formal vocabulary; avoids slang and regional words.

Grammar and syntax: Follows standard rules, e.g., SVO word order, proper use of tenses, agreement in number and person.

Social perception: Associated with education, professionalism, authority, and sometimes social prestige.

In Norfolk one hears “skellington” and “solintary” for “skeleton” and “solitary,” showing an intrusive n just as does “messenger” in RP from French messenger, “passenger” from French passager, and “nightingale” from Old English nihtegala. Other East Anglian words show consonantal metathesis (switch position-áttétel), as in “singify,” and substitution of one liquid or nasal for another, as in “chimbly” for “chimney,” and “synnable” for “syllable.” “Hantle” for “handful” shows syncope (disappearance-szó megrövidítése) of an unstressed vowel, partial assimilation-hasonulás of d to t before voiceless f, and subsequent loss of fin a triple consonant group. In South Western dialects, initial f and s are often voiced, becoming v and z. Two words with initial v have found their way into RP: “vat”-(dézsa) from “fat” and “vixen” from “fixen” (female fox). Another South Western feature is the development of a d between l or n and r, as in “parlder” for “parlour” and “carnder” for “corner.” The bilabial semivowel w has developed before o in “wold” for “old,” and in “wom” for “home,” illustrating a similar development in RP by which Old English ān has become “one,” and Old English hāl has come to be spelled “whole,” as compared with Northern hale. In South Western dialects “yat” comes from the old singular geat, whereas RP “gate” comes from the plural gatu. Likewise, “clee” comes from the old nominative clea, whereas RP “claw-karom” comes from the oblique cases.

Vocabulary continued to expand rapidly, incorporating words from other languages due to global interaction.

Grammar remained mostly stable, but informal speech introduced contractions, phrasal verbs, and simplified structures.

Pronunciation saw both preservation and change: some traditional forms declined, while new accents and international variants emerged.

2. Received Standard English (RSE) is a prestige variety of British English, also referred to as Received Pronunciation (RP) in phonology. It is socially neutral, traditionally associated with education, professional communication, and formal occasions.

The verbs keel and kemb have developed regularly from Old English cēlan “to make cool” and kemban “to use a comb,” whereas the corresponding RP verbs cool and comb come from the adjective and the noun, respectively. In Wales, people often speak a clear and measured form of English with a musical intonation inherited from ancestral

Celtic. They tend to aspirate both plosives (stops) and fricative consonants very forcibly; thus, "true" is pronounced with an audible puff of breath after the initial t. Lowland Scottish was once a part of Northern English, but two dialects began to diverge in the 14th century. Today Lowland Scots trill their r's, shorten vowels, and simplify diphthongs. A few Scottish words, such as bairn, brae, canny, dour, and pawky, have made their way into RP. Lowland Scottish is not to be confused with Scottish Gaelic, a Celtic language still spoken by about 90,700 people (almost all bilingual) mostly in the Highlands and the Western Isles. Thanks to Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott, many Scottish Gaelic words have been preserved in English literature. Northern Ireland has dialects related in part to Lowland Scottish and in part to the southern Irish dialect of English. Irish pronunciation is conservative and is clearer and more easily intelligible than many other dialects. The influence of the Irish language on the speech of Dublin is most evident in the syntax of drama and in the survival of such picturesque expressions as "We are after finishing," "It's sorry you will be," and "James do be cutting corn every day."

Plan: American English as a variety of the English language spoken in the United States.

