Joanna Przedlacka

Models and Myth:
Updating the (Non)standard Accents

1. Introduction

What constitutes a feasible model in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pronunciation teaching can become a contentious issue. There are a number of choices to be made: firstly which accent to use as a target – with teachers usually opting for either of the two reference accents: Received Pronunciation (RP) or General American (for a discussion of difficulties in defining the latter see Preston, this volume). The second problem can be constant change, an inherent property of language. Together with synchronic variation, it might make the learners and teachers’ life rather a minefield. Indeed, early on in our career, as language students we duly learn that the virtual impossibility of delimiting what falls within the scope of a given variety might translate into problems of description. As teachers we also discover it gives rise to dilemmas such as ‘What (not) to teach?’ i.e. ‘to update or not to update’ and if so, how much? Alternatively, problems in description (of native accents) might also inspire a search for more ‘learner-friendly’, artificially derived solutions.

In the present paper I intend to look at some late 20th century changes within RP, attitudes towards this accent and its role in language teaching. I shall also compare its situation with that of Estuary English, allegedly a recently born accent. It appears to have all the prerequisites to succeed as an imminent pronunciation model, as it has been rated favourably and has received attention in academic circles. But is there really a viable native alternative to RP?
2. What is RP or ‘an element of myth in the model’

In Europe, the most popular model accent for EFL purposes has been, throughout the 20th century, RP. Even though originally not necessarily the most widely intelligible one, it is unquestionably “the most thoroughly described accent of English” (Wells 1982: 279), as it is codified in pronouncing and general usage dictionaries and described in textbooks. Its recorded samples are available for illustrative purposes to accompany its written description and RP also forms the basis of most English language teaching tapes and CDs, for both academic and general purposes. Thus the accent is familiar, even to those who are only vaguely aware of its existence.

Paradoxically, various misconceptions about RP still hold. The accent is sometimes taken to be an invariant structure, a monolith that is resistant to change. This, of course, could not be further from the truth. Indeed RP is rather unusual because it displays no regional characteristics. It is only possible to say that its speakers are British and very probably English but, in terms of internal variation, change over time and even class differences, it does not differ from other accents of English. It is probably this very lack of present day regional association that gives rise to the mistaken belief that no variation of any kind is to be found within it. Thus, although the stereotypes and the aura surrounding RP might suggest otherwise, RP is linguistically nothing out of the ordinary. As can be seen, there has always appeared to have been a degree of myth in the model. In this section I am going to explore these myths and briefly show why they do not belong with fact.

2.1. RP is an unchanging structure

Like all other varieties, the RP accent is constantly evolving. Thus the present day RP is certainly not identical to the one spoken forty or even twenty years ago. A comprehensive discussion of all phonetic tendencies within the accent throughout its history is beyond the scope of the present paper. Here, we will be looking at a number of changes
that happened in the latter half of the 20th century. With the printed media being a step behind contemporary speech, the changes are usually well established, if not already completed by the time they are registered in standard textbooks. Bauer (1984) points out that the handbooks are practically a generation out of date. However with technological advances and the resultant speeding up of the printing and editing process, this probably does not hold true any more. Nevertheless the older materials are often still in use, which then in turn gives the learners an impression of RP being unchanging. Below follows a discussion of the most conspicuous recent changes in RP.

**Keywords for the vowels are taken from Wells (1982).**

### 2.1.1. HappY tensing

An important trend is the use of a more tense quality of the unstressed final /ɪ/. A tendency to use a closer quality [i] for /ɪ/ in unstressed word-final position is not new per se, as such pronunciations have existed for centuries in the accents of the Southeast of England. They did not, however, enter into RP until recently. In an earlier paper Wells (1970) gives an example of the pair *studied – studded*, as homophonous in RP (both with /ɪ/, if the latter not with /ɨ/; which is contrastive in other accents as /ɪ/ – /ɨ/). Two decades later, in an article of 1990, Windsor-Lewis classifies this pronunciation as falling within RP, which agrees with Gimson’s (1984) earlier observation. He predicted that /ɪ/ is likely to completely replace /ɨ/ in the above context. Still, selecting informants for his experiments whose purpose was to investigate recent changes in RP, Bauer (1984, 1985), set the pronunciation /ɨ/ as one of the RP criteria.

