Mobility, contact and an accent norm: the case of Received Pronunciation

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Abstract

This paper will focus on various facets of RP as an accent norm. In the first part of the paper I will set the stage for a renewed sociolinguistic view of RP, and examine some of the effects of social and geographical mobility and contact on RP. At the same time, one of my concerns will be to bring a renewed class analysis into the sociolinguistic discussion. I do this, contra many sociolinguists who have recently taken up the meta-narratives of, for example, the risk society, globalisation and late modernity (see e.g. Coupland, Sarangi and Candlin 2001), in order to argue for the continuing relevance of a restructured and updated notion of individually-instantiated social class for the discussion of an elite social class accent in Britain. Along the way, and perhaps controversially, part of the agenda of this paper will be to advance the case that a renewed understanding of the concept RP itself enables RP to claim a tenable place within descriptive sociolinguistics.

In the second part of this paper we will be looking at various facets of the changing situation of RP in present-day England. This includes data showing ongoing phonetic changes in progress, as well as overt and covert attitudes to RP. The phonetic data have been gleaned from sociolinguistic interviews, while the attitudinal data derive from interviews, subjective evaluation questionnaires and the popular press. By thus exploring the current and changing status of RP in the wider sociolinguistic landscape of Britain, the discussion will also highlight several ways in which variationist and attitudinal sociolinguistic studies can mutually benefit each other.

Construct versus native RP

Why look at RP sociolinguistically? To linguistically trained speakers of British English, this is perhaps *the* necessary first question, since RP, largely for historical reasons, tends to be envisaged as a somewhat mythical object. The apocryphal story about Daniel Jones, the compiler of the English Pronouncing Dictionary, is that he was asked how many speakers of RP there were in his department of Phonetics at UCL, and he replied "two", which left people to wonder who the other one was. By tradition, RP tended to be firmly placed in the domain of phonetics (as Ramsaran 1990: 180 also claims). In addition, it is easy to see by looking at the Labovian or quantitative sociolinguistic literature, that since its beginnings, it has concentrated on examining so-called vernacular accents found in the working, lower and middle middle classes of speech communities, in Britain as well as elsewhere. The assumption, never expressed but implicit, has been more or less

120

that RP speakers were unsuitable or uninteresting as objects of sociolinguistic study, or that RP was solely to be regarded as an idealised model not locatable in the real world (see further below).

But surely, even banally, like all other members of society, RP speakers are part of a speech community. By definition, they will probably not ever be the point of origin for changes from below, but that does not mean that they will never participate in linguistic change. We actually know very little about the progress of sociolinguistic changes in that part of the community. I suspect that various assumptions about RP speakers have also precluded them from sociolinguistic studies. These include notions that the search for the vernacular is most 'genuinely' carried out in other parts of the community, that people of this kind are inaccessible, or that their generally high levels of education make them unreliable as naïve linguistic subjects. In one of the few studies against the general trend, Kroch's work on the upper class of Philadelphia (Kroch 1995), the author experienced greater levels of cooperation from interviewees when they were told that the purpose of the study was speech rather than other, seemingly more risky, aspects of social life. This of course is in contrast to Labov's practice (which has become general) of not revealing the true intentions of the investigator in a sociolinguistic study, for fear of contamination of the vernacular data which is so highly valued. [1]

On another level, there is the possibility that sociolinguists' reluctance to tackle RP stems partly from the fact that there is a systematic ambiguity in the term. When the term RP or Received Pronunciation, (which is what the abbreviation stands for) is used, it actually covers two things that I feel must be kept conceptually distinct. First, it refers to the vernacular of those individuals for whom RP is their native variety (by Trudgill's (2002) estimate, around 3 percent of the British population), which I have elsewhere called 'native RP'. Second, it refers to 'construct-RP' the more or less conscious and more or less consistent construct of pronunciation norms and accent attitudes that can be held in people's heads, or presented in pronunciation dictionaries. It includes ideas about how words are 'correctly' pronounced, if that concept is at all relevant to an individual (and it won't be so for all). [2] It also present in statements that linguists sometimes make about what is 'permitted' in RP. (Note that it makes no sense to talk about something being phonetically 'permitted' in a native accent, so the concept of permission must refer to prescriptive attitudes held by individuals). An added complication here is that for people both within the native RP group and for some people outside it, construct RP has had a role as a reference accent. It has also previously had an important institutional role as the accent which dominated on the BBC in the early days of broadcasting. By these definitions then, I envisage construct RP as a far more complicated thing than native RP, separate from it, but with links to it. Native RP is also simpler to access in that it is grounded in a social group, and, we might assume at this point (in the absence of sociolinguistic evidence to the contrary), the process of socially-embedded language change in native RP operates more or less as it does in the rest of the community.

