

LEEDS 1966: SOME EARLY EVIDENCE OF “NEW RP”? ¹

Lawrence M. Davis, Charles L. Houck, and Clive Upton

Abstract

A number of linguists have noted that Received Pronunciation (RP) has changed during the last half century; however, they have not always agreed on nature of this development. Phonological data collected by Charles Houck in 1966-67 from residents of Leeds might shed some light on this change. Of Houck's twenty two subjects, two were born in and/or spent their formative years in Durham, fourteen were from Yorkshire, one was from Derbyshire, two were from Buckinghamshire and three from London. In other words, with only five exceptions, all of the subjects were northerners. The seventy-one item questionnaire used by Houck elicited single word responses, from which tokens of three vowels, SQUARE, PRICE and TRAP, are extracted for examination. Houck's randomly sampled speakers exhibit a striking lack of the most marked RP and regional speech characteristics. It is suggested that the 1960s Leeds data, for the variables observed, provide definite hints of today's modern RP in an urban population of the period. These real time data raise questions about what might be overly simplistic notions regarding the development of RP, and the direction of its spread.

1. Introduction

Conventional wisdom today holds that London is the source of developments in, or of replacements for, Received Pronunciation. To quote Wells (1982: 118):

By the end of the [twentieth] century ... some new non-localizable but more democratic standard may have arisen from the ashes of RP: if so, it seems likely to be based on popular London English.

This contentious statement is still largely uncontested. Indeed, the view that it is the south-east of England that has been, and continues to be, the source of RP and the power-house of its changes has, if anything, increased in recent years. Talk of 'Estuary English', beginning with a newspaper article (Rosewarne 1984), has grown to the point where the term is now being used in serious academic publications. More remarkably, the label '(Standard) Southern British English' is being advanced by commentators at the highest level (see for example *The Handbook of the International Phonetic Association* (1999) and McMahon (2002)) as a replacement for the term RP, indicating that southern England, and by implication the south-east especially, is the home of a model accent.

In this paper we confront the inconsistency of claiming that a non-localizable accent model can have one geographically-locatable origin or focus of change. We explore some remarkable similarities between phonological data collected by Charles L.

¹ This paper was delivered at the Eleventh International Conference on Methods in Dialectology (Methods XI), Joensuu, Finland, in August 2002. A version, substantially altered, is to appear as 'Modelling RP: a variationist case', in K. Dziubalska-Kolaczyk and J. Przedlacka (eds.). (2005). *English Pronunciation Models: A Changing Scene*. Linguistic Insights Series. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Houck in 1965-66 from residents of Leeds and certain features of today's RP as advanced in Upton et al. (2001). Given these data, we would like to suggest, albeit tentatively, that changes in today's RP might well be social in origin rather than regional.

2. Source data

The method used by Houck to collect his phonological data involved a two-staged probability sampling technique, a specific set of subject qualifications, a minimal pair based questionnaire, an extended speech sample, and a subject data sheet. A detailed account of the entire method can be found in Houck (1968).

The two-staged probability sampling technique was used to obtain 115 subjects for a socio-linguistic survey of Leeds. The first stage involved the construction of a valid stratum from which to select a random sample of households. The second stage involved the random selection of households from which the informants would ultimately be randomly selected. This sampling technique produced 115 viable quarter-kilometer squares from which one household was randomly selected (Houck 1968: 115-116). In order for a member of a household to qualify as a subject, he or she had to be (1) a non-transit member of the household; (2) at least fifteen years of age (the then UK official school-leaving age) or older; (3) a functional speaker of English; and (4) both physically and mentally capable of giving the required information (Houck 1968: 116, 119).

Eighty-eight out of the randomly selected 115 subjects were interviewed. The questionnaire elicited seventy-one item vowel and consonant monosyllabic minimal pairs, which provided a full phonological inventory for each subject. The sentence frames were constructed so that the response-word would always be obtained in sentence-final position, under stress, and with a falling intonation contour; the word was also placed in a semantic context which maximized the probability of its being obtained. Three examples of these questions are as follows:

A right and left shoe make a [pair].

To keep shoes on, the laces are [tied].

If something is not good, it is [bad].

