



TECHNIUM

SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

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RP English Vowel and Consonant Changes in the Brummies' English Accent

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Abstract. This study aims to investigate consonant and vowel changes in the Brummie accent as compared with the ones in the standard variety of English through a comparative descriptive study. The investigation is based on an audio recording conversation and an extract of a TV show film; in addition to a questionnaire administered to 40 second year students of Master degree of linguistics from the English section of Ibn Khaldoun University, after they have been exposed to both the audio recording and the film extract. This is to gather information about their attitudes towards the aforementioned changes' effects. The findings of the current study reveal the existence of great alterations in the articulation of vowel and consonant sounds in Brummie accent, which may differ from the norms that govern the standard variety of English. The outcomes of the audio recording and video extract as well as the gathered data from students' questionnaire point out negative effects on learners' clear perception of Brummie accent, which will undoubtedly lead to their fear of confronting serious communication problems when talking with UK citizens.

Keywords. Regional accents, Brummie accent, RP English, consonant changes, vowel changes, phonological distortion, mutual unintelligibility

1. Introduction

In the United Kingdom, the British Isles, where English was known first and from the Shakespearean era until today, English has been shaped many times and is still being shaped due to several socio-political factors, such as colonisation, trade and the spread of Christianity on that land; in addition to the effect of using English world widely today. English of today in the UK, and the British Isles, in general, is known by its different versions: Standard British English in England, Scottish English in Scotland, Irish English in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and Welsh English in Wales. When people from these places come in contact with each other, they sometimes come across some misunderstanding; although the varieties they speak have the same ground, i.e., English. This, misunderstanding is caused by each accent's own characteristics that may not be found elsewhere. Hence, the speakers of the different regions very often seek to use a variety that can be understood by all of them to ease mutual understanding among them. They refer to RP English because of the national status it has.

This complexity exists not only across UK towns and cities but also between every considerable distance crossed inside the British Isles. England, for instance, has plenty of

varieties insomuch that one might confuse whether it is English or not. A vivid example of this is Geordie and Cockney accents where the former is the accent of Newcastle in the North of England and the latter is the Londoners accent in the Southern East. Between London and Newcastle, there is a very big distance which reveals very big differences between the two varieties and which both differ, to a large extent, from the standard variety of English. Incidentally, the accent of Birmingham and the rest of the Midlands areas is found to mediate between the South and the North. This accent is called the Brummie accent. It is an accent that shares features of both the Northern and the Southern varieties. This research work which is dealt with in the domain of sociolinguistics uses ‘Phonetics’ as a procedure to study some of the features characterising the Brummie accent in comparison with RP English.

2. Significance of the study

The incentive behind this study derives from our desire to investigate a socio-linguistic phenomenon, namely vowel and consonant sound articulation in Brummie accent, as compared with RP English accent. This reflection is to bring EFL teachers and students’ awareness of the great changes that take place at the level of sound articulation among the speech community of Birmingham, the second biggest city in the West Midlands on the North West of England. As far as foreign learners of English are concerned, this study investigates whether these changes have negative impacts on their perception of this accent if ever they confront a Brummie in England or elsewhere. By comparing the alteration of sounds from RP English with the Brummie accent, EFL students will diagnose the possible changes as well as the level of difficulty these changes may arise and get an overall image about how sounds function within this accent and, hence the level of misunderstanding of Brummies’ speech will diminish when communicating with the people of the West Midlands region.

3. Background

In England, English has passed the age of 1500 years of existence. Along this period, unique language varieties have been created. However, these varieties could not have been found without several factors behind, such as the different invasions and the late immigration, which went back to three centuries ago, in addition to media, the current major factor. Language varieties change from one place to another, so as the longer distance is crossed the bigger differences are found. That is why linguists have set the isoglosses map –which is relative, not absolute- where parts that share similar features, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary are joined together. For the case of English, this map includes the northern, southern and midlands parts, and each one is divided into an eastern and western part. Alongside the borderlines, similarities are found and reveal *adialect continuum*. However, when crossing these borders, *this dialect changes*. Across languages, accents differ from one language variety to another and witness great changes in the articulation of vowels, consonants and even the realization of prosodic features. Indirect contact with the natives, a foreigner may face many difficulties, and for a moment sees English as a complicated language. Although native speakers of English from different regions do not face the same rate of difficulty, they sometimes need to use the standard variety of English to create mutual intelligibility, especially if the two regions are far apart. The long-distance is between the regions, the more misunderstanding appears among their speakers.