As can be seen from the above, this trend within the standard accent is a fairly recent one. In the 14th edition of the *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (EPD) the tense variant is not listed, but the closer quality of the vowel in modern RP is reflected in most recent editions of the three major pronouncing dictionaries.

### 2.1.2. Vowels in unstressed syllables

As regards vowels in unstressed syllables, Gimson (1984) remarks on the occurrence of /ɨ/ rather than /ɪ/ in unstressed syllables, with the
former now more frequent. This is also confirmed by a more recent RP data, as discussed by Fabricius (2002b). Both the tendency to use /ɛː/ and the move to a closer quality happY vowel might be a result of the covert prestige of south-eastern accents influencing RP.

2.1.3. The lowering of /ɵ/

The lowering of /ɵ/ is another feature remarked on by Wells (1982). Bauer’s experiment showed that /ɵ/ was at the time becoming retracted and lowered. This is also corroborated by Henton’s (1983) study, based on a sample of ten speakers, which compares two sets of data, from 1962 and 1982. Henton reports a centralisation of RP vowels. Her results also show the retraction of /ɵ/, identified by Bauer. The more open quality of the vowel is not codified in the 1977 edition of the EPD, but in his later paper Gimson (1984) mentions this sound change in progress. Yet, Cruttenden (1994) remarks on its use by younger RP speakers. Currently, with three major pronouncing dictionaries on the market, this tendency is reflected only in the Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation (ODP) by the use of the open [a] symbol to more accurately model the RP quality. Windsor-Lewis (2003) offers a comprehensive discussion regarding its use.

2.1.4. The GOOSE vowel

Interestingly, RP has been affected by the universal fronting of the GOOSE vowel, also present in urban accents of the South East of England as well as in other varieties of English in the world, such as the US or New Zealand. For the RP speech, this is demonstrated by both Henton’s (1983) and Bauer’s (1984) experiments. More recent research (Przedlacka 2002) is also in line with these findings. Thus the young RP speakers tend to have a more central quality of this vowel, with some degree of rounding, rather than a fully back one, which is characteristic of the older generation. This phonetic tendency of the GOOSE fronting is neither reflected in the transcription system of any of the three pronouncing dictionaries, nor explicitly mentioned in the pronunciation notes. However, we have some indication of this trend, by comparing RP vowel charts presented in their most recent editions.
Models and myth

as well as Cruttenden’s (2001) revision of Gimson’s standard textbook on English phonetics.

2.1.5. Glottaling and glottalisation

As regards consonants, a very interesting change is the realization of syllable non-initial /t/, whose allophonic variants have a strong social salience in England. In a paper published over a decade ago Ramsaran (1990: 187) remarks that the replacement of /t/ by a glottal stop is “increasingly common” in contexts such as fruit yoghurt and what now i.e. before a sonorant and across a word boundary. According to her, this variant is currently more common than a generation ago, regardless of the age of the speaker. Its more extended use in RP has also been noted more recently by Fabricius (2002a) and is discussed in Cruttenden (2001).

In fact, the presence of the glottal stop before sonorants is quite well established in RP. Crystal (2004: 417) points out that Daniel Jones remarked on its spread “among educated speakers all over the country” and “actually predicted that in a hundred years’ time everybody would be pronouncing mutton as [μυν].” Crystal does not give the time of the prediction, but Jones (1960: 151) in his description of the RP accent indeed states that “some speakers of received English pronounce like this, especially when m, n, r, j or w follows”. Cruttenden (1994: 156) remarks on its occurrence “before all non-syllabic consonants” and “sometimes [...] heard for /t/ before syllabic /n/ as in cotton, Eton”.

