

The Emerging Phonological Standard

LYNDA MUGGLESTONE

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), language, and the emergence of a standard variety, merited a chapter of its own. This usefully drew attention to the perceptual shifts that standardisation involves. 'After a speach is fully fashioned to the common vnderstanding, and accepted by consent of a whole countrey and nation, it is called a language', he famously commented (Puttenham 1589: 156). He documented, too, an early model of centre and periphery by which 'our Southerne English' – 'good Southerne', he affirmed – thereby took precedence over liminal varieties characteristic of 'marches and frontiers', as well as those pertaining to 'any vplandish village or corner of a Realme' where 'poor rusticall or vnciuill people' predominate. Puttenham's prime focus was writing – the variety to be used by the 'maker or Poet'. Nevertheless, considerations of sound as well as social meaning already intervened. 'Strange accents and ill shapen soundes' might not impact on 'common vnderstanding' but, he elaborated, they already typified the discourse of the 'inferiour sort'. Meanwhile, the 'better brought vp sort . . . graciously behauoured and bred' were judged exemplary – provided, that is, that they lived within sixty miles of the capital 'and not much aboue'. Beyond the Trent, in contrast, 'whether they be noble men or gentlemen, or of their best clarkes all is a matter' (Puttenham 1589: 157).

By the early seventeenth century, it is therefore possible to discern not only a nationally instituted (if still variable) variety of English in relation to spelling, morphology and lexis, but also the enregisterment (see Beal and Cooper, Chapter 27, this volume) of certain regional varieties in ways that reveal aspects of a perceptual 'non-standard' in phonology as well as form. Sociolinguistic disguise in Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1604), for example, underscores Edgar's transformation from courtier (and eldest son of the Earl of

Gloucester) to Poor Tom, the ‘bold peasant’ of Act IV by means of a distribution of voiced fricatives (‘Chill not let go, zir . . . ’twould not ha’ bin zo long as ’tis by a vortnight’). If remote from the orthographical conventions used elsewhere in the text, this was indicative of the ‘far Westernne mans speech’ that, as Puttenham noted (1589: 157), was neither ‘courtly’ nor ‘currant’. The northern markers of Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (first staged in 1614) functioned in a similar way. Broad parameters of this kind can usefully illuminate contrastive patterns of diversity. In other respects, however, as this chapter explores, the reality, and praxis, of a phonological standard and its emergence in English are laden with complexity.

The varied endeavours of early writers on spoken English to identify a phoneme inventory does not, for example, suggest either the existence of a clear-cut norm, nor its supraregional distribution. This was, in part, as a result of the Great Vowel Shift, still playing out at different rates in different speech communities. It was, however, equally evident in other ongoing patterns of change. Zero realisation of velar and palatal fricatives (conventionally indicated by <gh>) was identified as a key feature of the ‘flower of the English tongue’ that John Hart endeavoured to document in his *Orthographie* (1569); conversely, the London-based Alexander Gil in his *Logonomia Anglica* (1619) described their respective presence in words such as *ought* and *light* (as well as arguing for *you* with a diphthong similar to that used in *out*). The phonetician Richard Hodges (1644: 4) commented on the consolidation of what was a relatively new phoneme (the antecedent of /ʌ/) in words such as *other*. Other writers often ignored it. The extent to which /h/ was a phoneme at all remained controversial. It is ‘rarely other than an aspiration in power, though a Letter in form’, Ben Jonson’s *English Grammar* (1640) affirmed (Jonson 1928: 7). The monophthongisation of *ai* in *wait*, *maid* presented other aspects of diversity and change. London speakers, wrote Elisha Coles, had ‘fine smooth tongues’ in which this had often taken place. But, he argued, diphthongal enunciations characterised good speakers elsewhere while also being more ‘authentick’. People ‘usually espouse that pronunciation as properest which they have been accustom’d to’, he stressed (Coles 1674: 103).

The emergence of *orthoepey* and, indeed, *orthoepists* is a useful index of the shifting prominence that pronunciation, and ideas of a phonological standard, came to claim within the history of English. A distinct branch of linguistics in which speech rather than writing was made the primary object of investigation, it was, OED confirms, first attested in Simon Daines’s *Orthoepia Anglicana* (1640). Its use as a synonym for ‘correct speech’ or, as OED

notes, for ideas of ‘Accepted or customary pronunciation’ was, however, a later, and significant, development.¹ *Orthoepy* was ‘the right pronunciation of words’ and ‘as necessary to our language as *orthography*’ or correct spelling, stated John Walker in his *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791, *orthoepy*). As in William Kenrick’s *New Dictionary of the English Language: containing not only the Explanation of Words . . . but Likewise their Orthoepia or Pronunciation* (1773), *orthoepy* was based on ‘the present practice of polished speakers in the metropolis’, and presented in the aim of disseminating a ‘standard of English pronunciation’ over the nation as a whole (Kenrick 1773: i).

9.2 CREATING A REFERENCE MODEL FOR SPEECH

Knowledge, Samuel Johnson stated, was classified in two ways. Either ‘we know a subject ourselves’ or, especially given the rapid expansion of the reference book as genre, ‘we know where we can find information upon it’. ‘When we enquire into any subject’, he added, ‘the first thing we have to do is know what books have treated of it’ (Boswell 1971: II, 265). For general readers, however, such treatment had, in terms of spoken English, long been inadequate. ‘True Pronunciation’ – and the remediation of a ‘vicious Pronunciation’ – might respectively be extolled on the title pages of Dyche’s *Dictionary of all the Words commonly us’d in the English Tongue* (1722), as well as Dyche and Pardon’s popular *New General English Dictionary* of 1755. But in each, information was restricted to the recommended position of stress (hence *commótion*, *cómmune*). Entries were silent on the quantity and quality of individual sounds.

Johnson’s own work revealed similar tensions. His *Dictionary* (first published in 1775) set down national norms for sense based on what he termed ‘acceptation’ (‘The meaning of a word as it is commonly received’). For pronunciation, in contrast, incidental comments, rather than systematic coverage, remained the norm. As under *ront* (‘An animal stunted in the growth’), readers were reminded that this was ‘commonly pronounced *runt*’ or, under *extraordinary*, that this is ‘generally pronounced *extrordinary*, whereby the *a* is liquified into the *o*’.²

¹ *Orthoepy* (n.), senses 1 and 2. OED Online. Oxford University Press, June 2021.