3.1. RP English ‘Standard Variety of English’

The United Kingdom (UK), the original land of English includes four different countries namely England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with local standards and in one united

nation called the UK under one flag. As a result, these nationality differences result in different varieties of the same language called English accents and vary from one geographical region to another. However, among these varieties, one is raised upon the others nationally and internationally. This variety is known as the standard or high (H) variety of English. It is the variety used as a reference among people from different regions and with different dialects and accents. These people resort to it to achieve mutual understanding. This accent known as Standard British English is referred to as ‘Oxford English’, ‘queen’s English’, ‘BBC English’ and ‘Received Pronunciation’ shortened to ‘RP’. The first term is used in the 16th century to refer to the language used by the royal family. ‘BBC English’ introduced in 1926 refers to the accent used in broadcasting channels where newscasters present the news with the standard variety accent. Cruttenden maintains that

“the largest reason for the spreading of a standard pronunciation in the early twentieth century was the beginning of broadcasting by the BBC in 1926 with its formidable head John Reith, who was much concerned with prestige in that respect” (2014: 77)

The concept ‘*Received Pronunciation*’ was first introduced by Daniel Jones in 1920, but in current time with the development of English, Roach (2009) and other British linguists and phoneticians see this term as old-fashioned and misleading which meant in that time “approved” or “accepted” accent. This may imply a hidden meaning that other local accents were not accepted. Therefore, Cruttenden in his ‘*Gimson’s Pronunciation of English*’ (2014) uses the term ‘*General British (GB)*’ instead of ‘*RP English*’. Gimson himself predicts that the term ‘*GB*’ may later take the place of ‘*RP English*’. The standard British English is used in formal settings with casual styles, local education, dictionaries containing both definitions and pronunciations, teaching foreign learners of English, publishing books and media in national and international settings, in addition to political events among ministers and members of parliament. Despite this wide use of the standard variety in different fields, according to Hughes and Trudgill (2012), RP English speakers represent only 3-5% of the total population in the UK. ‘*GB*’ in the last fifty years has changed considerably where some features have no existence in present-day and others are about to be changed.

3.2. *The West Midlands Dialect and Accent*

The English we learn, hear and speak as foreign learners seems quite clear and comprehensible. However, in direct contact with the natives, a foreigner will certainly face many comprehension difficulties and for a moment sees English as a complicated language. Even native speakers of English from different regions find those difficulties and, therefore, they need to use the Standard English variety to understand one another. But, in fact, those difficulties lie beneath the twin, dialects and accents. A dialect, for Hughes and Trudgill (2012), refers to ‘*the differences in grammar and vocabulary*’; whereas an accent is “*a manner of pronunciation*” (John Laver, 1994, 55).

3.2.1 *West Midlands and Brummie Dialect*

The West Midlands (WM) conurbation, which covers Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Walsall, West Bromwich and Coventry, identify two major dialects: the Black Country dialect to the west around Wolverhampton, which is spoken by many people in the Black country, a region covering most of the four Metropolitan Boroughs of Dudley, which “*is linguistically notable for its retention of traditional dialect forms such as have disappeared from the rest of the midlands*” (J.Wells, 1982b, 364), Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, and the Brummie

dialect, which originates from the neighbouring city of Birmingham. The two are considered the same for an outsider of the WM, yet a local inhabitant can plainly realize the differences between them. The term ‘Brummie’ is originally from the word ‘Brummagem’ which is a dialect form of Birmingham and a name for the city. It can also be referred to as a local inhabitant of Birmingham. This dialect has its own characteristics including vocabularies, grammar and pronunciation.

3.2.2. West Midlands and Brummie Accent

Brummie accent is spoken by many people in Birmingham and some of its surrounding areas in the vicinity of the West Midlands, yet it does not refer to all accents of the West Midlands, as it is distinct from the accent of the adjacent Black Country, but the mobility of nowadays population has sometimes made it impossible to spot the distinction. The Brummie accent stretches to parts of the metropolitan borough of Solihull, but much of the accent in the borough could be seen as closer to the contemporary PR English accent. There are some people who do not speak with a strong Brummie accent but are identifiable from the West Midlands. The Brummie accent and the Coventry accent are also quite distinct in their dissimilarities, despite only 19 miles separating the towns. To a foreign learner of English, however, all of these accents can sound very similar.

People’s accents vary considerably across Birmingham. As in most cities, the accent changes relative to the size of the city. The idea that all people in Birmingham speak the same accent is very often not true. One could argue that Brummie is an accent rather than a dialect like in Black Country, which is a dialect with unique words and phrases. For ‘how are you?’ many of the comments of which are not used in Brummie’s speech. Likewise, Brummies pronounce “I” as “oy” while Black Country uses the dialect “Ah” as in “Ah bin” meaning that “I have been”. There are also differences between the Brummie and Black Country accents, which are not readily apparent to people outside of the West Midlands. Even some of the phoneticians admit that they become unable to tell the difference between them.

Unlike any other accent, Brummie has features worth investigating. Obviously, any language variety located in the middle of a specific area plays the role of an intermediate accent, the case of the Brummie in the west midlands. There is no doubt that features of both Northern and Southern varieties are part of this accent, hence this mixture makes it have the characteristic of a ‘*hybrid accent*’ as Steve Thorne calls.

One of the most apparent features that characterize this accent is that it is slow with hesitant utterances. It uses a downward intonation at the end of each sentence by lowering the voice in pitch and fading away slowly the last word. This accent is said to have a monotone way, hitting one note only, contrary to other accents which have varied intonation. This lack of aural variation is said to cause this accent a negative reputation among the People in the whole areas of the United Kingdom.