Interestingly, the myth that the glottal stop does not belong into the RP speech is quite robust. The fact is that both glottalling of /t/ (the replacement of the oral consonant by the glottal stop) and preglottalisation (with both the oral and the glottal closures, as in start [στ Ατ]) have been present in the accent for a relatively long time. Crucially it is not the presence or absence of this allophone from the accent, but its occurrence in a given phonetic context. Thus while RP allows glottalling in the environment described above, intervocalic glottal stops do not fall within its scope and are restricted to non-standard accents. Incidentally, pre-glottalisation appears to have had an even longer history in RP, dating back to at least mid-19th century as demonstrated in an excellent paper by Collins and Mees (1996).
It is presumably due to its social salience that the glottal stop, despite being an allophone, makes an entrance into pronouncing dictionaries. In both the *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* (LPD) and the 16th EPD we find remarks on the use of the glottal stop in pronunciation notes. On his website Wells points out that “As long as it remains an allophone of /t/, the phonemic principle means that we do not need to transcribe it distinctly”. The 16th EPD also comments on its recent spread, stating that the glottal stop can be heard “in many urban accents, notably London (Cockney), Leeds, Glasgow, Edinburgh and others and is increasingly accepted among educated young people” (2003: 229). One can only speculate what the future holds, and whether due to its salience both within the British society and among EFL learners it might be transcribed in one of the future editions.

2.1.6. Dark /l/ vocalisation

Another consonantal change in RP is the vocalisation of dark /l/, which is only just making inroads into the accent. Thus, Jones (1960) omits it from his description but twenty years later Wells (1982: 295) remarks that it is “occasionally met with in RP, particularly in the environment of a preceding labial”. In his revision of Gimson’s standard textbook Cruttenden (1994) shares Wells’ view, adding that the vocalised allophone is “somewhat less usual” when following other consonants. /l/-vocalisation is probably on its way to become accepted as an RP feature, since it is extending to more contexts, yet at this stage the evidence is scarce. Currently it only receives a mention in the LPD’s pronunciation notes, but is not discussed in the other dictionaries, which suggests that it cannot yet be treated as a tendency widespread or well-established enough to be included in most descriptions of the accent or overtly taught.

2.2. RP is a monolith

This is yet another fairly robust myth. As can be gleaned from the previous section it cannot be true. If RP changes diachronically, it therefore follows that generational varieties must exist within the accent. Being devoid of regional variation, RP varies in other respects
“so that, for instance, older members of the aristocracy and younger television announcers do not sound exactly the same” (Trudgill 1975: 21). In fact, not only generational, but also social differences are found within the accent.

Contrary to a common misconception, the variety known as ‘the BBC accent’ is not the only type of RP. It is however, the one most people are familiar with and therefore take as the only type of RP. Gimson (1980), in his diachronic classification, terms it ‘General’ RP, distinguishing two other varieties: ‘Conservative’ and ‘Advanced’, the first and the last of these being chronologically related. ‘Conservative’ describes the speech of the older generation, while the ‘Advanced’ variety of RP is the speech of the young members of the upper class, also “used for prestige value in certain professional circles” (Gimson 1980: 80), a kind of pronunciation that other RP speakers might view as affected.

Wells (1982) divides RP socially, concentrating on class-related differentiation within the accent. Thus, we have ‘U-RP’ (where U stands for upper crust) and ‘Mainstream’ RP. Wells remarks that Gimson’s ‘Conservative’/‘Advanced’ are chronological varieties of his ‘U-RP’, while ‘General’/‘Mainstream’ are equivalent. Whenever phonetic or phonological variables are discussed, ‘General’/‘Mainstream’ RP is taken as a reference point to which other (also non-RP) varieties are compared. Indeed, as Gimson (1984: 46) says “the more conservative and obsolescent speech forms of older generations and the often eccentric and ephemeral innovations of the young” do not serve this purpose as they could hardly be taken as representative. In lay discussions ‘Mainstream’ and ‘U-RP’ are somewhat emotionally referred to as ‘talking proper’ and ‘talking posh’ respectively.

2.3 So does RP exist then?

As shown above, social and age variability within RP exists. Thus, depending on the social and phonetic or phonological set of criteria selected, we can arrive at many different systems. All the changes taking place within the RP accent might lead one to ask which of these systems constitutes what was originally defined as RP. There is no
reason to say that RP has disappeared or become diluted by other accents. It still exists, but is now different from its 19th century counterpart. Nowadays it is more accurate to define RP as a regionally neutral, non-localisable accent, albeit an unusual one, since it fails to offer clues to the regional origins of the speaker.