² Johnson, *Dictionary* (fourth edition, 1773), *ront* (n.); (first edition, 1755), *extraordinary* (adj.).

Whether the latter also suggested rhoticity courtesy of the retained <r> graphemes remained unclear. Likewise, if *ront* is pronounced *runt*, was this to be seen as indicative of /ʌ/ as in *cut*, or /ʊ/ as in *pull*? Information was partial, relying on the reader's own sense of the sounds to be deployed.

As Thomas Sheridan, an actor, actor-manager, and one of the leading orthoepists of the late eighteenth century, commented, there was, across Britain, a self-evident paradox. Formal teaching and textbooks had long expounded the proper pronunciation of Latin and Greek. But, with respect to English, written language took precedence and, in pronunciation, diversity prevailed. He advocated instead a new kind of reference model that would, in contrast, comprise not only information by which words 'should always be understood in the same sense' but also such that 'the same words should always be sounded in the same manner', irrespective of the speaker's place of birth or social location (Sheridan 1756: 243). Like Puttenham's 'good southerne', Sheridan's chosen norm was largely localised. Nevertheless, based on 'polite pronunciation' in and around the capital, its sociocultural values were plain. It was, he noted, habitually acquired 'only by conversing with people in polite life' such that it functioned as a 'sort of proof that a person has kept good company' (Sheridan 1762: 30). His aim, however, was to secure its delocalised use, remedying 'want of knowledge' for the 'multitude' by the provision of 'known invariable rules' (Sheridan 1756: 182). Speech is typically determined 'by chance, by the company we keep' (1762: 5), he stated. The intended outcome of a taught model was instead to be both uniform and democratic; British speakers could thereby secure a 'communage of language, which has for too long been fenced in, and made the property of a few' (Sheridan 1762: 261–262).

Sheridan's focus on a national reference model of spoken English was developed across a range of publications (and private as well as public instruction) – and echoed, to various effects, by writers such as William Kenrick, James Buchanan, Robert Nares, William Perry and John Walker. Benjamin Smart, as in his own expanded and updated editions of Walker, continued this emphasis in the nineteenth century (Walker's own work meanwhile remained in print, with almost 100 editions by 1900). The pronouncing dictionary, equipped with extensive articulatory information alongside transcriptions for each and every entry, emerged as a new and thriving sub-genre, while providing a new specificity for the 'true pronunciation' promised in previous works.

As in Sheridan's own *Complete Dictionary of the English Language, both with regard to Sound and Meaning* (1780), codification of this kind had a three-fold

remit, encompassing (a) the identification of recommended modes of pronunciation decoupled from those of the regional speech communities that individuals might otherwise acquire, (b) sufficient information to secure the national assimilation of such forms alongside, (c) their intended immutability. 'I see no absolute Necessity why any Language would be perpetually changing', as Jonathan Swift, Sheridan's godfather, had declared in his own *Proposal* for a corrective model of English (Swift 1712: 16). As Sheridan noted, Swift's comments on the need to reform pronunciation had been forcibly relayed to him at an early age, alongside Swift's consciousness of the negative enregisterment of his own Irish tones (Sheridan 1757: 19–20). There were, as this suggests, evident continuities with the prescriptive and proscriptive orientation of earlier approaches to English usage, even if normative ideals of pronunciation now took centre stage.

Print, already used to anchor a delocalised norm in terms of writing, was envisaged as a prime agent of change, opening, Sheridan stated, 'an avenue to knowledge thro' the eye, as thro' the ear' (Sheridan 1756: 196). Johnson's incidental comments were rendered redundant. Transcription, as Robert Nares explained in his *Elements of Orthoepey*, aimed 'to render sounds visible': 'The purpose of literal notation is to convey to the mind, by the agency of the eye, that which living speech communicates by the ear' (Nares 1784: xi). Given the absence of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) (not introduced until the late nineteenth century), writers instead strove to delineate their preferred sound patterns via a combination of strategic respelling alongside diacritical symbols. Sheridan, like Walker, set out ideals by which 'every distinct simple sound, should have a distinct character to mark it' (Sheridan 1762: 239–240). Markers of stress and syllabification were retained. But Johnson's *ront* was now transcribed with Walker's 'short simple' *u* (marked by its superscript 2 and signifying [ʌ]) – which was thereby visibly as well as qualitatively distinguished from the [ʊ] in *pull*, transcribed with Walker's *u* plus superscript 3; *u* in *tube* ([u:]) gained a contrastive superscript 1. As now, the presence of the FOOT/STRUT split (as in *runt* versus *pull*) typified southern rather than northern or Midlands varieties of English where this change does not occur. Pronouncing dictionaries, and the transcription systems they introduced, nevertheless intentionally eradicated diatopic barriers of this kind, affirming one set of 'correct' sounds for all. 'Every one can be his own private Teacher', as Buchanan extolled on the title-page of his *Essay Towards Establishing a Standard for an Elegant and Uniform Pronunciation* (1766).

A certain amount of variation remained apparent. Nevertheless, comment increasingly centred on a clutch of prominent features and their desirable inculcation (or suppression). Ideals of /h/-fullness as supraregional norm gained, for instance, particular traction, extending to related prescriptions for /hw/ as in *in which*. ‘The best method of curing this will be to read over frequently all words beginning with the letter H and those beginning with Wh in the dictionary, and push them out with the full force of the breath’, Sheridan advised; this was to be continued until the ‘habit is obtained of aspirating strongly’ (Sheridan 1762: 77). Other proprieties attended the use of [ɪŋ] in words such as *walking* (in contrast to regionally marked [in] or [ɪŋg]), or the presence of the hitherto regionally restricted TRAP/BATH split, marked in the south by the lengthening of *a* before voiceless fricatives as in *fast*, *path*, and increasingly seen as a key marker of ‘elegant’ speech (even if opinions differed on the precise quality to be adopted, as well as the specific words involved). Parallel processes of lengthening for the *o* in words such as *cost*, *off*, alongside, say, the need to maintain distinct pronunciations for the vowels in *moor* and *more* (a merger in progress across the nineteenth century), the presence of a palatal glide /j/ following an initial plosive in words such as *kind*, *guide*, and the emergence of the diphthongal enunciation underpinning Present-Day English /neim/, /heit/ were other staple features. Walker’s *hate*, *name* were categorically monophthongal. Thomas Batchelor, with perhaps more phonetic acuity, already isolated the presence of diphthongal realisations in 1809.

