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BRITISH ENGLISH ACCENTS – LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

S The present article aims at depicting the phenomenon of British English accents. It investigates general characteristics of British English accents, analyzing Standard English (Received Pronunciation), Scottish English and Welsh English varieties within the diversity of the English language.

Key words: Standard English; accent; language; pronunciation; diversity

Stating the problem. Languages, dialects and accents are phenomena that have accompanied people since the dawn of time. Certainly, not only linguists but probably also each of us has, at least once, thought about the tremendous power and beauty of accents. Mastering at least one foreign accent demands a lot of work before one can speak it perfectly like native speakers do. It must be noticed that an accent is not a uniform phenomenon. Many different accents, dialects and varieties can be distinguished and in this case, the English language is particularly rich. It turns out that it is extremely complex in respect of its accent diversity. When we travel to Great Britain, we can notice this fact very easily. In this country, which is not in fact so big, we can find huge accent diversity. This diversity is so enormous that it happens that people from one end of Great Britain cannot communicate with people from another end of Great Britain. In Great Britain we can find English, Scottish and Welsh accents, but not only. All these main accents can be divided into small and regional accent units. The situation in the world seems to be very similar. The English language is extremely diverse when we especially mention American accents and their internal diversity, but also Australian, Canadian and Indian ones.

Analysis of the latest investigations of the question. This article formulates general characteristics of British accents. Though the most critical researches concerning the issue of British accents and their peculiarities are carried out by such famous scholars as J. Baker, A. Gimson, J. Kenworthy, B. Kortmann, E. Schneider, P. Roach, P. Trudgill, J. Wells and other researchers, there is room for further investigations. We take into consideration the fact that even though one language is described, there are a lot of varieties in it. In spite of this phenomenon, the characteristic features of this language are very general and that is why it must be pointed that all these features are still classified as the English language. What is more, we can find some essential features of these

accents in this language and on the other hand, we can observe many differences between all these accents which make them totally different. Additionally, there are essential features which are present in all accents and accidental ones that differentiate all these accents.

The aim of the article is: 1) to describe the phenomenon of British English; 2) to present the characteristic features of Standard English; 3) to analyze linguistic and extra-linguistic peculiarities of Received English; 4) to analyze and compare British, Scottish and Welsh accents.

Presentation of the basic material. First we endeavor to present the characteristic features of Standard English and the British English accents. The results achieved will be beneficial for the practical application in the teaching process. We open our research with a description of Standard English as a variety of British English.

1) *British English Varieties: Received Pronunciation.* Received Pronunciation is very often regarded as the regionally neutral accent; it comes for the most part from Southern English. Gimson comments this view in this way: «For reasons of politics, commerce and the present state of the Court, it was the pronunciation of the south-east England and more particularly to that of the London region that this prestige was attached» [4, p. 76].

First and foremost, there is one thing that can be noticed about a person's speech and it can give us some important information about the speaker. Thanks to an accent people can find out where their speaker grew up, what class he represents and where he lives now. Thus, an accent is a helpful and powerful indicator of geographical identity [7].

Standard English is also called RP for short. The word 'Received' means 'socially accepted as good' or 'accepted as the authority'. It has a lot of different names such as Queen's English, BBC English, Oxford English and Public School English. Standard English is also sometimes referred

to as Oxford English. It did not become traditionally the common speech of the city of Oxford but rather specifically of Oxford University. Hence, RP is the accent of an educated Englishman, but also the accent which is learnt in other parts of the world. RP accent relates to the upper class and prestigious occupations such as a lawyer, diplomat, doctor, politician and the clergy. One of the interesting arguments is given by K Patzold. He says that 'RP is superior, from the character of its vowel sounds, to any other form of English, in beauty and clarity' [5, p. 311]. It is interesting to note that some native speakers of English, namely Americans, cannot distinguish RP from near-RP, let alone distinguishing Scottish from Welsh or Irish.