But the way RP is referred to in sociolinguistic studies tends to blur this important distinction between native RP and construct RP, and this has dire consequences for a sociolinguistic understanding of the accent. The fact remains that native RP changes over generations, while

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[1] See Milroy and Gordon (2003) for a critique of the theoretical construct of *the vernacular*.
[2] I would not deny that many people have experienced what Abercrombie (1965) called the "accent bar" first hand, and that antagonism and downright hostility are the natural reactions to what remains systematic accent prejudice. My point is also that this prejudice and its sociolinguistic ramifications are relevant to the sociolinguistic situation under investigation. It is part of the sociolinguistic life and history of the accent, however socially unjust it is.

construct RP seems to have a tendency to fall behind. One example of this lag can be seen in the interview I recorded in Cambridge in 1997 with a male speaker who had experience of singing in an internationally famous choir; he referred to the choirmaster's wish to keep *morn* and *mourn* distinct, i.e. retaining the /ʊ/ with schwa offglide which has become obsolete in younger native RP. His comment on this is:

S: that's the thing, it is, singing in a choir is a very standardising thing and and in the case of X (college) it's standardising to some vague notion of RP of fifty years ago I think, which is no doubt what our world service listeners want to hear, who knows (M3).

In the specific context that the speaker refers to, RP norms, even outdated ones, still have resonance for at least some speakers. But if the phonetic norms of construct RP are no longer widely cited in the public domain or in the community, and a native RP voice is heard less and less often on radio and TV, the consequence of the conceptual blur between construct and native RP is that laypeople and linguists alike claim that "No-one speaks RP anymore" (see e.g. John Wells' discussion of this in Wells 1997).

We can see this line of thinking in operation in James Milroy's paper entitled "Received Pronunciation: who "receives" it and how long will it be "received"" (J. Milroy 2001). His stated purpose is "to consider the proposition that RP no longer exists" (2001:15). By contending that the linguistic (i.e. primarily the segmental-phonological) characteristics of RP (which we here call 'native RP') are not sufficient to define the accent, he chooses to make its continued 'existence' contingent upon the continuation of the accent's previous high status in the speech community (an aspect which, we have argued here, belongs to construct RP). Thus, he maintains, the idea that the accent is 'received' is central to the accent's definition; here we move definitively into the domain of construct RP. Milroy claims that even though the phonetic forms of RP can still be heard, the social conditions which brought about the accent are no longer the same and that it "is no longer uniquely "received" in the way it used to be" (J. Milroy 2001:31).[3] If both claims are true, then the accent both still exists (in a phonetic and phonological sense) and does not still exist (in a social sense). We are left with an RP that is, as Churchill said of Russia in October 1939, "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma".[4] The only way out of this paradox, which, as I see it, arises from an analytical choice, has to be that we stringently separate out two senses of the term 'RP', the two senses, which, I have argued previously, make the single term systematically ambiguous (see also Fabricius 2000:29, 2002)

My argument in this paper, then, is that alongside generation-based changes affecting speakers of native RP (and, as Milroy points out, many of the phonological changes in recent times have been due to external influences[5]), social and economic history have had an important influence on the sociolinguistic status of construct RP. As Milroy writes, (construct) RP was always in an unusual

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[3] This point is not intended to dispute Milroy's excellent analysis of the historical sociolinguistic circumstances (including high levels of middle-class social mobility in the late 1800s), which brought about the levelled variety Received Pronunciation at that time. See further below.

[4] Macaulay (1988) echoes this when he writes: "Certainly linguists should be interested in every type of speech, including the exotic upper-class varieties, but the only way to see them in perspective is through a comprehensive study of the community", in other words, a sociolinguistic study. The label *exotic* I don't subscribe to, but I would suggest that Macaulay's ire against RP is actually against construct RP, and native RP is hauled along in its wake. Macauley's reference to RP as an 'idealization' indicates that he is thinking of construct RP without having made a distinction between it and native RP.

[5] It is not relevant here to discuss Milroy's arguments about internal and external change to a language variety.

position as a standard accent, since it did not ever have general acceptance by the population, one feature that standard accents are generally expected to have (2001:16). In the social conditions under which it came about, in the late 1800s, it was the result of the cloistering of generations of boys (and to some extent, girls) in boarding school establishments, where accent levelling operated alongside a conscious teaching of pronunciation norms, so that the accent which emerged could be seen as a badge of educatedness, functioning as a 'gatekeeping accent', admitting those who were qualified for the many new Civil service and military positions that the British Empire demanded (Milroy 2001:20-21). Milroy argues convincingly that RP (of both kinds) originated in an era of "a high degree of upward social mobility" in the nineteenth century, as a result of the expansion of the public school sector and its opening to members of the newly-prosperous middle classes of the time (also documented in Mugglestone 2003).

Milroy's claims about the present status of construct RP are also highly relevant here. Milroy (2001:25) notes that exclusive attitudes to accent do remain in Britain, but have retreated in the face of the empirically verifiable fact that RP is no longer the only 'accent of the educated' or 'literate', following expanding access to university education since the 1960s. Its specially-marked status as the marker of educatedness is thus in terminal decline, and changing media practices in admitting other accents to the domains which were once denied to them (news reading on the BBC, for example) reflect that fact. At the same time, a 'levelled Southern British English' variety, now generally known as Estuary English, is advancing to the point of becoming a mainstream accent, becoming more and more commonly heard in the media.

