

## Exercice

*UK Accent RP Received Pronunciation* – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIemPxHSb6Q>

English has been here for roughly speaking a thousand years, since settlers came from Northern Europe. We call them now the Anglo-Saxons. And there have been now a number of dialects and accents in all parts of the UK since that time. So the language that has been spoken in different parts of the UK has always been very very different ever since it arrived here.

But from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, there was an accent that emerged that we now call Received Pronunciation or sometimes RP **for short**. This is actually quite a young accent in terms of how long English has been around in the UK [???????].

And this accent emerged in the public schools from the early 1900's onwards. There was an increasingly large middle class here in England. And they began to send their children to the public schools, the boarding schools, so increasingly large numbers of children were going to these schools. And they all aspired to a similar type of education and similar ideals and standards. And ultimately, they were populated by teachers generally **who'd been to Oxford or Cambridge**, who came from the same social circle, over a number of years and, of course, they therefore influenced each other and an accent emerged, in these schools, that was free from any **regional elements**. It was a neutral accent if you like. You couldn't tell where a person came from geographically if they attended one of these schools.

And so, this was about the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that larger numbers were beginning to go to these schools. And the children were taught there, and they were taught elocution, pronunciation, they were **brought up to speak** like each other and then they went on to, or they aspired to go on to, occupations such as in the City, within academia, professions, the sort of middle-class professions that they aspired to bred that kind of accent themselves. So it kind of was a self-perpetuating thing. However, **it was also** a very young accent. It emerged then, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and became **more popular** in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, **as a result** probably of the fact that it was the accent that the BBC adopted. The BBC, the British Broadcasting Company, was founded in the 1920's. The first general manager, **a gentleman called** Lord Reith established a committee to decide what type of speech would be broadcast on the BBC. Initially, it was radio then of course, it became television. And the accent that they, this committee, chose... There were some very famous people on that committee – Daniel Jones was a phonetician at University College, London, George Bernard Shaw, the playwright was on the committee, and a number of other people. And they discussed whether they should use a variety of accents or this newish accent, Received Pronunciation. **And ultimately**, the committee decided to adopt Received Pronunciation.

So therefore, for the first fifty [or] sixty years maybe of the **existence** of the BBC, the only voice that you heard broadcast on the radio and on the first days of television was this neutral, non-regional, typically middle-class English accent if you like, the one that perhaps most people

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over the world associate with the UK, the accent of somebody like Hugh Grant for instance, the actor.

And, so therefore, it was adopted by the BBC, everybody in the world heard this voice and because of the **nature of society** in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly post-war, post-second World War, where all of a sudden social differences were breaking down, it became more and more possible for people to move up through the social scales. People **were able to go stay on their school longer**, go to universities. People from the lower middle-**classes and from** the working classes were for the first time able to move **upwards socially** if you like. And one of the trappings of being part of the middle-class is this accent. So therefore this accent became very aspirational. It was an accent that I think large numbers of speakers who wanted to get on in life, [who] wanted to become part of the middle class, adopted this accent or tried as best they could to imitate this Received Pronunciation accent.

So in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century therefore, this posh, originally public-school accent spread throughout the UK as an accent of the middle **classes if you like**. It was first **perpetrated** through this public school system and then through university, through education.

The thing about Received Pronunciation is [that] it refers only to the pronunciation of the speakers. It doesn't refer to the vocabulary or the grammar. All speakers of Received Pronunciation speak what we know as standard English grammar. In other words, they don't use grammatical constructions that are non-standard so things like "I didn't do nothing". They would always say "I didn't do anything". They also don't use dialect vocabulary or regional vocabulary. So they use very standard English structures and very standard English vocabulary. But they pronounce all the words that they use and all the constructions that they use in a way that reveals nothing about their geographical background. It is a neutral accent.

As I said, from the twentieth century onwards it probably grew in numbers, to the point where **most recent surveys I've seen have suggested** that two percent of the UK population, roughly speaking, speak Received Pronunciation. So that's still not a very large percentage of the UK population and of course, the UK population, **in terms of English speakers worldwide**, is a very very small percentage. So although it's probably the most widely known accent of the UK, the most widely recognized because people associate it with films, and television and radio and **any stereotypical cartoon figure if you like of** British society, it's a very well-known accent. It's still not the most widely used accent in the UK.

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