In the introduction to his first edition of the pronouncing dictionary Daniel Jones (1917) defined RP as “everyday speech in the families of Southern English persons whose menfolk have been educated at the great public boarding schools”. Almost a century later RP speakers do not hail solely from this relatively small social group. Jones’ definition would very likely be puzzling for a contemporary EFL learner, who identifies the model presented during classes and/or codified in dictionaries as the speech of the BBC newscasters. Indeed, it is due to the influence of the corporation’s long broadcasting tradition that it is, as Ramsaran (1990: 178) puts it, “unrealistic to try to label the accent as belonging to a particular section of society”, as its speakers are just as likely to come from the upper as from middle class. RP is no longer a status symbol indicating one’s belonging to the elite. Being used in mass media, it is freely available to anyone in England and overseas to be imitated and mastered should the speaker wish to do so. Thus the sociolinguistic correlations which used to serve as a base are no longer valid. Currently, non-localisability remains its defining feature.

Gimson (1977: x) remarks on “a dilution of the original concept of RP”. As suggested in earlier sources, RP exerts influence on regional varieties, which through contact modify their traditional sound system (Wakelin 1977: 5). This might still be true, though perhaps to a lesser degree due to the somewhat diminished prestige of accent. The other side of the coin is that RP is in a sense moving downmarket by adopting features that have been present in regional accents. Wells (1994) writes about more recent phonetic developments in RP which resemble Cockney, traditionally the accent of the working class in the East End of London.

Summing up, the accent is subject to the universal processes of variation and change. Thus, depending on the set of socio-phonetic criteria we choose to delimit RP, we might arrive at a number of divergent definitions and phonetic features. Wells offers a flexible approach to the concept, while emphasizing the importance of change.
He acknowledges that what constitutes RP “depends on your definition. I prefer to define RP sociolinguistically, as the pronunciation of people at the upper end of the social scale – whatever [emphasis mine, J.P.] that is at any given time. From this perspective, RP gradually changes as it incorporates elements from lower down” (http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/estuary/ee-faqs-jcw.htm).

Undoubtedly present-day RP does not sound like it did decades ago, which provokes claims that the accent has disappeared. These in turn are inspired by the false belief that “normal sociolinguistic processes somehow pass by speakers of RP”, as accurately observed by Fabricius (2002a: 115).

3. Negative attitudes towards RP?

As the accent symbolised good education and/or at least middle class status, unquestionably, its social acceptability was initially very high. However, it seems to have decreased somewhat in the latter half of the 20th century. With the aura surrounding it and the associations it evokes, RP has met some negative reactions, just like non-standard varieties frequently do. Thus, an earlier comment by Spencer (1957: 17) who remarks that “the accent most unfortunately persists” despite the loosening of social barriers in the British society, voices sentiments of many of the English. RP used to be a “behaviour trait” (Spencer 1957: 17) of the socially privileged. It gave its speakers a certain social advantage, denoting membership of elite. Fortunately, these days RP is not a prerequisite for social advancement. In fact, it is the covert prestige of urban varieties that has more appeal.

Even a certain degree of hostility towards RP has been noted. The very fact that a speaker uses RP is sometimes judged as a desire to emphasise his assumed social superiority and is treated as affected and artificial. It is especially the younger generation that tend to reject it, not wishing to be regarded “as Establishment” (Gimson 1980: 86). This observation is also confirmed by Coggle’s (1993: 85) mini-survey, in which he asked a group of students to write down adjectives
which came to their minds when listening to a speaker of conservative RP. These included “formal”, “pompous”, “cold”, “over-precise” and “stiff”, which clearly shows overwhelmingly negative reactions. As Christophersen (1987: 19) notes, resentment to RP is “coloured by something resembling vindictiveness”.

Similarly, Giles et al. (1990) report a survey in which listeners were asked to evaluate a speaker’s personality and job suitability. A clear correlation was noted between the job suitability and accent usage. RP speakers, perceived as credible and competent, were judged suitable for prestigious jobs, requiring responsibility, while for the three lowest positions speakers of broader forms were preferred (the jobs formed a continuum, from a control manager down to an industrial plant cleaner).