In addition, the sentence frames were randomly distributed. This random distribution minimized, if not eliminated, first of all, the chance of any systematic grouping of similar words, consciously or unconsciously, which would bias the pronunciation of the following word. Secondly, the random distribution, along with the different semantic environments of each sentence frame, in effect gave the questionnaire the form of a crossword puzzle, with, in hindsight, the all too optimistic hope of focusing the subject on the appropriate response-word and not some preconceived correct or preferred pronunciation. Houck also emphasized this focus on the appropriate word when he explained the interview procedure. (Houck 1968: 125).

An extended speech sample was also obtained using Labov's (1964) method of getting extended casual speech within the context of the interview. Two major topics were used in this survey. One was the very familiar 'Context 5a' question "Have you ever been in a situation where you were or thought you were in danger of being killed?" (Labov 1972: 92-4). If the answer was yes, then the subject was asked, "What happened?" The second was to ask "Have you ever been in a situation where something funny or humorous happened to you or you saw it happen to someone else?" For Labov,

and for this survey, speech was judged casual if one of the following cues occurred: changes in tempo, pitch, volume or breathing, or laughter (Houck 1968: 128).

Biographical data for each subject included a composite of stated and inferred questions from several sociological questionnaires, involving factors such as sex, age, marital status, residency, education, occupation, and income.

3. Study sample

In order to test the hypothesis that 1966 Leeds speech provides definite hints of today's modern RP, we used a ready made sample of twenty-two randomly selected subjects, which represented with the correct percentages the five social classes studied in the original enquiry. These social classes were based on occupational classification: professional, intermediate, skilled, partly skilled, and unskilled, as defined by the Classification of Occupations (1966). With the exception of five subjects, all were northerners: fourteen subjects were from Yorkshire; two were born in and/or spent their formative years in Durham; one was from Derbyshire; two were from Buckinghamshire; and three were from London. All of the non-northerners had lived for a number of years in Leeds and had obviously interacted with native northern speakers on a daily basis.

To both maximize and simplify our analysis, Davis constructed a seventy-one by twenty-two matrix, with the horizontal axis delineating the twenty-two subjects via their metric square cell numbers and the vertical axis delineating the seventy-one response-words of the minimal-pair questionnaire. We each independently transcribed phonetically each response word into respective matrices. Differences in our transcriptions were generally minor, and were resolved quickly and without difficulty. We then filled in our composite matrix with the phonological response for each of these two axes for a total 1562 responses.

For the purposes of this investigation, we concentrated on just four vowels, identified, after Wells (1982), in the TRAP, PRICE, SQUARE, and CURE lexical sets. The questionnaire provided 220 responses (4 for the TRAP vowel and 2 each for the PRICE, SQUARE, and CURE vowels = $(4 \times 22) + (6 \times 22) = 220$). We chose these phonemes in particular because they are the subject of innovation in Received Pronunciation (see for example Weiner and Upton 1999, Upton et al. 2001) and show noticeable variation in the present data. Although collected in Leeds, these data also show some marked variation from realisations most characteristic of Leeds speech, as recorded in the Survey of English Dialects (Orton and Halliday 1962-3), and it is with these earlier data that we will compare Houck's data.

4. Findings

We think it important to reassert that the well-known and somewhat light-hearted acronym NORM for an SED subject provides only a shallow portrayal of the social makeup of the Survey's speaker sample, and is not actually a linguistic *term*. Nevertheless, the three SED Leeds subjects, interviewed between 1952 and 1955, did conform closely to the stereotype, which, insofar as it exists, does so deliberately to serve the diachronic purpose of the Survey. All were male. Subject 1 was 78 when interviewed, left school at 11, and was a transport worker. Subject 2 was 76, left school at 9, and was a labourer and transport worker. Subject 3, the only one to have lived away from Leeds—for two years, in Sheffield—was also 76, left school at 13, and had been a

butcher, labourer, and gardener. As the archetypical SED subjects, therefore, the three might be expected to have provided traditional realisations of the phonemes under investigation, and these are set out in Table 1 for purposes of comparison. Level 2 in Table 1 contains less-frequently found variants:

TABLE 1: Realisations for TRAP, PRICE, SQUARE, and CURE vowels, SED locality 6Y.23 (Leeds)

Level	TRAP	PRICE	SQUARE	CURE
1	a	aɪ	ɛə	u:ə
2		i: ɪ ɛɪ	ɪə	

We set against these realisations those of the speaker sample already outlined, the result of random sampling of speakers largely to the north of the city centre a dozen or so years after SED fieldwork took place. These are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Realisations for TRAP, PRICE, SQUARE, and CURE vowels, Houck's random-sample data (x frequencies of response)