The evidence thus points to the erosion of 'construct' RP's status as a "standard" accent; as an accent it is no longer aspired to, or used as a reference point to the same extent as previously. However, I would contest that native RP is still an elite accent, in the sense that it belongs to a group who are undoubtedly an economic and social elite, albeit not the only such elite group in Britain. I would also contest that 'construct' RP still has resonance in some parts of the British speech community, albeit not for a large group or a majority group, by any means. In the following sections, I will suggest elite accents persist as a result of elite social distinctions based on education. Furthermore, the claim is made that the much-touted classless society is to some extent ideological rather than socially real. Classlessness is not all that the term implies.

Social class theory and sociolinguistics

Adonis and Pollard (1997) is one example of a polemic over the "myth of classlessness" in British society. Their claim is that while the bases of determining social class may have changed, this cannot be the same as the claim that classes have disappeared. Inequalities in access to education, as can be seen in the case of the independent sector, to jobs, and to living standards still exist. In their introductory chapter Adonis and Pollard summarise present-day Britain thus (1997: 10):

> Cultural distinctions and nuances remain legion. Accents, houses, cars, schools, sports, food, fashion, drink, smoking, supermarkets, soap operas, holiday destinations, even training shoes: virtually everything in life is graded with subtle or unsubtle class tags attached…And underpinning these distinctions are fundamental differences in upbringing, education and occupations.

The idea that Britain is becoming a classless society is, according to Adonis and Pollard (1997: 14-15):

> a clever ruse to discredit the notion of class divisions without actually denying their existence… The classless society is therefore not a society without classes, but … a meritocratic society providing means for people to advance by ability regardless of class origins.

Adonis and Pollard claim that the goal of a meritocratic or classless society, touted especially by Conservative politicians in the 1990s, effectively glosses over the fact that economically-determined segregation into different forms of education still exists, and is a powerful factor determining the ability of talented pupils to achieve. Class differences, they argue, persist most prominently in education, and it is this aspect of their analysis of present-day Britain I wish to focus on here. "Education", they write "is the engine of social mobility, and Britain's, particularly England's, education system does not remotely provide equality of opportunity" (Adonis and Pollard 1997: 36). Educational segregation in Britain begins with the earliest levels of schooling; increasingly, it begins at nursery level, as independent schools open crèches (from age 1½) which act as feeders for their infant schools. The infant schools feed into the independent primary schools from age five, preparatory schools from age 8, and public schools from age 13. Such is the flow through the system that, for example, Eton College's website includes a list of the preparatory schools which have previously sent boys to Eton. The website further encourages parents with boys on the waiting list to keep the school up to date if a prospective student changes preparatory (prep) school (state primary schools don't get a mention at all). Economic advantage is the deciding factor for access to independent education at all stages, scholarships notwithstanding, as Adonis and Pollard emphasise again and again. Finally, at the point of selection for higher education, years of advantage and specialised tutoring have placed independent school pupils well in the race for good university places. The following figures give one example of the continuing disparities of access between the state and private education systems in Britain.

TABLE 1: Five year admissions trend to Cambridge for home/EU students (excluding Overseas and other) by school and college type[6]

Year of Entry	State School (%)	Independent School (%)
2003	1,643 (55)	1,360 (45)
2002	1,672 (56)	1,340 (44)
2001	1,458 (53)	1,336 (47)
2000	1,458 (52)	1,336 (48)
1999	1,461 (53)	1,320 (47)

These figures show Cambridge entrance rates over the past five years, a period when media attention has at different times focussed on equality of access to the collegiate universities, and, it has to be admitted, the universities themselves have set up schemes to try to even out the differences. While state school rates of admission to Cambridge in the most recent year have reached 55%, this only seems equitable until we compare this with the actual size of the two populations, and consider that only 7% of sixth forms in Britain are from the independent school sector. The collegiate university interview system is generally blamed for this (e.g. by Decca Aitkenhead[7]). The conclusion must be that the school system and Oxbridge education remain segregating forces in British society.

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[6] Source: http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/news/press/dpp/2004031201 (accessed 16th March 2004)
[7] *Guardian* 24 May 1999.

If the idea of the classless society is but an ideological ruse to disguise the continued existence of social classes, then what is the status of the concept of social class in sociological theory? To provide a tentative answer here, I will refer to the work of Mike Savage, professor of sociology at the University of Manchester, who argues that the concept of social class still has relevance for sociological theorizing in his book *Class Analysis and Social Transformation* (Savage 2000). While this work criticizes earlier models of class analysis (most notably those of John Goldthorpe and his colleagues), as being technical and arcane, and inadequate for various reasons, he wants to reintegrate social class into sociological theory. Savage argues for an individuated mode of class analysis, a theoretical use of the concept of class which ties it to people's own negotiations around the term in their own lives, thus making class a conceptual link between various "mediated, complex, local and ambivalent social processes" (Savage 2000:149). Superior incomes and job positions are accomplished by individuals, as cumulative processes, and class is thus "instantiated in people's lives" (Savage 2000:150). His claim is further that economic and social inequalities persist in Britain, while class cultures have been transformed. The first transformation lies in the loss of the defining role of the working class in British culture. The working class has lost its "proud independence" as a class of people who mastered a trade. The conditions for the working class have changed so that 'working class' as a positive cultural concept has dissolved or decomposed, remaining only as a "cultural frame", "a ghostly presence at the heart of British culture" in that many people still express identification with "values of ordinariness and unpretentiousness" which are reflections of "anti-elitist and populist connotations that the term has historically possessed" (Savage 2000:155). The working class has instead in reality become the servile class. The second transformation is of the middle class, which has developed from its original 'servile' status, where it was dependent on employers, but promised continuing employment (ibid). For the middle class, the meaning of career and work have changed radically during the twentieth century. The concept of professionalism has become central and "new modes of individualization have come to focus on the self-developmental and transformative capacities of the self" (Savage 2000:156). Traditionally, individuality relied on class position, but now fixed boundaries are no longer enforced, and, Savage concludes, "the individual pursues a project of the self in each new situation" (ibid). The result of this is that those who win the class war come to blur the notion of class itself, or regard it as irrelevant. This of course concurs with the whole debate about the 'classless society', which Adonis and Pollard deconstruct. Social class can now be seen as ambivalent. It is both present in obvious and visible ways but pushed aside and ignored by a middle-class individualized culture. The importance of social class hierarchy (on a vertical dimension) as part of class culture has faded, which can be seen, for example, in the decline of forelock-tugging deference of the lower classes to the upper classes. It can, moreover, be seen directly in the decline of deference to the norms of construct RP, or to speakers of native RP.