However, when it comes to personality, RP speakers were evaluated negatively. They were thought not to possess features such as friendliness, generosity or sincerity. For example, Welsh listeners rated a Welsh-accent speaker as warm and kind-hearted, only when she diverged from her interviewer and broadened her accent, but refused such a rating when she tried to modify it in the direction of RP. Generally, speakers with local accents were rated much higher with respect to the positive features of personality.

Of course it would be far from the truth to claim that the attitudes to RP are now unanimously hostile. Christophersen (1987: 17) argues that the accent should be preserved, not only since it is utilitarian and because of its intelligibility, but also because it “symbolises a wider cohesion and loyalty, on a national and international basis”. He believes it will long continue to serve as a model for foreign learners because any suitable replacement seems to be lacking. In consequence, discarding it might create chaos.

4. …and positive to Estuary English?

As implied before, partly due to the fact that the modern version of RP was sometimes not recognised as such, the very existence of the accent
has been questioned. This coincided with the media hype surrounding Estuary English and its being put forward as a candidate for the future pronunciation standard as a replacement for RP. It might have appeared that the perfect candidate had come on the scene. The new variety was judged ‘young, modern and democratic’. Allegedly it incorporated the most recent phonetic trends. Apparently, then, it had all the prerequisites for success in that role, as it was also evaluated favourably by natives and EFL learners.

Clearly, Estuary English has captured public imagination. Over the past two decades British mass media have seemed to indicate an emergence of a new accent chiefly characterised by two phonetic tendencies, towards l-vocalisation and syllable non-initial t-glottalling. In an early attempt at a description of this language phenomenon for lay readers Coggle draws attention to its salient feature of t-glottalling: “the accent that minds its ‘p’s and ‘q’s but drops its ‘t’s”.¹

The images the term conjured up, though varied, were nevertheless mostly positive. Frequently they referred to descriptions of individuals, factual or reflecting authors’ attitudes towards the person: such as “the stereotypical trendy teacher”, who speaks “in estuay English tones”² or “‘He [Prince Edward] is not as posh as the others’, said one guest commenting approvingly on his estuary English accent”.³ Others commented appreciatively on the blur of class barriers, calling it “the classless dialect sweeping southern Britain, Estuary English, the ‘high cockney’”,⁴ which testifies to its positive ratings.

Of course, it would be misleading to claim that the reactions to the variety are purely enthusiastic. While journalists seem to find it somewhat of a novelty, an attractive speech variant worth the publicity it is receiving, one also finds a body of comments such as “it’s a lazy accent, lacking in clarity”,⁵ or adjectives such as ‘somnambulant’ and ‘slack-jawed’, applied to Estuary English. These

⁵ Letters to the Editor. The Times, 12 November 2004.
are usually found in the Readers’ Letters section of various British newspapers.

Browsing the internet, one can find EFL teachers and students’ sentiments voiced as well. Here again we have a whole spectrum of attitudes, ranging between gushing enthusiasm: “I love Estuary English! I wish I had a teacher who would help me with that accent. It’s the real McCoy! [...]”; mild concerns about its transience: “I am not in favour!!! How long will Estuary English last?” and observations on its situation–related usage: “We tend to speak differently when we are socialising together, adopting forms of Estuary English or using local dialects as we are more relaxed with each other.”

5. Replacing a model with a myth – What is really happening in (non) standard accents?

In the light of the above it might seem tempting to postulate Estuary English for the current pronunciation model, as a replacement for the outdated Received Pronunciation. And since so many sing its praises, one could be forgiven for hoping that Wells’ (1982: 118) prediction about the rise of a “new, non-localizable, but more democratic standard” that “seems likely to be based on popular London English” will have now come true.