Cell	TRAP	PRICE	SQUARE	CURE
001	æ x3 æ' x1	Λɪ x2	ɛə x2	ʊə x2
002	a x4	Λɪ x2	ɛə x1 ɛ:ə x1	ʊə x1 ɔə x1
004	æ x3 a x1	aɪ x1 a'ɪ x1	ɛ: x2	ʊə x2
005	æ x1 a x3	aɪ x1 Λɪ x1	ɛə x1 ɛ: x1	ɔ:ə x2
006	a x4	a'ɪ x1 a:i x2	ɛ'ə x1 eə x1	ʊə x1 ɔ'ə x1
009	a x4	aɪ x2	ɛ: x1 ɛ:ə x1	ɔə x1 ɔ: x1
011	a x4	aɪ x2	ɛ: x2	ɔ: x2
012	a x4	aɪ x2	ɛ: x1 ɛ'ə x1	ɔ: x1 ɔ'ə x1
013	a x4	aɪ x1 Λɪ x1	ɛə x1 ɛ: x1	ɔ: x2 ɔ'ə x1
014	æ x2 a x2	aɪ x1 a'ɪ x1	ɛ' x1 ɛ: x1	ʊə x1 ɔ: x1 ɔ'ə x1
015	a x4	a'ɪ x1 aɪ x1	eə x1 ɛ:ə x1	ɔə x1
017	æ x1 æ' x1 a x1 a'ə x1	aɪ x1 Λɪ x1	ɛ'ə x1 ɛ: x1	ɔ: ə x2
018	a x3	a'ɪ x1 Λɪ x1	ɛə x1 ɛ:ə x1	ɔə x1 ɔ: x1
019	æ x1 a x1 a' x2	aɪ x2	ɛə x1 ɛ'ə x1	ʊə x2
022	a x4	aɪ x2	ɛ'ə x1 ɛ: x1	ʊə x2
023	a x4	aɪ x1 Λɪ x1	ɛ: x1 ɛ' x1	ɔ: x2
027	a x3	aɪ x1 a'ɪ x1	ɛə x1 eə x1	oə x1 ɔə x1
028	a x4	aɪ x2	ɛ: x1 ɛ' x1	ɔə x1 ɔ: x2
030	æ x3 æ'ə x1	Λɪ x2	ɛə x2	ɔə x1 ɔ: x1
034	a x4	aɪ x3 aɪ x1	ɛ'ə x2	ʊə x1 ɔə x1
065	æ x2 æə x1 ə x1	Λɪ x1 əɪ x1	ɛə x2	oə x1 o: x1
113	a x4	aɪ x2	ɛ: x2	ɔə x1 ɔ'ə x1

5. Discussion

Immediate and generalised comparison of Tables 1 and 2 indicates that those variants at level 2 in Table 1, which might be construed as the most localised—and least frequently elicited—of those produced for SED Leeds, are not represented at all in the later data. It is also apparent that there are variants in Table 2 which are not to be found in Table 1 and which might not therefore, by implication, be especially locally authenticated. If we take the considered phonemes in turn, we find the following:

TRAP. [a] is by far the more usual realisation, being found exclusively in fourteen cells and being found at some level in all but three. It is noteworthy, however, that [æ] occurs in eight cells, coexisting with [a] in five of them and appearing exclusively in two.

PRICE. In particular, the un-shifted realisations are lost in the later material. [aɪ]-forms are dominant, as might be expected for Leeds; five speakers produce some degree of length for the first diphthongal element, one as their only form of response. A previously unrecorded Leeds form, [ʌɪ], is recorded from nine speakers, for three of whom it is categorical.

SQUARE. [ɪə] does not occur, although [eə] at cells 006 and 027 might be a residual form of it. [ɛə] is frequent, but is not exhibited in seven cells. The innovative long monophthong [ɛ:] appears in twelve cells, to the exclusion of other variants in six of these. Furthermore, lengthening of the first element of the [ɛə] diphthong, arguably reducing the second element to glide status, occurs in the speech of eleven subjects.