But this does not entail native RP has ceased to exist. If we accept the evidence of network-based sociolinguistic analyses (e.g. L. Milroy 1980), then it seems clear that some distinctive features of speech can probably still be found in public-school circles, given their persistent social exclusiveness, at least during the period of school and university education. Comments by the interviewees in my Ph.D. study on 'sounding public school' also suggest this (Fabricius 2000:54). As generation has succeeded generation, however, this form of speech has not remained static, as we can see from the well-documented changes in RP in the course of this century (e.g. Wells 1997). I would suggest furthermore that the ideology of the 'classless accent' may be similar to the ideology of the 'classless society', a remaking of traditional class distinctions, this time in speech, so that expressions of individuality depend on a project of individualization which gives space to

other voices. As we have seen, social and economic privilege persist in Britain, and the most natural sociolinguistic expectation would be that linguistic differences reflecting privilege would remain. But the social elite accent now very commonly suggests not only privilege and exclusiveness, but also conservatism, arrogance and prejudice. This accent, in other words, conjures up connotations of the old order. Comments in the popular press suggesting that a 'traditional' RP accent can be a distinct disadvantage in some contexts can, I think, be seen as bringing out the new middle class modes of individualisation that Savage discusses, by rejecting an accent which has associations with older forms of individualization based on vertical social class distinctions. In conclusion then, we need a remade concept of social class to understand the decline of construct RP. If accent forms can undergo levelling (as RP has done with accents of the South-East), maybe accent norms can undergo levelling too. One example of this we have already seen, in the decline of the norm about *morn* versus *mourn*. *Whine* /hw/ versus *wine* /w/ has met a similar fate: what was formerly seen as a necessary distinction is now seen as overly fussy and pedantic.[8]

Geographical mobility and the breakdown of non-localisability

We turn now to the concept of non-localisability and its interaction with the increased geographical mobility which has characterised the latter part of the twentieth century. Non-localisability is often cited as a defining characteristic of Received Pronunciation: that RP, while it is a British accent, is non-localisable within Britain. Indeed, it is the one defining characteristic used to separate RP and Estuary English, according to Wells' (1998) definition of EE, which reads: "standard English spoken with an accent that includes features localisable in the southeast of England." In terms of sociolinguistic processes we can see why RP came to be non-localisable: it was formed and promulgated in the non-localisable boarding schools from the 1870s onwards. These schools gathered their intake of students from all over the country, and separated them from local networks and local modes of speaking, with predictable homogenising results.

However, as Milroy (2001) also points out, the social situation which brought about RP is no longer the same. While social mobility is at the centre of Milroy's argument, geographical mobility has also been evident as a driving motor in widespread levelling of previously distinct regional dialects, a phenomenon which has been observed all over the country (Foulkes and Docherty 1999:13). We may ask, then, to what extent has geographical mobility challenged the 'non-localisable accent'?

We will briefly diverge to look at a slightly different conceptualisation of (native) RP's non-localisability. In a formulation which places fine-grained phonetic detail in a central position, Nolan (1999:86) explicitly rejects the strong version of non-localisability, characterised as the "common view which refuses to locate RP geographically, and … views it as a non-regional prestige variety". Nolan's definition of RP is (quoted from Nolan and Kerswill 1990: 316): "Received Pronunciation (RP) is the long-established term for the prestige accent of South East England which also serves as a prestige norm in varying degrees elsewhere in Britain."[9]

In this approach, which I find very useful, since it takes account of variation in a way which many discussions of RP do not, Nolan contends that (native) RP forms a phonetic and phonological continuum with local accents in the Southeast. He bases this for example on observable systematic variation in the GOAT vowel (disregarding its special allophone before /l/). The narrow first element

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[8] Fashion norms in other areas of life, it should be noted, do the same. The wearing of gloves and hats is one example.
[9] As I have argued above, I would prefer to call native RP an elite, rather than a prestige, accent, in the sense that it belongs to an economic elite.

of the diphthong in RP (schwa) can be seen as one end of a phonetic continuum "in which increasingly open first elements correlate with decreasing socio-economic prestige (culminating in 'Cockney' [aʊ]." Nolan (ibid) argues that no such phonetic continuum can be found to link RP and northern varieties of English, where, for example in South Yorkshire, the low prestige vowel would be [ʊ] with schwa offglide, and the more prestigious form for GOAT approaching cardinal vowel 9, similar to RP THOUGHT, "neither of which can be straightforwardly placed on a simple phonetic continuum with the RP form".