Writing of this kind (see Hickey 2009) offered explicit discussion of a particular type of pronunciation as an object of desire while harnessing the negative language attitudes towards particular varieties (already identified by Puttenham and Swift) in order to encourage the convergent behaviour desired. Prescriptive injunctions were, for example, routinely elaborated in ways which consolidated not only a heightened awareness of a ‘received pronunciation’ (as early noted by Walker (1774: 17)) or what Batchelor in 1809 already termed ‘standard English pronunciation’ (1974: 84), but a set of extra-linguistic meanings in a metadiscourse resonant of culture and class. ‘What can reflect more on a person’s reputation for learning, that to find him unable to pronounce with propriety and elocution’, as Buchanan (1757: vii) demanded. Sheridan deftly introduced a dialectic in which social and regional signifiers were at odds: ‘Surely every gentleman will think it worth while, to take some pains, to get rid of such evident marks of rusticity’ (Sheridan 1762: 33).

As here, framing social meanings were made overt, as was a perceptual divide between ‘accented’ and ‘accentless’ speech. The ‘gentleman’, as William

Enfield likewise affirmed in his *Speaker* (a text adopted in many schools) is 'supposed to have seen too much of the world, to retain the peculiarities of the district in which he was born' (Enfield 1774: xiv). Specifications of a standard reference model often illuminated the overt intent to displace localised 'provincial' markers with delocalised practice in ways that came to foster what Lippi-Green (1997: 41) describes as 'the myth of non-accent'. In contrast, 'accented' enunciations seen as typifying local familiarities were identified as markers of the 'lower classes' or the 'uneducated peasantry' (Batchelor 1809: 97, 102).

Pronunciations deemed typical of Irish or Cockney were, as for Sheridan, negatively marked, and enumerated as 'faults' along with the manner in which they might be redressed or standardised. These included 'not sounding *h* after *w*', 'not sounding *h* where it ought to be sounded, and inversely', as well as the [v]/[w] alternation that became a staple of lower-class representation in Victorian fiction (and which was, Charles Darwin recorded (Mugglestone 2012: 288), acquired by his son William as part of adaptation to the speech of the servants in his London house). Walker (1791: 17) likewise provided 'Rules to be observed by the natives of Scotland for attaining a just Pronunciation of English', detailing a range of 'errors' in quality and quantity; 'OO, in *food, mood* . . . ought always to have a long vowel' but is 'generally shortened in Scotland to the middle sound of the *u* in *bull*', as he expounded on the distributional patterns observable with reference to the GOOSE/FOOT lexical sets. What 'generally' happens was, as he indicated, by no means a sanction for its continued use. Meanwhile, elite London-centric norms became a synecdoche for 'standard' spoken English *per se*, fostering a rhetoric in which standard/non-standard binaries (and attendant forms of enregisterment) were unambiguous. 'All other dialects', claimed Sheridan (1762: 69), were 'sure marks, either of a provincial, rustic, mechanical, or mechanic education; and therefore have some degree of disgrace annexed to them'.

9.3 DIRECT AND INDIRECT INSTRUCTION

In principle, texts of this kind, and the rhetoric of a supralocal norm they advanced, circumvented the inequities of access that had hitherto precluded, as Sheridan declared, 'an attainment . . . ardently desired by an infinite

number of individuals' (Sheridan 1762: 70). This extensive elaboration of a regulative model of English pronunciation did not, however, escape critical scrutiny. Indirect instruction by means of a reference book, as a range of writers observed, presented particular difficulties. 'This distinction cannot be entirely abolished by any rules laid down in writing', the *Scots Magazine* concluded, reviewing Sheridan's *Dissertation on the Causes of the Difficulties which Occur in Learning the English Tongue* ('Review' 1762: 372). 'Articulate speech can be formed by imitation alone, and described only by similitude', Nares (1784: 20) likewise acknowledged. He might, in his own work, therefore describe a 'common pronunciation' in which for example *gh* is 'entirely silent' even if 'retained by our northern neighbours'. But attempts to instil preferred practice in relation to consonants were, he admitted, easier ('The consonants more readily admit of such description'). Conversely, 'the nice discriminations of vowel sounds, on which the principal harmony of language depends, will generally elude the efforts of the most subtle definer' (Nares 1784: xx, Note). The descriptors deployed in such texts, as Batchelor pointed out in 1809 (1974: 98), arguably brought their own problems, perplexing readers who sought to profit from the information that was provided.

Indirect instruction by means of the page and its marking of visible speech was, however, intended by many writers to be accompanied by more direct and directive processes. Long before his pronouncing dictionary of 1780, for example, Sheridan envisaged spoken English as part of British education while his lectures on elocution, first published in 1762, had far more immediate realisations in national lecture tours spanning cities such as Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh. Advertisements for Sheridan's forthcoming appearances in Edinburgh in June 1761 stressed the way in which, by means of direct presentation, 'the difficulty (at present thought to be insuperable)' of attaining 'the right pronunciation' of English, especially 'for natives of different kingdoms and counties, that speak a corrupt dialect of English' would be resolved 'in a manner hitherto unattempted' (Scotland 1761: 391). The emphasis, in turn, was placed on the provision of 'an easy and practicable way of reducing the English tongue to a standard', and the corrective methods or 'remedy' that individuals might deploy. A first set of eight lectures was aimed at gentlemen, and those who might need to speak in public. A second shorter set was 'chiefly intended for the use of the ladies' whose voices might primarily be heard in private but for whom correctness was no less important. Both sets, Benzie (1972) confirms, were strikingly popular.