CURE. Evidence for this phoneme in SED is, it must be recognised, meagre: [u:ə], as recorded, is the result of just one question in the Survey's questionnaire. It is apparent that a diphthongal realisation with a close start point, [ʊə], is quite strongly supported, being found in eight cells (or ten if we include [ɔə] with its half-open rounded start). There is, however, a preponderance of smoothings on a half-open rounded vowel, [ɔ:], with or without off-glides, together with some diphthongs with this vowel as startpoint: these are found in seventeen cells, the fully smoothed monophthong occurring in ten of them, in two of them categorically.

What might we make of this? Clearly, something is happening in Houck's more elaborate 1960s data that is not to be found in the determinedly historically-focused SED record. Certain variants are lost to us there yet, beyond the individual variability, which is to be expected from data collected by his method, Houck uncovers variability which the earlier survey does not. It is here that a consideration of phonological change occurring at a remove from the Leeds vernacular might be illuminating.

Some at least of what we see in Table 2 accords well with RP developments of recent years. For some considerable time the mainstream RP TRAP phoneme has indeed been best represented by the cardinal vowel 4 transcription, rather than by the traditional aesc: this change is very notably and most famously heard in the speech of middle-aged and younger members of the British royal family (Princess [an], Prince ['andru:] and so on. This TRAP-vowel movement has been commented on at an academic level for some considerable time (for example by Wells 1982, who rightly sees it as an RP feature moving British and American pronunciations determinedly apart), and it is now, rather belatedly, becoming a feature of description in the ELT field (as noted by Bulley, see Weiner and Upton 2000).

Less obvious than the TRAP vowel, until construed in its constituent parts, is the revision required from the traditional in description of the PRICE vowel, a change first argued for by MacCarthy as long ago as 1978. Once with a low-front startpoint, the mainstream diphthong now typically starts at a position occupied by the RP STRUT vowel.

Also less remarked than change in the RP TRAP vowel is the SQUARE-vowel transformation from diphthong to monophthong. And yet [ɛə], to most native British English speakers, now sounds decidedly old-fashioned or affected, or even 'square'. Of course, some younger RP speakers may be heard to produce a slight off-glide [ə], but it is the lengthening of the monophthong that is of the essence here.

Finally in our quartet of phonemes, it should be noted that the CURE vowel is now exhibiting both [ʊə] (the more usual older form) and, increasingly, [ɔ:] realisations. This is now regarded as an acceptable variant feature of RP by pronouncing dictionaries, *The English Pronouncing Dictionary* (Jones 1997), *The Longman Dictionary of Pronunciation* (Wells 1990), and *The Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation for Current English* (Upton et al. 2001).

In order tentatively to bring out the significance of what might be occurring in Houck's data, it is important to recognize two things about them. Firstly, the data record the speech of a cross-section of Leeds society, randomly sampled, and so are not illustrative of an especially conservative stratum of society as are those from SED. Secondly, whilst the later study did not rely on a questionnaire which generated a relatively high level of formality as did SED's (what Johnston (1985: 84) calls 'canonical style'), it is to be expected that Houck's subjects were nevertheless inclined to be less than casual in their responses: an American knocking on one's door was, it is reasonable to assume, quite an exotic experience for most Leodensians in the 1960s; one bearing a letter of introduction from the local university, and asking detailed structured questions, would have been rare. Bearing these two matters in mind, we can venture upon informed comment, again taking each phoneme in turn.

TRAP. In the RP of the 1960s, [æ] was a normal realization. It has been observed that this is a not uncommon variant in Houck's data, and it can be seen to be strongly favoured by some, unsurprisingly if they are operating towards the formal end of their range. It is also unsurprising, of course, that [a] is the preferred variant of most, this being the historical and contemporary vernacular form for the region, and one would be foolish to suggest that its vernacular use here is in any sense a precursor to its introduction into today's RP. That it exists within the comparatively formal context of a fieldwork interview indicates, however, that there existed at the time a dominant reservoir of speakers who used [a] naturally in situations where others in their community used [æ], who were certainly resistant to its abandonment, and who might have assisted its more widespread acceptance over time.

PRICE. Unlike TRAP, this phoneme's older RP and frequent Leeds realizations correspond on [aɪ], except for a Leeds tendency towards some length on the first element of the diphthong. Prior to 1978 (MacCarthy) there is no record of [ʌɪ] as an RP feature, and no transcriptions of Leeds speech indicate its use either. We have here, therefore, a pronunciation by a significant number of Leeds speakers which seems innovative, and which accords with the normal mainstream RP realization today.