Furthermore, Nolan claims that, geographically, because of the socio-economic affluence of the South East,

> the majority of RP speakers are in contact with one set of regional varieties, namely those of the London area, and since RP forms a continuum with those varieties, it is not surprising that there should be some parallels between the historical development of RP and that of these other varieties (1999: 87).

In summary then, according to Nolan's conceptualisation, RP and the accents of the south are undergoing similar changes which sweep across all varieties in the region, presumably because of increased geographical mobility. If RP participates in linguistic changes active in the Southeast (or perhaps the South in general in some cases), this may go so far that regionalised varieties of RP can be identified. To mark such a possibility Cruttenden (1994) introduced the term 'Regional RP' as a subvariety of RP, the London version of which he identifies with Estuary English in the sixth edition (2001).

There is some evidence that certain features of younger speakers' native RP do have regional distributions. In my study of the speech of a group of ex-public school students born in the 1970s (Fabricius 2000), I examined rates of t-glottalling (the pronunciation of word-final /t/ as a glottal stop). Figure 1 shows the distributions of t-glottalling by speaker's regional origin and phonetic context. The regional analysis is based on sorting the speakers into groups according to where they had lived for most of their lives.

Interview Style: t-glottalling and region

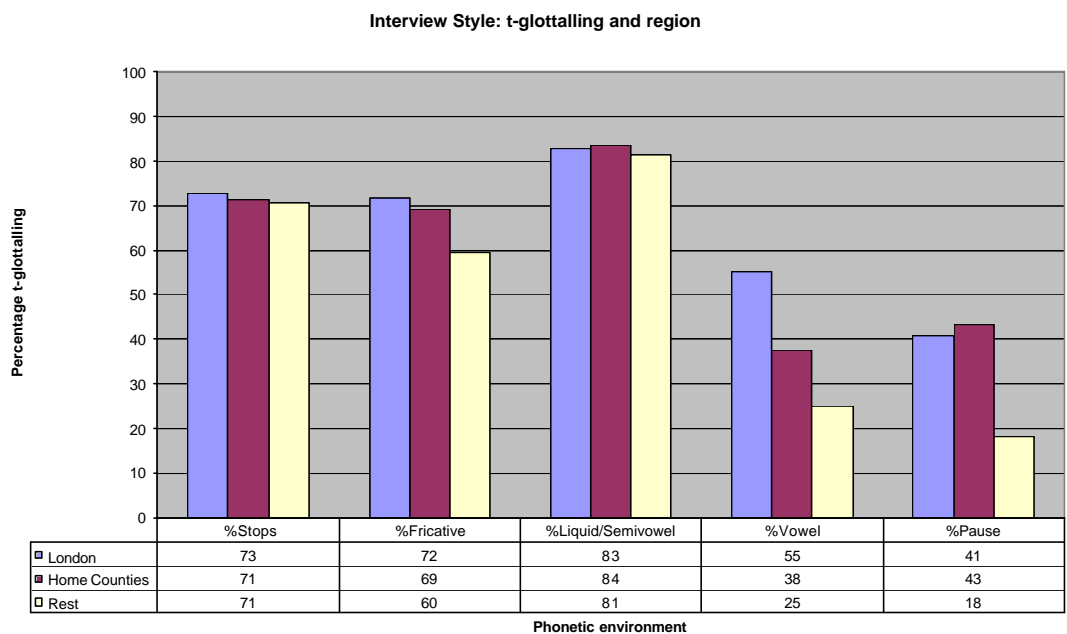|	%Stops	%Fricative	%Liquid/Semivowel	%Vowel	%Pause
London	73	72	83	55	41
Home Counties	71	69	84	38	43
Rest	71	60	81	25	18

Figure 1: Interview style: t-glottalling and region (reproduced from Fabricius 2000:98)

If we examine the means (the average value for a group) for each region, we can see that the pattern of variation for the pre-vocalic environment across the regions is slightly different from the pattern for the pre-pausal environment. The results in the pre-vocalic category show a stepwise pattern, decreasing from London through the Home Counties to the rest of England. This pattern does not apply to the pre-pausal environment, where the group average for glottal stop in the Home Counties group is very similar to the value for the London group. To sum up the statistical results (obtained using ANOVA), the London speakers' rates of pre-vocalic t-glottalling were significantly different from the other two regions combined ($F(1,64)=8.721$, $p=0.004$), while the rest of England group had statistically significant differences from London and the Home Counties together in rates of t-glottalling pre-pausally ($F(1,65)=9.98$, $p=0.002$) and pre-vocalically ($F(1,65)=6.492$, $p=0.013$) (for details, see Fabricius 2000:98-103) The relationships for the different phonetic environments across the different regions can be summarised in Figure 2, which uses separate columns to indicate statistically significant differences. Within the pre-vocalic environment, all groups are significantly different from each other, while in the pre-pausal environment the Home Counties pattern together with London, separate from the rest of England. No significant differences were found between the different regions in the pre-consonantal environments.