Sheridan's lectures (and, later, the exemplary recitations that featured in his 'Attic' evenings (Benzie 1972: 55–57)) clearly made effective use of skills well-honed in his stage career, if now deployed in order to perform the proto-standard he advanced. Private lessons given to other public speakers – the Welsh-born Sarah Siddons (originally a lady's maid), the novelist Ann Ford Thicknesse (born near the Temple in London in 1737), the actor Dora Jordan, born in Ireland but widely commended for her enunciation, or James Boswell, the Scottish student (and aspirant lawyer) who attended his Edinburgh lectures in 1761 – were further routes of transmission. Siddons, notably, was later employed at court as 'Preceptress in English Reading to the Princesses' (Sheridan himself received a royal pension, in recognition of his services to education). Walker followed a similar trajectory, giving lectures in Edinburgh, Dublin and Oxford while, Beal notes, garnering more private pupils for elocutionary instruction than could easily be accommodated.³

The conviction that elocution, in the narrow sense of a correct and corrected pronunciation, should be taught was increasingly popular. By 1762, for example, Sheridan, back in London, was employed in giving further private instruction to Boswell. Nevertheless, as the *Scots Magazine* confirms, a wider programme for 'the reading and speaking of English in Scotland' was swiftly established after Sheridan's departure. Mr Leigh, the new appointment, was commended as 'a person well qualified to teach the pronunciation of the English tongue with propriety and grace' though lessons were by no means cheap ('for one hour, during a month, to a single persons, one guinea; for two or more persons, during the same time, half a guinea each' (Scotland 1762: 450).

Sheridan's lectures, like the teaching Leigh delivered, were addressed to adults. Nevertheless, as Sheridan repeatedly affirmed, a spoken standard should ideally be secured for the 'rising generation' at the point of learning to read. The disjunction between written standard English and its regional enunciation in school settings had, for example, earlier attracted Daniel Defoe's critical gaze. His travels in Somerset in his *Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* reinforced readings of centre and periphery ('when we are come this Length from *London*, the Dialect of the *English* Tongue, or the Country way of expressing themselves, is not easily understood') alongside associative meanings in which, if literacy indubitably revealed knowledge,

³ Joan Beal, 'Walker, John (1732–1807), elocutionist, orthoepist, and lexicographer'. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Retrieved 11 August 2021, from <https://ezprox-y-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2648/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-28499>.

reading aloud, in a regional accent, was constructed as fundamentally untutored (Defoe 1738: 319). ‘The Words were the same, and the Orthography the same, as in all our Bibles’, Defoe noted of a reading lesson he had observed in a school in Martock. But, courtesy of a ‘Dextrous Dunce’, the sentence ‘I have put off my Coat’ was erroneously rendered as ‘Chav a Doffed my Cooat’ (Defoe 1738: 319–320).

Sheridan’s *Elements of English* (a work directed not only at schools and ‘boarding-schools’, but to private tutors) echoes Defoe in this apparent conflict of localised spoken and delocalised written markers. ‘Individual books, when read aloud, are pronounced in a quite different manner by the natives of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Yorkshire, and all the several counties of English’, he noted; children erroneously exhibit forms dependent on the ‘corrupt dialect of speech, established by the vulgar in their respective places of abode’ (Sheridan 1786: vi).⁴ In the reforms he advocated, ‘right pronunciation’ was to be inculcated from ‘the first commencement of the alphabet’ such that spoken and written knowledge were yoked together (Sheridan 1786: viii). As an appended ‘Advertisement’ for the *Elements* made plain, possession of a *Pronouncing Dictionary* was a useful ancillary tool (‘necessary to all during their progress towards the art of reading with propriety’). The lesson plans that Sheridan detailed, however, aimed to secure a literally ‘educated’ accent via instruction in the minimal pairs of a supralocal norm, alongside the parsing of words in relation to the sounds they contained (Sheridan 1786: 54–55).

Sheridan was by no means alone in this interest in education as a form of remediation or elocutionary redress. Batchelor, like Buchanan, was a teacher in public life. ‘To avoid a provincial dialect, so unbecoming gentlemen, they are early instructed, while the organs of speech are still flexible, to pronounce properly’, Buchanan noted of his own practice: ‘It ought to be indisputably, the care of every teacher of English, not to suffer children to pronounce according to the dialect of that place or country where they were born or reside, if it happened to be vicious’ (Buchanan 1757: xii, Note). Enfield’s lectures at the Warrington Academy were likewise expressly given ‘with the design of assisting the Students . . . in acquiring a just and graceful Elocution’ (Enfield 1774: iii); companion lectures on oratory, and the English language (in spoken and written forms) were instituted as core parts of the syllabus. That this was a dissenting academy, not an elite public school, has its own significance in this respect. Students who came to the Academy hailed from all over the country (as well as

⁴ See also Lynda Muggleston, ‘Sheridan in the Schoolroom’, *Paradigm* (2003), 22–28.

from abroad) but were provided with the same directives as part of Enfield's 'public-speaking pedagogy' (Poster 2015: 97). Being 'just and forceful' meant, Enfield stressed, acquiring an accent that was /h/-full (omitting the aspirate was a 'fault' as was its hypercorrect insertion). Localised markers such as the [v]/[w] alternation characteristic of inner-city London were likewise proscribed, as was pronouncing 'ou' like 'oo' in *out* (a reference to the monophthong in relevant words in Northern English; corresponding southern forms showed 'proper' diphthongisation occasioned by the Great Vowel Shift and should, Enfield urged, be adopted as a model). Practice, Enfield exhorted, made perfect. A speaker in possession of 'prevailing defects ... in articulation' could, he added, find remedy in 'a regular course of exercises'. Individual application, however 'irksome and disagreeable', was commended. So, too, was the 'correction of an Instructor or Friend' (Enfield 1774: xxvi). Sheridan offered similar advice. 'Whoever will allot a certain portion of time every day, to read aloud in the hearing of a friend ... will find in a short time the true pronunciation become familiar to him' (Sheridan 1762: 74). A trained teacher was, of course, even better.