One may say that it was the television and radio where RP accent was firstly spoken. This form of pronunciation was recommended by BBC for its announcers, because it was the type which was widely understood and caused the least prejudice of a regional kind. People who speak RP are viewed as more intelligent, self – confident, competent, industrious and more successful in their argumentation than people speaking with mild or broad socio-regional accent. Within RP accent, there are some habits of pronunciation that are mostly established and tend to be regarded as 'correct'. Women who speak RP accent share the same prestige as men speaking with an RP accent and what is more, they are consequently stereotyped as more independent and enterprising than their counterparts with a socio-regional accent [3].

Some people believe that RP is based only on the Southern accents of England, but it is very close to the Early Modern English dialects of the East Midlands. Unfortunately, the most important observations tell us that RP is not as popular as fifty years ago. This accent is still used by Royal Family, Parliament, the Church of England, the High Courts, but only about three per cent of British people speak it in a pure form now. Indeed, this accent belongs to a minority.

According to Gimson [4], there are three sub – variations within RP. Namely, the first one is called *Mainstream RP* and refers to older generations and it can be defined rather negatively. This type of RP contains U-RP and *'Adoptive RP*. Adoptive RP is the variety spoken by adults who did not speak RP as children. The usual reason for adopting RP is a change in the individual's social circumstances. For example, when someone accepts a job offer where he is surrounded by RP – speaking colleagues, he may experience a certain social pressure to conform to their norms in speech like in other areas of behavior. It is also possible to recognize a rather vaguer entity such as 'Near-RP, consisting accents which are not exactly RP, but which do not differ from it. Another different set of differentiations within RP are: 'Conservative RP' which is used usually by the older generation, certain professions and social groups. 'General RP' is used and typified by the pronunciation which is adopted by BBC, and 'Advanced RP' is mainly used by young people of popular social groups – it

is mostly the upper – class, but also in certain professional circles and for prestige value.

It is also worth mentioning one of the varieties of English such as Estuary English. It is a term which is unsuitable but it has been widely accepted. Why is it improper? Because it suggests that most people are talking about a new variety, which they are not. Its label actually refers to the lower middle-class accent, as opposed to working-class accent. Estuary English has southeast of England features such as wide diphthongs, but it does not have features typical only of working-class accent. Nowadays, there are some people who speak with lower middle-class regional accent in public situations especially in the media. The most important of these accents are lower middle-class accents of the southeast of England, because it can be seen as the largest region of England in terms of population. This pattern of speech can be seen particularly in the growing, totally new dialect areas of the West Midlands (around Birmingham), Merseyside (around Liverpool).

2) *Standard Scottish English*. Some people can discover that the difference between a dialect and accent is even more important in Scotland than in England. Many Scottish people, who are non – Gaelic, have two forms of speech: one of these forms is Scottish English, i. e. Standard English which is spoken with a Scottish accent and another form is Scots language which is a traditional dialect spoken in southern, central and north – eastern Scotland. Generally, there is a shift to Scottish English in formal situations or with individuals of higher social status. In agricultural areas the differentiation between Scots and Scottish English may be quite sharp, so that it is obvious which accent is being spoken at a given moment. «For example, in Glasgow, many people would claim that authentic Scots treated as a traditional dialect a speaker has died out» [7, p. 320].

English spoken in Scotland is the type that is more difficult to define than elsewhere in the UK. In 1707, there was the Union of Parliaments where the official language of Scotland became aligned with that of England. Standard English has been used as the language of education, religion and government. It became the socially prestigious form adopted by the middle class. In contrast to England, however, Standard English is still spoken with a variety of local accents. Above all, Scottish English is still recognizable by its pronunciation: Scottish speakers do not make the same distinction in vowel length which is made by speakers with other English accents. In Scotland, the vast majority of speakers are rhotic, which means that they pronounce the 'r' sound after a vowel [1].

Moreover the lexical incidence of vowel before /r/ may not correspond to RP; 'sport' and 'short' may have different vowels as in General American. More generally, there is no systemic durational difference between short and long vowels, as it is seen in RP. The chief differences from RP in the realization of the consonants lies in the use of a tap [ɾ], e. g. red and trip, though there is variation between this and [ɹ] [4, p. 85].