Consonant:	London + Home Counties + Rest		
Pause:	London + Home Counties		Rest
Vowel:	London	Home Counties	Rest

Figure 2 Interview Style: Region and Environment in word-final t-glottalling

In Fabricius 2000, I concluded that high rates of t-glottalling pre-consonantally (around 70% for stops, 80% for Liquids/Semivowels, around 60% for Fricatives) were a stable feature of Interview speech style of all speakers from all regions. If we take a diachronic view of this situation, and consider earlier reports of t-glottalling's distribution (e.g. Wells 1982: 261) to be accurate, it seems that word-final pre-consonantal t-glottalling has completed its spread and is now common for this generation of upper middle class speakers from further afield than the Southeast of England. Translated into historical terms: Pre-consonantal glottalling can be regarded as the 'first wave' of glottalling. The 'second wave' seems to be the pre-pausal category, which in the present analysis shows a significant difference between the Southeastern category and the 'rest of England' category. As we have seen, London and the Home Counties pattern together on this feature, while the Rest of England lags behind. The 'newest' wave of t-glottalling is evident in the pre-vocalic category, where the London-raised public school speakers use pre-vocalic t-glottalling at a significantly higher rate than speakers from other parts of England in less formal styles of speech. (but see also the discussion of this hypothesised spread of t-glottalling in Straw and Patrick 2002).

We can now return to the concept of non-localisability and discuss it in the light of these sociolinguistic results. Non-localisability, as we have shown through the quantitative sociolinguistic analysis presented here, can be tested empirically: by asking whether the speakers from the same social group but different regions show significantly different results. The regionalised results for t-glottalling in native RP suggest that RP is indeed regionalising at a micro level. In the interview speech analysed here, word-final pre-consonantal t-glottalling is a non-localisable feature. Word-final pre-pausal t-glottalling is approaching non-localisability, but has not moved significantly further than the Home Counties. Word-final pre-vocalic t-glottalling occurs in the speech of all speakers in the sample; but t-glottalling in this position at a significantly high rate (over 50%) is a localisable London feature.

Construct-RP at the micro-level

We move now from considering native RP at the micro-level to examining construct RP at the micro-level. In this section, I will illustrate some of the ways in which norms of speech are created, expressed, and negotiated. The first example consists of two spontaneous comments from an interview recorded in 1998, which give some instances of normative behaviour and a clash between generations as to notions of correctness or appropriateness:

I: um did your mother and father ever talk about um the way that you spoke as a child
R: yes… not so much me as the other two [younger siblings] cause the other two used to glottally stop all the time so they'd go 'wha''[glottal stop] and my mother'd go 'what' [t´] like this

In this excerpt, the interviewee reports on and demonstrates her mother's correction of the glottalled pronunciation of 'what', presenting her mother as using the ejective [t´] (interestingly, not aspirated [tʰ] as the normative model. The mother is of course here following the societal condemnation of glottalled /t/ which has been much reported in the media in Britain (Foulkes and Docherty 1999: 11). However, the interviewee then reports on her own reactions to aspects of her mother's pronunciation, which she feels is overly 'posh' and too reminiscent of 1950s BBC pronunciation:

R: there's sort of a slight backlash going on at the moment my mother says 'yer' she says like he's twenty-three years [jɜ:z] old and it's like "No, mother, 'year'" [pronounced as in mainstream RP NEAR]
I: so you're correcting her
R: trying to sort of slightly bring this back down to not quite so much like 50's BBC television presenters (…)

Note that the interviewer's comment "so you're correcting her" isn't accepted by the speaker as a gloss of what the daughter is doing here. Rather, the process is characterised as "bringing this back down", from a place which is in some sense too 'high', and thus, I would venture, too 'posh', or too 'snobby'. This type of anecdotal evidence, elicited in interview situations where the focus is on language attitudes, can give valuable insights into changes in norms and normative behaviour.

A second type of anecdotal evidence which concerns the sociolinguistic place of RP is to be found on a more society-wide level. This consists of the kind of journalism on linguistic topics which appears regularly in the media. While such journalists' grasp of linguistics can vary widely, this does not mean that such articles should necessarily be dismissed out of hand by professional linguists. As texts they can be quite revealing of mainstream (and minority) attitudes to language, and thus useful as indicators of the flow of opinion. One example can be found in a feature article by India Knight in the *Sunday Times*, 11 November 2001, available online on the Estuary English page at http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/educres.htm. Knight's essay was spurred by the Glaswegian Speaker of the House of Commons, Michael Martin's sacking of his secretary, Charlotte Every, 38, on the grounds that her accent 'got on his nerves'. Ms Every, as a speaker of RP, was characterised as speaking like a 'Sloane Ranger' (the 1980's term for what could be characterised as *advanced RP* in Gimson's terms).