Characteristics of American English, pronunciation, words, spelling, grammar. American lexicographer Noah Webster. The History of American English. Modern variation and influence of American English. Canadian English . American and Canadian English. The dialect regions of the United States are most clearly marked along the Atlantic littoral, where the earlier settlements were made. Three dialects can be defined: Northern, Midland, and Southern. Each has its sub dialects. The Northern dialect is spoken in New England. Its six chief sub dialects comprise northeastern New England (Maine, New Hampshire, and eastern Vermont), south-eastern New England (eastern Massachusetts, eastern Connecticut, and Rhode Island), south-western New England (western Massachusetts and western Connecticut), the inland north (western Vermont and upstate New York), the Hudson Valley, and metropolitan New York. The Midland dialect is spoken in the coastal region from Point Pleasant, in New Jersey, to Dover, in Delaware. Its seven major sub dialects comprise the Delaware Valley, the Susquehanna Valley, the Upper Ohio Valley, northern West Virginia, the Upper Potomac and Shenandoah, southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, western Carolina, and eastern Tennessee. The Southern dialect area covers the coastal region from Delaware to South Carolina. Its five chief subdialects comprise the Delmarva Peninsula, the Virginia Piedmont, north-eastern North Carolina (Albemarle Sound and Neuse Valley), Cape Fear and Pee Dee valleys, and the South Carolina Low Country, around Charleston. 38 These boundaries, based on those of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, are highly tentative.

To some extent these regions preserve the traditional speech of south-eastern and southern England, where most of the early colonists were born. The first settlers who came to Virginia (1607) and Massachusetts (1620) soon learned to adapt old words to new uses, but they were content to borrow names from the local Indian languages

for unknown trees, such as hickory and persimmon, and for unfamiliar animals, such as raccoons and woodchucks. Later they took words from foreign settlers: “chowder” and “prairie” from the French, “scow” and “sleigh” from the Dutch. They made new compounds, such as “backwoods” and “bullfrog,” and gave new meanings to such words as “lumber” (which in British English denotes disused furniture, or junk) and “corn” (which in British English signifies any grain, especially wheat). Historical background. Before the Declaration of Independence (1776), two-thirds of the immigrants had come from England, but after that date they arrived in large numbers from Ireland. The potato famine of 1845 drove 1,500,000 Irish to seek homes in the New World, and the European revolutions of 1848 drove as many Germans to settle in Pennsylvania and the Middle West. After the close of the American Civil War, millions of Scandinavians, Slavs, and Italians crossed the ocean and eventually settled mostly in the North Central and Upper Midwest states. In some areas of South Carolina and Georgia the American Negroes who had been imported to work the rice and cotton plantations developed a contact language called Gullah, or Geechee, that made use of many structural and lexical features of their native languages. This remarkable variety of English is comparable to such “contact languages” as Sranan (Taki-Taki) and Melanesian Pidgin.

The speech of the Atlantic Seaboard shows far greater differences in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary than that of any area in the North Central States, the Upper Midwest, the Rocky Mountains, or the Pacific Coast. Today, urbanization, quick transport, and television have tended to level out some dialectal differences in the United States. The boundary with Canada nowhere corresponds to any boundary between dialects, and the influence of United States English is strong, being felt least in the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland. Nevertheless, in spite of the effect of this proximity to the United States, British influences are still potent in some of the larger cities; Scottish influences are well sustained in Ontario. Canada remains bilingual. One-fourth of its people, living mostly in the province of Quebec, have French as their mother tongue. Those provinces in which French is spoken as a mother tongue by 10 percent or more of the population are described as “federal bilingual districts” in the Official Languages Bill of 1968.

The 20th century marked a period of significant growth and transformation for the English language. Advances in technology, science, media, and global communication expanded the vocabulary and spread English worldwide, establishing it as a dominant international language. At the same time, Received Standard English (RSE) emerged as a prestige variety, providing a socially and regionally neutral standard for formal communication, education, and broadcasting. While English diversified into numerous regional and international forms, RSE remained a reference point for pronunciation and formal usage. Overall, 20th-Century English demonstrates

the dynamic interplay between linguistic standardization, social prestige, and global influence, laying the foundation for the modern, globally connected English we use today.

Questions to Lecture 8:

1. What are the major differences between RP and the Northern Dialect spoken in the north of England?
2. What are the main peculiarities of the Lowland Scottish Dialect?
3. What are the chief features of the Welsh and the Irish accents?
4. How many dialects exist in the USA?
5. What are their major peculiarities?
6. Are there any significant characteristic features of Canadian English? 3. What are the most common modern variations of American English?