However, things are obviously not that straightforward. We are not dealing with a simple replacement of one accent by another. This is so for a number of reasons: Firstly, even though one might have got that wrong impression by e.g. an increased presence of regional accents prompted by the BBC’s permissiveness in recent years, RP has not disappeared. Secondly, there is no doubt among linguists that the standard variety is the codified variety, used with certain ends in mind, such as foreign language teaching or official broadcasts (Crystal 1992). Indeed, performing this function comes hand in hand with

---

prestige, but the reverse is not necessarily true. Thus, if the variety in question loses some of its prestige, it does not automatically follow that a replacement standard is sought immediately. Therefore, as a codified accent RP is unlikely to be replaced. The sheer impracticality of such a task makes it even less likely. RP is by all means the most thoroughly described accent of English and it has a distinct advantage over other varieties, being readily available to the learner in dictionaries, textbooks, recordings and the spoken media.

Recent research (Fabricius 2002a, Przedlacka 2002) shows that the RP accent is alive and well and still used in British institutions stereotypically associated with it, such as Eton or Cambridge University. Indeed, young RP speakers reveal new features, such as extended context for /l/-vocalisation (Przedlacka’s informants) and /t/-glottalling, yet their presence does not affect its status. Because these phonetic trends are supralocal and not characteristic of a specific geographical area, RP remains non-regional. Incidentally, the same trends are reported to be on the increase in non-standard accents, their emergence being part of widespread changes currently going on in Britain. Their appearance cannot be equated to the death of RP or a birth of a new variety. Also, since innovations tend to be viewed with suspicion, any incorporation of non-standard features into RP has at the initial stage always been regarded as non-RP.

A relevant question at this point seems to be ‘What is Estuary English?’ Its status and exact phonetic nature are beyond the scope of this paper, however it has been demonstrated elsewhere (Przedlacka 2002) that the claims about the birth of an accent that is rapidly diffusing out of its Thames estuary heartland and influencing current English speech both socially and geographically belong with myth rather than fact. Currently this label seems to be merely convenient shorthand for a number of ongoing changes in RP and urban accents. It is only in this sense then we can say that Estuary English exists.

It appears that the Estuary English myth was partly fuelled by English sensitivity about what constitutes a spoken standard. Clearly, matters of accent differences attract a lot of attention, which is accurately illustrated by Abercrombie’s (1965: 10) remark that “English people are divided by the way they talk [...] I believe this to be a situation, which is not paralleled in any other country in the world”. Rather than constituting a linguistic phenomenon, Estuary
English became a vehicle for criticising or celebrating socially salient phonetic features, depending on one’s sentiments towards them.
6. Learners’ views, materials and potential implications for curricula

It is understandable that a young person might be reluctant to imitate a model which is a contemporary of their grandfather’s generation (see Trudgill 2001) and would prefer to be taught the speech of their peers. In their study of attitudes towards pronunciation teaching, Janicka, Kul and Weckwerth (this volume) conclude that while RP is considered the optimal model, the first- and second-year English Department students “rather than having a strict image of ‘conservative’ RP […] were entirely content to consider a young speaker as a good model for pronunciation teaching”.

A selection of learners’ views presented in section 4 above implies a keen interest on the part of many (presumably advanced) learners in how English is currently pronounced. Although the accuracy of such comments might be debatable, their value lies elsewhere. They are an indicator of attitudes that might not necessarily have been revealed through formal questionnaires. Thus, the enthusiasm about Estuary English demonstrates that this interest in pronunciation is not merely functional. To the learner, it also appears important to sound authentic. This goal, however, can be achieved if the target to be approximated is not only a native, but also a contemporary one.

Naturally, as Cruttenden (2001: 299) puts it “[t]he great majority of foreign learners will have a severely practical purpose for acquiring English and will see no great advantage in learning other than to a level of MINIMAL GENERAL INTELLIGIBILITY”, yet it is also true that:

There will, however, be many learners who, for academic reasons or because their work requires them to deal on equal terms with speakers in or from other regions of the world, wish to communicate easily without signalling too blatantly their regional origin; […] The foreign teacher of English constitutes a special case. He has the obligation to […] present to his students as near an approximation to that model as he can. Particularly if he is dealing with young pupils, his students will imitate a bad pronunciation as exactly as they will a good one; […] (Cruttenden 2001: 299).
Even descriptions of the model draw attention to the fact that RP has changed. And thus, fortunately for teachers and learners alike, this modernised model is readily available. The three pronouncing dictionaries are in agreement that it is an updated one, not the RP that was enshrined in dictionaries a few decades ago. Thus, the 16th EPD recognizes the fact that the (redefined) RP is no longer an exclusive class property, by stating in the introduction that it describes “what is referred to as BBC English; this is the pronunciation of professional speakers employed on BBC1 and BBC2 television, the World Service and BBC3 Radio 3 and 4 [...]” and points out that “of course, one finds differences between such speakers” (2003: v). Likewise, LPD observes that “The model of British English pronunciation recorded in LPD is a modernised version of the type known as Received Pronunciation or RP” (2000: xiii), and finally the ODP also puts forward “a younger, unmarked RP” (2001: xi).

There are of course slight differences in how this model is represented, with respect to the features that have recently entered RP. This is presented in Table 1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>16th EPD</th>
<th>LPD</th>
<th>ODP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hapPy vowel</td>
<td>transcribed in dictionary entries</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/θ/ → [α]</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>transcribed in dictionary entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l-vocalisation</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>mention in introduction</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glottal stop</td>
<td>mention in pronunciation notes</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Comparison of the ‘new’ RP features in the three major pronouncing dictionaries.

7. Conclusions

Ultimately, the likelihood of encountering RP speaker is small, and that of encountering only RP speakers is virtually nil. Therefore, the
teacher can best prepare their students for real life language situations by making them aware of variation. Thus, as said in the ODP “we appeal to our readers, the living speakers of contemporary English, whether native or later acquired to listen to the pronunciation of English around them and to revel in the endless variety of English voices and accents that they will hear” (Upton et al. 2001: vii). This is key to ensuring that the students will be aware of the range of accents they may encounter on meeting native speakers and helping the learners to understand them. In turn, however, the EFL learner wishes to be recognised as a speaker of contemporary English. Therefore in choosing a pronunciation model the question is not solely ‘Which model?’ but also ‘How up to date?’

Clearly, the most feasible model for language teaching purposes remains RP, but it is the updated version that should be taught, with the inclusion of features that are salient and ‘authentic’ to learners. Indeed, the enthusiasm EFL learners show for Estuary English, which is largely poorly defined (at least to EFL learners) and more a product of media hype, simply serves to illustrate that it is the perception of a modern accent that attracts the students. Given that RP is an accent which incorporates changes as readily as any other (a fact that one can convey to the students), it would thus seem that what the teacher wishes to teach and what the students really want to learn are actually in accordance, so long as the teacher stays abreast of the change that occurs within RP. Given the constant updating of the major pronunciation dictionaries, coupled with an awareness of the accent changes from British media, this should be a readily achievable goal which will satisfy the needs and interests of the students. As Dame Eileen Atkins wrote in a letter to The Times recently (12 November 2004), on the subject of accents in classical theatre:

Received pronunciation (RP), of course changes all the time and I suppose there may come a time when estuary becomes RP, and it may be more taxing for audiences to sit through Shakespeare, Shaw, Ibsen, Chekhov and Restoration plays as it’s a lazy accent, lacking in clarity; but it is the audience that decides if it’s acceptable. If they get restless, the actors will change their accent again.

Similarly teachers need to ‘change their accent’ to keep their ‘audience’, i.e. the students, from getting restless too.
References


University Press.

Henton, Caroline G. 1983. Changes in the Vowels of Received 


Heffer.

Przedlacka, Joanna 2002. *Estuary English? A Sociophonetic Study of 

(ed.) *Studies in the Pronunciation of English: A 
Commemorative Volume in Honour of A. C. Gimson*. London: 
Routledge, 178-190.

Press.

Spencer, John 1957. Received Pronunciation: Some Problems of 
Interpretation. *Lingua* 7, 7-29.

Arnold.

Trudgill, Peter 2001. Received Pronunciation: Sociolinguistic 

*The Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation for Current English*. 
Oxford: Oxford University Press.


Linguistics* 6, 231-252.

University Press.

Johannesson, Nils-Lennart (eds) *Nonstandard Varieties of 
Language*. Papers from the Stockholm Symposium 11-13 April 
Wiksell International, 198-205.