These methods of targeted correction informed the increasing consolidation of elocution, and elocution masters, across the nineteenth century. Schools such as Miss Wilmhurst's Seminary in Maldon, Essex, assimilated practices such as the parsing of the proper sounds in individual words. Subsequent publication of the teaching practice deployed (see Wilmhurst 1833) presented a model for other establishments to follow. Reading aloud, according to the norms set out by Sheridan, was a familiar part of practical pedagogy whether in local establishments (see e.g. the account of reading practice in Somerset given in John Poole's *The Village School Improv'd*, in its third edition by 1815) or in private schools such as the 'English and French Grammar School for Young Ladies' in Bath where 'the rules laid down by Mr. Sheridan with regard to the English language and the art of reading' formed part of the curriculum.⁵ 'A coarse or provincial way of pronouncing a word, though sanctioned by the general practice of the district, is immediately noticed by the teacher; and exposes the child, who uses, it, as much to the correction of those below him ... as any other impropriety in reading would do', as Poole (1815: 41) observed. The fact that school inspectors in the second half of the nineteenth century regularly comment on the absence of localised marking as testimony to educational success is equally significant

⁵ Advertisement, 'English and French Grammar School for Young Ladies', *Star and Evening Advertiser*, 16 August 1798.

in relation to the dissemination of these ideas.⁶ As Sheridan stressed in his *Lectures* in 1762, a prime desideratum was the shifting of ‘consciousness’, both by the heightened provision of information and a reorientation of accompanying attitudes (Sheridan 1762: 63–64). In an early model of applied linguistics, education proved a fertile testing ground for these ideas, with legacies that continued into the twentieth century.⁷ ‘The earliest business of the primary teacher is Elocution, not Grammar’, Newman affirmed in 1869: ‘He should teach pure, correct sounds, and cultivate both ear and tongue. Coarse, plebeian utterance, sticking to men through life, splits the nation into two castes’ (Newman 1869: 22–23).

9.3.1 Principle and Praxis

Print texts, alongside the expansion of educational practice, can therefore attest to an escalating interest in pronunciation and its incorporation within the prescriptive remits earlier associated with grammar, morphology and spelling. Praxis – what individual speakers chose to do – is, however, critical. Private letters, diaries and notebooks, in this respect, provide useful ancillary documentation of individual reception and response. Boswell’s London journal, written in the early 1760s, remains, for example, a valuable source of information about his continued instruction under Sheridan, illustrating, too, his increasing sensitisation to normative models of English pronunciation (Mugglestone 2018: 23–38). ‘Mrs. Miller’s abominable Glasgow tongue excruciated me’, he states in his journal in March 1763 (Boswell 2004: 221). The popular stigmatisation of Scots impelled a diligent process of change, evident alike in, for example, the writer David Mallett who, as Johnson notes, ‘cleared his tongue from his native pronunciation so as to be no longer distinguished as a Scot’ (Johnson 2010: 1433), or the Scottish lawyer Sylvester Douglas. The latter provided, in manuscript, detailed instructions for acquiring English phonological markers in preference to the ‘defective pronunciation’ that was, he argued, indicative of the ‘provincial dialect’ of Scotland (Douglas 1991: 101).

⁶ See further Mugglestone (2007), chapter 7.

⁷ References to elocution lessons dedicated to removing regional markers and provided as part of the curriculum remain commonplace in twentieth-century autobiographies. See e.g. the presenter Peter Purves’s account (Purves 2009: 27) of the weekly elocution lessons he attended from the age of fourteen at Arnold School with the aim of ‘ironing out those flat Blackpool vowels’.

Hester Thrale, another member of Johnson's intimate social circle, is, courtesy of her own extensive diary and manuscript annotations, another useful resource for these attitudinal shifts. Surviving evidence attests her responsiveness to perceptual markers of 'correct' speech, such that she monitors the voices of acquaintances as well as her children for apparent infelicities. The vocalisation of post-vocalic and final /r/, and the development of intrusive /r/ as a sandhi feature where no <r> is present in the spelling (as in *idear of*), alongside the widespread use of /ə/ in unaccented syllables had, for example, early emerged as further targets of proscriptive constraint. Sheridan condemned 'adding the letter *r* to all proper names ending in *a* unaccented, as *Belindar*, *Dorindar*', alongside the undifferentiated use of unstressed /ə/ – a 'vice in the cockney pronunciation' and a 'vicious habit' by which, as in *follow* > *foller*, and *window* > *winder*, 'the sound in the last syllable of words ending in *ow*' is changed 'into *er*' (Sheridan 1762: 74–75). Queenie Thrale, born in 1764, was therefore not only instructed in Latin by Dr Johnson but, with her siblings, was the recipient of a range of normative strictures of this kind. As Hester Thrale confirms, her children were repeatedly reminded 'to pronounce Window and Fellow instead of the Cockney method Winder and Feller' though, she also records, this could produce unexpected forms of hypercorrection: 'one Day the Boy said Look Sister there's a ladder – Fye Fye cries the Girl it is a Laddow'.⁸ Thrale's decision to grade her acquaintances on voice and vocal proprieties is, however, perhaps still more revealing in relation to the 'consciousness' that Sheridan advocated (Thrale 1951: I, 329). Johnson, perhaps predictably, scored zero for 'person & voice' (if achieving fifteen out of twenty for 'wit'). His conviction that Staffordshire possessed the 'purest English' might attest vernacular loyalty, but it was remote on a range of levels from popular language attitudes. Better, Thrale decided, were Lord Sandys and Lord Westcote (with a vocal score of ten). Even these, however, needed improvement.

