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## **RECEIVED PRONUNCIATION AND GENERAL AMERICAN STANDARDS OF ENGLISH**

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### **Rezumat**

*Acest articol scoate în evidență unele aspecte de pronunție a vocalelor, inclusiv diftongilor în engleza britanică (RP) și engleza americană (GA). Problema fundamentală a pronunției engleze stă în vocalizmul ei și în valorile vocalelor și ale diftongilor.*

It has long been believed that RP is a social marker, a prestige accent of an Englishman [8, p. 39]. In the nineteenth century “received” was understood in the sense of “accepted in the best society”. The speech of aristocracy and the court phonetically was that of the London area. Then it lost its local characteristics and was finally fixed as a ruling-class accent, often referred to as “King's English”. It was also the accent taught at public schools. With the spread of education cultured people not belonging, to, the upper classes were eager to modify their accent in the direction of social standards.

We may definitely state now that RP is a genuinely regionless accent within Britain; i.e. if speakers have it you cannot tell which

area of Britain they come from; which is not the case for any other type of British accents.

It is fair to mention, however, that only 3-5 per cent of the population of England speak RP. British phoneticians estimate that nowadays RP is not homogeneous [3, p. 23].

A.C. Gimson suggests that it is convenient to distinguish three main types within it: “the conservative RP forms, used by the older generation, and, traditionally, by certain profession or social groups; the general RP forms, most commonly in use and typified by the pronunciation adopted by the BBC, and the advanced RP forms, mainly used by young people of exclusive social groups – mostly of the upper classes, but also for prestige value, in certain professional circles” [2, p. 88].

As was stated above, changes in the standard may be traced in the speech of the younger generation of native RP speakers. These changes may affect all the features of articulation of vowel and consonant phonemes and also the prosodic system of the language.

Considerable changes are observed in the sound system of the present-day English, which are most remarkable since the well-known Great Vowel Shift in the Middle English period of the language development. The most perceptible and stable changes are described in the works of British linguists and have been investigated by Russian phoneticians. The RP of recent years is characterized by a greater amount of permissible variants compared to the “classical” type of RP described by D. Jones, L. Armstrong, I. Ward [4, p. 11].

The phenomenon is significant both from the theoretical and practical viewpoint. The variability concerns mainly vowels. Most of English vowels have undergone definite qualitative changes. The newly appeared variants exhibit different stability and range.

The qualitative distinctions manifest new allophonic realizations of the vowel phonemes. Ch. Barber comes to the conclusion that a definite trend towards centralization is observed in the quality of English vowels at present [1, p. 79].

According to the stability of articulation long vowels [i:], [u:] have become diphthongized and are often called diphthongoids; the organs of speech slightly change their articulation by the very end of pronunciation, becoming more fronted. Ch. Barber tries to draw a parallel with the Great Vowel Shift which took place in Middle English, where diphthongization was just one part of a complete change of pattern in the long vowels.

There is a tendency for some of the existing diphthongs to be smoothed out, to become shorter, so that they are more like pure vowels. This is very often the case with [ei], particularly in the word final position, where the glide is very slight: [tB'deP], [seP], [meP].

Diphthongs [aP], [aM] are subject to a smoothing process where they are followed by the neutral sound [B]:

Conservative RP: [taMB], [faPB]

General RP: [taB], [faB]

Advanced RP: [tL:], [fL:]

Also, diphthongs [AB], [MB] tend to be levelled to [A:]. Thus, the pronunciation of (the words *pore*, *poor* is varied like this:

older speakers: [pAB], [pMB]

middle-aged speakers: [pA:], [pMB]

younger speakers: [pA:], [pA:]

It should be mentioned, however, that this tendency does not concern the diphthong [PB] when it is final. The prominence and length shift to the glide, this final quality often being near to [D]: *dear* [dPB] – [dPD]

According to the horizontal and vertical movements of the tongue very striking changes occur in the vowel quality affected by the horizontal movements of the tongue. In fact, the general tendency is marked by the centering of both front and back vowels:

a. the nuclei of [aP], [aM] tend to be more back, especially in the male variant of the pronunciation;

b. the vowel phoneme [I] is often replaced by [L] by younger speakers: [hIv] – [hLv], [Ind] – [and];

c.the nucleus of the diphthong [FM] varies considerably, ranging from [oM] among conservative speakers to [FM] among advanced ones:

Conservative RP: [soM], [foMn], [noMt].