Scottish English speakers do not have as many vowel sounds as speakers with English accents. In Scottish English there is lack of about five vowel sounds that English speakers use. Speakers in Scotland do not use the 'schwa' sound like speakers in England [2].

3) *Welsh English*. In Wales, there are places where English has been used for centuries, for example in the Pembroke areas on the southern coast of Dyfed. Although ordinary Welshmen have had friendship with English since the Middle Ages, English was not their mother tongue, as their first language. When looking at the pattern of English in Wales today, one must remember that North America has had native English for longer than Wales has. Welsh English, as a native language, is not much older than South Africa English [7]. Nowadays nearly everyone in Wales can speak English. These are the native speakers of Welsh, maybe the most viable of the Celtic languages. But for many speakers English is only a second language. Many of the English speakers have some knowledge of Welsh thanks to their parents or grandparents who spoke it. The role of the Welsh language in the Welsh English accent is not disappearing even though one might expect that English would be more and more important in the speech of younger people.

Welsh English is distributed in Wales differently because of the geography of the country. The Northern part of the country is rural and that is way, it was the latest to be influenced by English. Geographically, Wales is situated in a rugged mountain terrain. Consequently, for many centuries north – south communication within Wales has been rather difficult.

The most spectacular thing about Welsh English for people's ears is the intonation. It is perceived as 'sing – song' and is totally different from that of English English. This impression is no doubt strengthened by differences in timing that is why consonants have longer duration than in usual English. The other characteristic feature is vowel quality; there are more monophthongs and fewer diphthongs in Welsh English than in most accents of English, while diphthongs are tended to be narrow. «This, together with clear [l] is characteristic of an area remote from the recent metropolitan influences in English pronunciation» [7, p. 377]. It can be seen rather for the industrial values of south Wales which have only recently

deserted Welsh as a first language. Thanks to rhythm and intonation people can easily recognize an accent as Welsh.

Conclusions. In the article general characteristics of the accents that can be found in Britain have been provided, namely, Standard British English (Received Pronunciation), Standard Scottish English and Welsh English. The comparison was realized on the lexical and phonetic level. Additionally, we focused on presenting characteristic features such as diversity of accents which causes a situation when, strange as it may seem, they still constitute one language.

It is important to notice in conclusion that the influence of RP is changing. Johannesson claims that 'its impact is both increasing and decreasing' [6, p. 301]. What makes it decreasing is the fact that RP is losing its status, and it is increasing because of many adaptations. It is also very often claimed that Queen's accent becomes slowly the Standard accent of southern England. Gramley made a very interesting assumption that one should remember. It tells that «people seldom choose an accent. Rather, they have one» [5, p. 313].

RP which is regionally non – specific accent of the upper middle classes in England has an insignificant presence in Scotland in comparison to Wales, where it is prestigious in some areas. This situation can entail that even the most socially prestigious forms of English spoken in Scotland bear elements that are characteristically Scottish.

For many people Welsh English next to Scottish English is one of the British accents that are very hard to learn. Even though the RP accent is tolerated in Wales, people who travel to Wales and talk with RP accent are seen as people from higher class.

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Байбакова І. М., Драпалюк Г. С. Британські акценти – лінгвістичні і культурні імплікації.

Метою статті є вивчення Британського варіанту вимови англійської мови. У ній досліджуються загальні характеристики Британських акцентів англійської мови за допомогою аналізу літературної англійської (Standard English), Шотландського та Валлійського акцентів у рамках різноманіття англійської мови.

Ключові слова: літературний варіант мови; акцент; мова; вимова; різноманіття

Байбакова И. М., Драпалюк Г. С. Британские английские акценты – лингвистические и культурные импликации.

Целью статьи является изучение Британского варианта произношения английского языка. Исследуются общие характеристики Британских акцентов английского языка при помощи анализа литературного английского языка (Standard English), Шотландского и Валлийского акцентов в рамках разнообразия английского языка.

Ключевые слова: литературный вариант языка; акцент; язык; произношение; разнообразие