On the basis of this, Knight claims that "political correctness has sprung to the rescue of every single kind of accent", except her own, that people will "laugh like drains at the absurdity of public

school voices", while regional accents are defended, she claims, on the grounds that "it's terribly important to maintain this kind of regional linguistic diversity". This 'inverted snobbery', according to Knight, has led (advanced) RP speakers to adopt a habit of "drop[ping] the accent a notch or three" in certain circumstances, mainly because "speaking properly is more trouble than it's worth". She then lists a series of assumptions which are made when people hear an RP accent:

> you are immediately viewed with hostile suspicion, the implication being you are probably some ghastly plummy nob, your very existence confirming the fact that there are still people who sneer down their long, well-bred noses at the plebs. You are also viewed with defensiveness … and with mistrust…

These character traits, cleverness, snobbishness, lack of social skills and untrustworthiness, are immediately reminiscent of typical responses to RP accents in language attitude studies in the 1970s and 1980s. For India Knight, these reactions are "moronic in their predictability", with the result that:

> we Sloane-speakers have become a fraudulent, beleaguered minority, pretending to be something we are not every time we open our mouths…To the rest of the world, though, we are the proud(ish) possessors of the only accent in Britain that is still an albatross.

India Knight, however, is not the only RP speaker to feel put upon in this way. Boris Johnson, an Old Etonian, editor of the Spectator, and vice Chairman of the Conservative Party, claimed in 1999 that he had been sacked as a presenter on BBC Radio 4's "The Week in Westminster" because of his accent, which he claimed the radio station deemed to be too 'plummy'. BBC Radio 4 denied that accent had been the factor involved, but the author of the report of this on the BBC website[10] nonetheless consulted Gregory de Polnay, head of voice at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, who offered suggestions as to how to make Boris Johnson's voice more acceptable for radio. These suggestions are framed as a fact box on the side of the page headed "Top tips to become less 'plummy'". Although this 'pseudo-phonetics' is linguistic nonsense, it would not be possible as a piece of journalistic writing unless being 'too plummy' as a concept somehow struck a chord in the public consciousness. That this type of advice should at all be deemed necessary and newsworthy surely indicates a different attitudinal 'place' for such accents nowadays, far removed from the deference accorded to BBC pronunciation up until the 1960s (for discussion of the Boris Johnson case, see also Altendorf 2003:35.)

A third source of information on attitudes towards language varieties comes from the attitude studies which have been carried out in various ways within sociolinguistics since the 1960s, inspired by social psychology, and, more recently, perceptual dialectology (see Garrett, Coupland and Williams 2003). In 2002 I conducted one such study of 'dialect in discourse' in York, using six separate passages of spontaneous speech (three male speakers, three female speakers) as prompts for a group of teenage listeners in three secondary schools. The students were asked to make a range of attitudinal judgments and give qualitative (discourse) as well as quantitative (scale ratings) responses. Transcripts of the four passages are presented in appendix 1, with two RP speakers (H and T) and two regional speakers (E and N). H and E are female, T and N male. This paper will present just a small part of the results obtained. Figure 3 below shows a summary of the qualitative responses given by speakers from three schools in York to the prompt: *Please write down your first impressions of this person.* The data were transcribed in full and grouped into semantic fields, using a keywords approach (see also Garrett, Coupland and Williams 2003). The numbers given in the

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[10] See http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk/newsid_468000/468895.stm

chart below show the boys' versus the girls' responses to the four segments of discourse. Each semantic category is presented as a percentage of the total number of counted responses (items such as 'male' or 'young male' were not included in the coding).

Figure 3: qualitative responses by sex

	1 nervous	2 confident	3 boring	4 interesting	5 average	6 intelligent	7 posh	8 friendly	Total
H girls	1%	4%	8%	5%	0%	31%	18%	32%	99%
H boys	**0%**	**5%**	**9%**	**8%**	**3%**	**31%**	**17%**	**26%**	**99%**
E girls	2%	2%	5%	16%	8%	9%	2%	55%	99%
E boys	**2%**	**3%**	**6%**	**17%**	**19%**	**14%**	**0%**	**38%**	**99%**
T girls	3%	2%	14%	8%	7%	25%	21%	19%	99%
T boys	**1%**	**4%**	**14%**	**8%**	**6%**	**31%**	**19%**	**16%**	**99%**
N girls	2%	6%	5%	16%	3%	22%	6%	39%	99%
N boys	**3%**	**1%**	**2%**	**11%**	**5%**	**25%**	**12%**	**42%**	**101%**

nervous and not very confident
positive, confident and independent
boring and quiet
interesting, outgoing, chatty, bubbly, straightforward
average achiever, not very intelligent
intelligent, well-educated, well-spoken, ambitious
posh, snobby, spoilt
friendly, relaxed, trustworthy, pleasant

The first four response categories can be characterised as representing different aspects of the concept of 'dynamism', an over-arching category which covers the extent to which speakers are judged as 'dynamic', i.e., interesting, positive, confident, outgoing and independent. The last four (numbers 5 to 8) cover concepts which can be grouped under the label 'superiority', whether this has to do with competence (judgments of 'intelligent' or average achiever) or sociability (posh, friendly) (see Kristiansen 2001 for further elaboration).