Advanced RP: [sFM], [fFMn], [nFMt].

This tendency is so strong that the transcription symbol has been recently changed in many British books: [oM] – [FM].

d) Back-advanced vowels [D], [M] are considerably fronted in the advanced RP: but [bDt] – [bBt], good [gMd] – [gBd].

It should be mentioned here that there is a tendency for all short vowels to be made nearer the centre of the mouth, that is to move towards [B], especially in unstressed position: *honest* [’OnPst] – [’OnBst] [8, p. 47].

Thus, the horizontal changes in vowel quality may be listed like this:

Centering of short vowels;

More back pronunciation of the nuclei of diphthongs: [aP] – [LP], [aM] – [LM].

More advanced pronunciation of the diphthong: [oM] – [FM].

More fronted pronunciation of the diphthongoids: [i:] – [i(j)], [u] – [u(w)].

Vertical changes in vowels may be traced in [e] and [A:] which tend to be closer in advanced RP. It has also been stated above that the nuclei of diphthongs [eP], [KB], [AB], [MB] become more open when these phonemes are being levelled, particularly the diphthong [KB], which is characterized by a great opening of the first element: *careful* [’kKBfMI] – [’kK: fMI]. The first element of the diphthong [MB] can be lowered considerably. Thus, several words with [MB] are given a shade [A<sup>B</sup>] pronunciation by some advanced RP speakers: *poor*, *sure* [pMB, EMB] – [pA<sup>B</sup>, EA<sup>B</sup>].

The American variant of English has been very thoroughly described by many prominent scholars in the USA. In this article, however, we shall try to follow the conception introduced by G. L.

Trager in his sociolinguistic approach to the treatment of contemporary speech situation in America [6, p. 396].

The sociolinguistic situation in the United States is very complicated. It is moulded by certain linguistic, cultural, historic, demographic, geographic, political and other factors.

Generally speaking, the situation in the USA may be characterized as exoglossic, i.e. having several languages on the same territory, the balance being in favour of American English.

It is true, of course, that the formation of the American Standard underwent the influence of minorities' languages, but its starting point was the English language of the early 17th century.

American English shows a lesser degree of dialect than British English due to some historical factors: the existence of Standard English when first English settlers came to America, the high mobility of population, internal migrations of different communities and so on. As regards pronunciation, however, it is not at all homogeneous. There are certain varieties of educated American speech. In the USA three main types of cultivated speech are recognized: The Eastern type, the Southern type and Western or General American.

There is no strict division of vowels into long and short in GA, though some American phoneticians suggest that certain GA vowels are tense and likely to be accompanied by relative length: [i] in *seat*, [u] in *pool*.

They also admit that a slight rise in tongue position during the pronunciation of tense vowels leads to a diphthongal quality of tense vowels which contrasts to a monophthongal quality of lax vowels.

Classification of vowels according to the stability of articulation is the most controversial subject in GA. Some diphthongs are treated in GA as biphonemic combinations. The inventory of GA diphthongs varies from three to twelve phonemes. Following D. A. Shakhbagova, we distinguish here five diphthongs in GA: [eP], [aP], [AP], [aM], [oM] [5, p. 26].

Another very important feature that causes different

interpretations of diphthongs and vowel length in GA is the pronunciation of [r] sound between a vowel and a consonant or between a vowel and a silence: *turn* [tʰ: <sup>m</sup>], *bird* [bʰ: <sup>rd</sup>], *star* [stL: r].

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### **METODE TRADIȚIONALE ȘI MODERNE ÎN PREDAREA LIMBII ENGLEZE**

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#### ***Summary***

*Modern teaching methods provide an alternative to traditional formulas by offering other methodological and instrumental options that enrich the evaluative practice. In the learning process, teaching, learning and evaluation is done with the help of important elements that are closely linked, thus ensuring a coherent and beneficial deployment of these processes. In the practice of teaching English, there are a variety of methods that have been and are being used, some more efficient, others less effective. Each method has its*