Interesting, too, are the dedicated attempts by the scientist Michael Faraday, the son of a blacksmith, to shed his native Cockney. Membership of the City Philosophical Society (founded for the benefit of artisan and apprentices) provided a route to the scientific knowledge he desired. Yet, he also set up a 'mutual improvement plan' among his friends with the remit 'to read together; and to criticize, correct, and improve each other's pronunciation and construction of language'. This has obvious links to the kinds of

⁸ Hester Thrale, manuscript annotations in Samuel Pegge, *Anecdotes of the English Language* (London: J. Nichols, 1803). Cited in Clifford (1935), 175. On this change, and its relation to proto-RP, see Jones (2012), 839–840.

critical methods that Sheridan (and others) advocated in which friendship might also comprise a kind of articulatory mentorship. Still more significant, however, is Faraday's lengthy connection with Benjamin Smart, initially via Smart's lectures on elocution in London in 1817–1818 – recorded in detail in Faraday's extant manuscript 'Common Place Book' in a unique history of elocutionary instruction at first hand (Mugglestone 2011: 87–107).⁹

'We first have to consider the capacity and command of the voice its defects and the best means of removing them', Faraday dutifully noted: Smart's opinion that 'provincialities must be corrected by a dictionary for which purpose I would recommend Walker's' was transcribed with equal care. Injunctions on the /h/-fullness requisite for standard speech occupy a full page of notes. To attain proficiency, Faraday records, 'The person should practice himself in lists of words beginning with H, then in mixed lists of words some beginning with H, and some with a vowel and lastly with the introduction of the words commencing with H mute'. The proprieties associated with /ɪŋ/, and the lengthening of *a* before voiceless fricatives, receive similar attention. Instruction and praxis were firmly aligned. 'I have constantly supposed that you would endeavour to make these lectures useful by applying them to actual improvement at your homes . . . I have endeavoured to accommodate them to this use', Smart stressed. Faraday paid for an additional course in 1818.

Improvement, as Faraday's notes attest, was firmly directed to the dissemination and adoption of elite models of speech remote from those of his native Southwark. As elsewhere in Smart's work, markers deemed typical of Cockney elicited specific concern, were made part of a binary positioning of London speech in which 'well-bred' was opposed to 'vulgar', and 'cultivation' contrasted with 'a corruption of fundamental sounds' (Smart 1810: 9). 'Hints to Cockney Speakers' likewise comprised a dedicated (and detailed) subsection in Smart's later *Walker Remodelled* (where 'negligencies' such as *dooty* and *Toosday*, as opposed to the requisite use of initial /dʒ/ /tʃ/, were singled out for correction, alongside the use of intrusive *r* (Smart 1836: xli)). A 'standard pronunciation', he stressed, was instead typified by its absence of localised marking of this kind, such that 'all marks of a particular place of birth and residence are lost, and nothing appears to indicate any other habits of intercourse than with the well-bred and well-informed, wherever they may be found' (Smart 1836: xl). Faraday's subsequent commendation as a lecturer

⁹ Faraday's 'Common Place Book' remains in the Royal Institution archives in London. For citations from the notebook, see Mugglestone (2011).

as at the Royal Institution testifies, on one level, to his assiduous application in this respect. Delocalisation was apparently complete. On the other, however, Smart's retention as mentor, attending Faraday's lectures across his life and providing, when necessary, critical observation and articulatory advice, also sheds light on the enduring anxieties that might accompany accent consciousness (and the changes it required).

9.4 FROM POPULAR CULTURE TO PHONETICS

Faraday, Thrale and Boswell (among others) all provide useful information on the kind of top-down (re)modelling of accent which, for many writers on pronunciation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was presented as integral to the success of spoken standardisation. What we might see as a widespread 'accentism' is, by the same token, both normalised and endorsed. If, as Smart noted, 'a man displaying either ["cockney" or "rustic" pronunciation] must have a large portion of natural talent or acquired science, who surmounts the prejudice it creates', the aim was to enable such accents to be shed rather than dispelling the attitudinal fallibilities that such 'prejudice' reveals (Smart 1836: xl). Buchanan had earlier exposed similar fault lines in his own writing about standardisation and speech. As he stressed, standardisation could be seen as a social good, 'joining [speakers] into one social family'. Yet only by the successful adoption of the convergent behaviour prescribed could 'national prejudice, which has too long subsisted' be eradicated. This was, he added, 'chiefly fostered' by 'different forms of speech' (Buchanan 1766: xii).

Popular language attitudes, reflected in the publication of sixpenny manuals aimed at the 'Million' to the ludic potential of accent and identity as deployed in magazines such as *Punch*, routinely reinforced such ideas. Inadvertent homophones (*air*: *hair*; *otter*: *hotter*) appear in a range of publications in ways which reinforce readings of sociocultural disfavour. 'Now, boy, what's the capital of 'Olland?', asks a 'self-made man' in a cartoon in *Punch* in 1870. 'An "H", Sir', the boy answers, confirming both stigma (of the imperfectly educated new rich) and stereotype (of standards and their absence) in his reply. A cartoon headed 'Culture for the Million; or, Society as it May Be' centred on phonetic crimes and proportionate punishment in a dystopian

corrective for Sheridan's earlier democratic ambitions ('What's he been and done', a policeman rhetorically demands, seizing an unfortunate urchin: 'Why, he's been and Dropped an H ... Isn't that Enough?' (Du Maurier 1870: n.p.)). Elsewhere, an anthropomorphised 'Poor Letter H' could appear as author, begging for his rightful reinstatement in the proper pronunciation of words (see Hon. Henry 1861)). Other forms of language play, as in the cartoons below, focused on the disjunction between the 'proper' realisation of words such as *type* and *tape*, and their localised 'cockney' equivalents (Figure 9.1).¹⁰

As Jaffe (2000: 497) notes, 'orthographic choices' such as these are by no means accidental. Instead, they constitute 'metalinguistic, socially conditioned phenomena' which 'shed light on people's attitudes towards both specific language varieties and social identities and on the relationship between linguistic form and the social world in general'. Victorian writing, in both popular and elite culture, provided its own supraregional dissemination by which binary models of marked/unmarkedness, and their ideologised values, were perpetuated (see also Agha 2003: 245).



Figure 9.1 Poor Letter 'A' and The Evening Pipers.

¹⁰ George Du Maurier, 'Poor Letter "A"', *Punch*, 18 December 1886, 298; George Du Maurier, 'The Evening Pipers', *Punch*, 11 December 1886.

The phonetic scrutiny afforded by writers such as Alexander Ellis, Henry Sweet, and in the early twentieth century, by Daniel Jones, enables, however, a clearer assessment of any such phonological standard, and the realities of its use. One of the foremost phoneticians of the Victorian era, Ellis carefully unpicked popular rhetoric while exploring the ongoing divide between language attitudes and actuality. 'There prevailed, and apparently there still prevails, a belief that it is possible to erect a standard of pronunciation which should be acknowledged and followed', he noted. Equally prevalent, he added, was the sense that such 'a standard already exists, and is the norm unconsciously followed by persons who, by rank or education, have most right to establish the custom of speech' (Ellis 1869–1889: II, 264). Nevertheless, if it was possible to 'recognise a received pronunciation all over the country', it was equally plain, he stressed, that within this 'there are many ways of pronouncing English *correctly* according to the usage of large numbers of persons of either sex in different parts of the country, who have received a superior education'. In this light, a 'standard' was debatable: 'nothing approaching real uniformity prevails' (Ellis 1869–1889: II, 626).