The results presented in figure three summarise the categorisations spontaneously produced by the students in judging RP versus non-RP dialect in discourse. The most interesting comparisons come from comparing the voices on the vertical dimension in the table. The categories of 'nervous' and 'confident' do not appear particularly often in the qualitative responses, so it is hard to generalise on these particular traits. The most salient dimension of dynamism appears in the 'boring' versus 'interesting' dimension, where T (the male RP speaker) tops the group as the most boring speaker, a fact which is confirmed in his low placement in the 'interesting' category. The two regional speakers N and E receive twice as many judgments as 'interesting' than the two RP speakers, thereby emerging as more dynamic voices on this particular dimension. Categories five and six reflect judgements along the competence dimension, where E (regional female voice) is marked (especially by the boys) as the average achiever, and considered not particularly intelligent. This reflects comparisons between standard (RP) guises and non-standard guises in attitude studies from the 1970s. T and H are categorised as the voices of 'poshness', while judgements as 'friendly' occur at a high rate for E and N, and slightly lower for H, while T comes at the bottom. We can thus see a range of qualities attributed to the RP speakers, with the interesting result that the female speaker is more often given positive attributes than the male RP speaker. Perhaps this is because a male RP voice elicits stronger establishment associations that a female RP voice and the male voice is thus subject to stronger condemnation. These adolescent evaluations of dialect in discourse show a

continuing link between RP and certain attitudinal judgments, such that RP continues to have associations with poshness, high intelligence and lack of friendliness. As an indication of the 'place of RP' in terms of sociolinguistic status, then, the picture remains more or less the same as thirty years ago. For further details of the study's methods and results, the reader is referred to Fabricius (2005).

Conclusion

To conclude then, this paper has offered several examples which show that it is fruitful to deconstruct the term RP into two separate but related entities, native and construct RP. By identifying and labelling the two facets of the 'accent entity' RP, we can investigate them individually. Changes in construct RP versus changes in native RP in particular demand separate consideration, without a conceptual blur between the two. The Labovian paradigm can be applied to native RP, while investigating change in construct RP requires somewhat different methods and analyses.

By implication, this paper has also raised the question of what constitutes an accent norm. As the paper has suggested, this is a question whose answer is probably just as complex as what constitutes an accent. We have seen in the latter part of this paper that an accent norm can perhaps be represented as a myriad or multitude of individual judgments, comprising a person's individualized ideas about their own or other people's accents as well as culturally resonant norms, as we see in the commentary by India Knight and the attitude study.

In closing then, it is perhaps worth noting that the contribution a sociolinguistic study of RP can make to the paradigm of sociolinguistics may just as well lie within the area of language norms as in the area of language variation and change.

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Appendix 1: Transcripts of stimulus texts

Transcript H (female RP)

It was very it is or was certainly a very very friendly sort of school no sort of hierarchy very (0.7) laid back because everyone did a lot of different things there was very much of an ethos of letting everybody do what they were good at (.) um while at the same time having very high quality teaching and of course very high quality musical education as well because of the whole background so everybody played an instrument I've played in an orchestra since I was seven eight (0.7) and and all sorts of things because again there was a lot of things to do after school so we were always at school until six, six thirty every night I loved it absolutely loved it (.) and my first teacher was was called Miss Perfect she was very a very gifted teacher and very sympathetic while at the same time being (breath) you didn't mess around

Transcript E (female regional)

I went to our local um state primary school so it was like in our catchment area from when I was about six seven no I must have been four to five I was quite young for my year (mm hm) so I think I was four when I started um (0.8) yeah and went on till I was eleven which is like what most people do I loved that that was brilliant I've got really good memories about that good friends and everyone lived in the same sort of area so (0.5) it was quite a liberal school really nice *(mm)* and relaxed church school (0.4) so there was quite a lot of religious emphasis but not really orthodox or anything like that just relaxed but a lot of church and things involved *(mm)*

Transcript T (male RP)

There's a infants school which was along one very long corridor (.) with a dining hall at the end and classrooms off it and I don't remember a whole lot about that and (breath) which was sort of separated by a magic white line from junior school (.) the magic white line was the line you weren't

allowed to go over in play time (.) and the junior school had a big hall in the middle and I think about eight classrooms clustered around the sides and (1.0) and there used to be fir trees round it but then they chopped them all down cause they were going to fall down but they've probably planted new ones by now and and I don't know it's about half a mile from where we used to live, so I used to walk to school (.) There's one there's a very good history teacher and a very good English teacher which is two things I've always been interested in since and I did a lot of music so probably I haven't they've had quite a big influence on what I was interested in.

Transcript N (male regional)
Um it had a big central hall and all the other classrooms sort of came off around it and the central hall used to be used for PE and the meals as well () the kitchen was just off to the side and then all the other classrooms sort of adjoined onto the big hall with big fields out the back and a swimming pool () we were really lucky to have a swimming pool (1.2) I remember the headmaster who for most of my time there who was really really nice () my parents loved him and he was the one who said why don't I try for that school I went to afterwards () cause he told me to try for this scholarship and so I did () he used to he was really really nice and another one of the teachers was one of my mum's friends so we used to see her a lot a well so those are the people I really remember.