SQUARE. As with PRICE, we have with SQUARE a trend in the Houck data away from a correspondence of the vernacular with the traditional and now marked or 'U' RP, towards a form which exhibits the monophthongal realization characteristic of RP today. The tendency to favour [ɛ:] -forms is in fact very considerable, especially if one acknowledges the lengthened first element and consequent off-gliding as being indicative of the same trend.

CURE. The favouring of [ɔ:] is notable. It should be remembered that, in Leeds, we have a population for whom [ʊə] might be expected to be entrenched in the vernacular: even <moor>, which for many English speakers has led the move from [ʊə] to [ɔ:], has been resistant to change in the city and more widely in Yorkshire. To find so many Leeds residents in the mid 1960s taking part in this change (at a time when *The English Pronouncing Dictionary* (Jones 1967) was resolutely flagging [ʊə] as the most frequent form suggests that it was well advanced generally at this period, although not yet within the conservative confines of the RP fold.

6. Conclusion

RP, like any accent, has changed and is changing: particularly advanced forms seem today to be alive in the somewhat rarified confines of Cambridge University, for example (Fabricius 2001), which *might* be indicative of present wider use or change in progress. We might speculate as to the origins of those changes, positing a situation in which the influence of RP on the pronunciation of residents of the great cities of England is at least matched by a democratization of English speech in the direction of that used by those residents. Whilst it would be unsound to point to Leeds as the source of any particular innovation in RP, it would be reasonable to assume that this city, and so others too, have fully participated in its development, testimony to the accent's status as a social rather than a regional entity. If this is true, then claims such as the following for the possible influence of so-called "Estuary English" could be seen to be exaggerated:

It is interesting to speculate on the future of "Estuary English". In the long run it may influence the speech of all but the linguistically most isolated, among the highest and lowest socio-economic groups. Both could become linguistically conservative minorities. (Rosewarne 1984)

As with the complex geographical and social issue of the evolution of Standard English, the story of Received Pronunciation is not reducible to such simplistic geocentric assumptions.

References

- Classification of Occupations.* (1966). London: HMSO.
- Fabricius, A.H. (2001). 'T-glottaling: 'rough', 'posh' or somewhere in between?'. In Fontana, Josep M., L. McNally, M. T. Turrell, and E. Vallduví (eds.) *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Language Variation in Europe*. Barcelona: Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 80-89.
- Handbook of the International Phonetic Association: A guide to the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet.* (1999). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Houck, C.L. (1968). 'Methodology of an Urban Speech Survey'. In S. Ellis, (ed.) *Leeds*

Studies in English New Series II, 115-28

- Johnston, P.A. (1985). 'Linguistic Atlases and Sociolinguistics'. In J.M. Kirk, S. Sanderson, and J.D.A. Widdowson (eds.) *Studies in Linguistic Geography*. London: Croom Helm, 81-93.
- Jones, D. (1967). *The English Pronouncing Dictionary*, 13th edn, ed. A.C. Gimson. London: Dent
- Jones, Daniel. (1997). *The English Pronouncing Dictionary*, 15th edn, ed. P. Roach and J. Hartman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press
- MacCarthy, P. (1978). *The Teaching of Pronunciation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- McMahon, A. (2002). *An Introduction to English Phonology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
- Orton, H. and W.J. Halliday (eds.). (1962-3). *Survey of English Dialects B: The Basic Material*. Vol. 1, *The Six Northern Counties and the Isle of Man*. Leeds: E.J. Arnold
- Rosewarne, David. 1984. 'Estuary English', *Times Educational Supplement*, 19 October 1984
- Upton, C., W.A. Kretzschmar Jr, and R. Konopka. (2001). *The Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation for Current English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Weiner, E. and C. Upton. (2000). '[hat], [hæt], and all that', *English Today* **61**, Vol. **16**. **1**, January 2000
- Wells, J.C. (1982). *Accents of English*. 3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Wells, J.C. (1990). *The Longman Dictionary of Pronunciation*. London: Longman

Lawrence M. Davis,
Department of English
The Wichita State University
Wichita
Kansas 67260-0014, USA
lawrence.davis@wichita.edu

Charles L. Houck
Department of English
Ball State University
Muncie
Indiana 47306, USA
CLH@rkymtnhi.com

Clive Upton
School of English
The University of Leeds
Leeds
LS2 9JT, UK
c.s.upton@leeds.ac.uk