Ellis was a mathematician as well as an authority on English speech and his caveats turn, in some respects, on a matter of taxonomy. If a 'standard' is a fixed and invariant norm, then pronunciation clearly remained unstandardised. Even within the 'received' practice Ellis identifies, it was open to change and variation, exhibiting a range of advanced or conservative features, depending on age, gender and context. Words such as *name*, *go* could, he confirmed, be monophthongal or diphthongal, the latter more apparent in younger speakers. Instability in palatal glides was widely in evidence; the presence of /j/ in words such as *Tuesday* (/tju: z-/), *tulip* (/tju: lip/) was seemingly secure, though he noted the affricate /tʃ/ (/tʃu: lip/) as a further emerging trend. Conversely, the glide insertion favoured by Walker in words such as *kind* was 'rapidly dying out', even if Ellis himself favoured /gj/ in *girl*. Distinctive, too, was the raising of *a* in words such as *mat*, earlier seen as an affectation. Variability also attended words such as *fast*, *bath*, *lost*, *off*, while the fact that fully lengthened and retracted vowels in BATH were strongly associative of Cockney seems to have acted as a sociophonetic deterrent for some speakers.

That the 'received pronunciation' or 'r.p.' that Ellis identifies was far from monolithic remains an important point. But so, too, was the undoubted existence of a supraregional variety ('used all over the country'), alongside its restricted social distribution (those with a 'superior education'). If Ellis resists the appellation 'standard', he was nevertheless content to regard this

variety as ‘a kind of mean’ or, in other words, a reference model of ‘the general utterance of the more thoughtful or respected persons of mature age, round which the other sounds seem to hover, and which, like the averages of the mathematician, not agreeing precisely with any, may for the purposes of science be assumed to represent all’ (Ellis 1869–1889: I, 18). Manifesting a ‘floating diversity of pronunciation’, ‘the term “educated pronunciation”’, he clarified, must be taken to have ‘a very “broad” signification’ (Ellis 1869–1889: IV, 1208). Even so, Sheridan’s democratising ambitions clearly remained awry: the expansion of delocalised elite education over the Victorian period was, both Ellis and Jones concur, another significant feature within the geographical spread, and social restriction, of the phonological patterns they describe. As in Jones’s later specification of ‘Public School Pronunciation’, this was the variety ‘heard in everyday speech in the families of Southern English people . . . educated at the public schools’ or ‘used by a considerable proportion of those who do not come from the south of England but . . . educated at this schools’ (Jones 1917: viii).

9.5 BROADCAST VOICES: DISSEMINATION AND DISSENT

The descriptive acuity of writers such as Ellis and Jones remains a landmark in the history of a phonological ‘standard’, not least given their rigorous probing of the gaps between popular belief, and the far narrower (and variable) basis of language praxis. Henry Sweet, too, cast a critical eye on its assumed proprieties. ‘I know as a fact that most educated speakers of Southern English insert an *r* in *idea(r)* of, *India(r)* Office . . . yet they all obstinately deny it’, he expostulated on intrusive *r* (Sweet 1890: viii). Retention of /hw/ was deemed a similar marker of the ‘speech-conscious’, influenced by the graphic environment, and the visual proprieties of <h>. The consolidation of /h/-full spelling-pronunciations in words where it had previously been silent (as *herb*, *hotel*, *hospital*) was a further manifestation of this trend.

Jones’s involvement with the BBC, where he was a founder member of its advisory Committee on Spoken English, was, however, part of a new era in which standard speech and its supralocal dissemination assumed renewed topicality. ‘Good articulation and accurate pronunciation’ were early identified as desiderata for announcers while speech training, in the regulative

model of RP, secured the necessary competence (it was extended to 'Announcers at the Provincial Stations' too, as part of a remit to 'build up in the public mind a sense of the B.B.C.'s collective personality', archival resources at the BBC record (WAC/R34/252/)). 'No one would deny the great advantage of a standard pronunciation of the language, not only in theory but in practice. Our responsibilities in this context are obvious', John Reith, the BBC's first Director-General, proclaimed: 'We broadcast standard time. The responsibility of being looked to in many quarters as authorities in standard pronunciation is an interesting, if somewhat onerous, responsibility' (Reith 1924: 42). This is, as the *North Eastern Daily Gazette* reflected (16 July 1926) 'a standardized age. The B.B.C., providing standardised amusement for daily multitudes, are taking thought how they may set their countless patrons a standardized example of English pronunciation'.

Announcers, and RP-speaking 'Aunties' and 'Uncles' on the 'Children's Hour', provided one such source, though elocutionists, such as Augustus Beddie on 'The Speaking Voice' in 1924, provided others. Articles in the *Radio Times* – 'The Official Organ of the BBC' – reinforced the beneficial nature of such provision, alongside its associated cultural (and linguistic) hegemonies. Sheridan's early concern with 'consciousness', and the accent-based sensitisation this might provoke, gained new and unexpected correlates. 'Announcers as teachers' stated a commendatory article by the popular novelist William le Queux (1924: 51). 'The listener, wherever he may live, hears the announcements, the news bulletins, the talks, given in "Standard English"', the *Radio Times* stated: 'their actual voices come to his ears and he notices the way in which they speak. He marks the absence of local accent . . . Our imaginary dialect speaker realizes that his is not the language of the great men he admires' (de Poynton 1924: 5). Regionality, as de Poynton's article concluded, 'is a handicap to the man who wishes to rise in the world'. BBC English duly emerged as yet another synonym for RP.

Whether the BBC was engaged in 'levelling up' in a 'practical application of democracy', as Reith argued (1925: 1) – or an attempted eradication of regional values – was nevertheless forcefully debated. As the *Yorkshire Post* proclaimed (21 July 1926), standardisation of the kind as attempted by the BBC was 'the latest tyranny' by the south; resistance was encouraged. 'In self-expression we are heretic all, proud of our dialects and our difference', the *Manchester Guardian* concurred in 1927 in an article tellingly headed 'Speech Control'. Adopting RP, it argued, was to 'surrender to the slovenly and drawling speech of southern English'; convergence of this kind should 'be promptly disregarded by any self-respecting speakers of the language'.

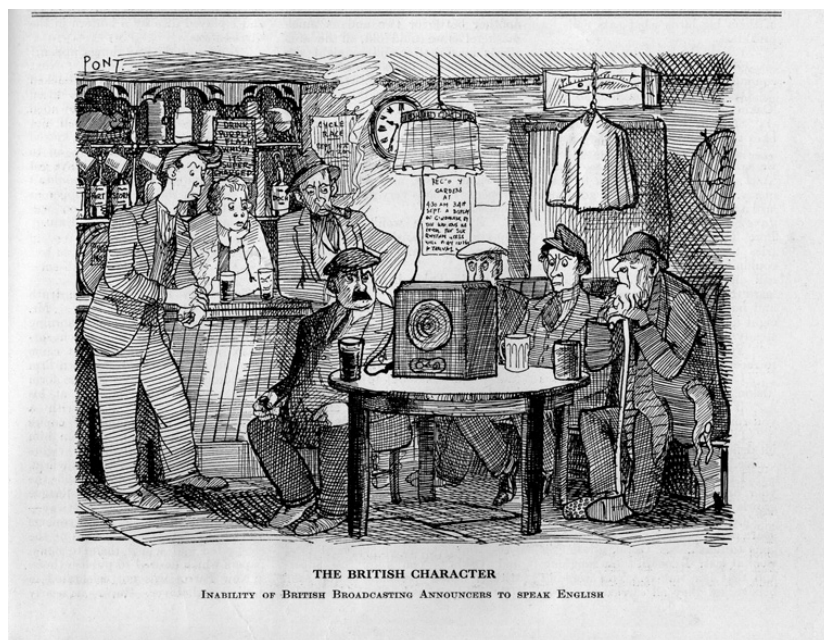


Figure 9.2 The British Character

RP might, in this respect, often have been used to focalise negative readings of the north and Midlands. But, as a *Punch* cartoon from 1936 attests (Figure 9.2), this interpretative lens could easily be reversed.¹¹

The fact that language – and perhaps especially spoken language – is itself a resonant image of identity and belonging, and of covert as well as overt prestige in which RP can, in its own right, be marginalised or laden with negative affect, is therefore a further important part of this history. In Modern English, RP remains far from representative of the voices of the nation. Spoken, in some form, by c. 3–5 per cent of the population, it is, in this light, not a national ‘standard’, but the accent of a minority, both supralocal but socially and distributionally restricted. Renamed ‘non-regional pronunciation’ by Collins and Mees, it is, they state, ‘a pronunciation that cannot be pinned down to a specific area’ (Collins and Mees 2003: 3–4). In ways that parallel Ellis’s earlier accounts, if not Sheridan’s aims for fixity, it also remains open to change and variation along an

¹¹ Graham Laidler, ‘The British Character’, *Punch*, 30 September 1936, 375.

accent spectrum from ‘Advanced RP’ to ‘Conservative RP’ (or what Wells (1982: 280–282) terms U-RP or ‘Upper-Class RP’). ‘She has the accent of the Queen – “really” becomes “rill-eh”, “off” is “orff”’, as a recent account of RP of this kind attested (Freeman 2020: 20).¹² ‘Adoptive RP’ (with antecedents observable, as we have seen, in Faraday and Boswell), alongside ‘Near RP’, where RP features combine with some degree of localised marking, are other well-documented strands.

Sheridan’s rhetoric of regional ‘disgrace’ (1762: 69) would, however, now be seen as unacceptably discriminatory. In modern educational practice, competence in written standard English is instilled, alongside awareness of other varieties – but supraregional phonology is irrelevant. A call for improved ‘elocution’ in 2021, prompted by the presence of regionalised [in] rather than [ɪŋ] in televised commentary on the Tokyo Olympics (‘Competitors are NOT taking part . . . in the fencin, rowin, boxin, kayakin, weightliftin & swimmin . . . Can’t someone give these people elocution lessons?’) encountered outrage and outright resistance.¹³ ‘A presenter’s accent is irrelevant’, the *Daily Telegraph* affirmed (Lawrence 2021: 23). While the ‘received’ in other aspects of language practice tends to reflect issues of communality, ‘received pronunciation’ is, it argued, often seen as bound to the uncommon or non-representative, or uncomfortably elite. *BBC pronunciation* as synonym, is, by the same token, seen as approaching functional obsolescence. In its delocalised sterility, RP is, in a further development, often favoured in, for example, advertising cleaning products such as bleach, or as an attribute of cinema villains from the *Lion King* to *Harry Potter* (see also Fabricius 2000: 31).

Elsewhere, however, attitudes and praxis can remain intriguingly conflicted. Elocution lectures might no longer occupy high profile venues or, as for Sheridan and Smart, be advertised in *The Times*.¹⁴ But any search of the internet readily reveals the prevalence of sites, and products, aimed at native speakers and variously devoted to ‘accent reduction’, ‘accent elimination’ or ‘accent softening’ – a form of over-lexicalisation that suggests continuing anxiety, alongside a modern commodification of ‘accentless’ or minimally

¹² Freeman was describing an interview with Anne Glenconner, a former lady-in-waiting to Princess Margaret.

¹³ www.theguardian.com/inequality/2021/jul/31/bbc-alex-scott-proud-working-class-accent-digby-jones-elocution.

¹⁴ See e.g. *The Times* 12 August 1814 (advertisement for Smart’s lectures on ‘practical instruction’ in elocution). His lectures in e.g. 1816, 1819, 1821, 1822 and 1824 claimed front-page positions.

localised speech that has successfully moved from print, to broadcasting, to the digital realm.¹⁵

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¹⁵ See www.opcoxford.com/talking-posh-do-i-need-to-lose-my-accent/, and also Beal (2008: 21–40).

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