4. Method

In the field of sound investigation, there may be no way to study a certain phenomenon without listening to what interlocutors say. Besides being the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process, careful listening is the most important tool in the understanding of how sounds are uttered by different speakers. This can be based on the use of different instruments that help one to notice, identify and determine the kind of language, dialect, or accent these speakers use among them.

So as to attain the objectives of the study, an inductive approach is used where the main focus is put on observation. Audio texts and recordings become quite crucial and beneficial to any research process dealing with phonetic and phonological issues, the case of this study, which examines the changes that take place in the Brummie accent compared to both RP English and the different accents spoken in England. The method used is listening to and analysing a specific audio text and a video film extract. Examining the phonological effects of sound change is also taken into consideration by administering a questionnaire to EFL students to ask them about their attitudes towards the level of their understanding of the stated accent.

4.1. Audio text 01

The audio text 01 “England 103” is entitled “*Comma gets a cure*” part 01, and written by Jill McCullough and Barbara Somerville, and recorded by Bryn Austin from the International Dialects of English Archive (IDEA). According to the given information, the speaker is a 22-year-old male born in Birmingham, England. The audiotape was recorded on 29/08/2017 and the script is about Sarah Perry a veterinary nurse working in an old zoo. She was taking care of a sick goose with a rare disease; however, the veterinary nurse managed to find an effective cure; even though it was quite expensive.

4.2. Audio text 2

The second audio text also belongs to “England 103” is entitled “*Comma gets a cure*” part 02, from the International Dialects of English Archive (IDEA). According to the provided information, the speaker is the same as in passage audio text 01 with the same biographical information and transcribed by Bryn Austin on 20/02/2018. This passage talks about a person’s first trip with his mom to the United States; however, he ended up having a problem after he departed from Dublin to Hartford. During his trip, he lost his suitcase which contained his clothes.

4.3. Video film extract

This video is an extract from a series made and broadcasted first on BBC channels in 2013, it is ‘The Peaky Blinders’. It reflects the history of Birmingham between the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. During this period, a gang, whose gangsters are from the same family –the Shelby Family, controlled Birmingham. They call themselves ‘The Peaky Blinders’. Carl Chinn, a Brummie writer specialized in the history of Birmingham, believes that the term ‘Peaky’ refers to the flat caps with short peaks that used to be worn in the time of 1880s. The Shelby gang used to control all the business in Birmingham and the areas around, solve Brummies’ problems and defend their own properties and benefits against other gangs.

4.4. Questionnaire

To know students’ attitudes about whether the changes in vowel and consonant sounds present any problems to them in the perception of Brummie accent, a questionnaire is administered to 40 students from second year master degree of linguistics from the English section of IbnKhalidoun University, after they have been exposed to both the audio recording and the film extract. The number of participants is divided into an equitable number between girls and boys, yet the factor of age is not taken into account. The questionnaire is composed of 15 questions about students’ attitudes on their interest or not to learn and know about British accents, namely the Brummie one; the ways sounds are articulated by the participants in both the audio recording

conversation and the video film extract, and whether this articulation influences negatively their perception of words.

5. Data collection (tape recording and video)

For the data collection section, the observational method is used as a suitable approach for this task since the study is mainly about the phonological changes that occur in the Brummie accent. It consists of two audiotape recordings from the IDEA and a video film extract of the TV show series *'The Peaky Blinders'* by the BBC. The corpus consists of a collection of words to locate and describe the phonetic aspects of sounds in the Brummie accent, i.e., how these sounds are uttered by the Brummies. The collected words are presented in 3 different tables representing the data of audio text 01, text 02 and the video extract. These tables are illustrations of the changes that occur in Brummies' accent as compared to RP English pronunciation. The comparison between the two accents is made through sound transcription to locate the areas of difficulty or ambiguity that EFL learners may confront.

5.1. Audio Text 01: "Comma Gets a Cure" part 1

The following table includes the phonological transcription of words submitted to the different changes in the articulation of Brummie accent compared with their counterparts in RP English. The possible phonological outcomes of the different sound articulations are also mentioned to diagnose the degree of effects on RP English learners' understanding and interpretation of Brummies' English accent. The table is put under six headings, namely sample words from the recorded audio, their expected pronunciations in RP English, their changes in Brummie English accent, the type of allophones of vowel and consonant phonemes, and finally the possible phonological distortions that may take place as a result of these changes.



No	Word	Brummie accent transcription	Expected pronunciation in RP English transcription	Change from RP English to Brummie English	Type of phoneme Vowel vs. consonants	Possible phonological distortion
1	Veterinary	/veʔeneri/	/vetrɪməri/	From /t/ to /ʔ/	consonant	Ambiguity.
2	Daily	/dali/	/deili/	From /ei/ to /ai/	Diphthong	Ambiguity.
3	Old	/aʊd/	/əʊld/	From /əʊ/ to /aʊ/, and merging the dark /ɪ/ with the sound /ʊ/	Diphthong and consonant	/aʊd/ points to a region in north of india called 'oudh'.
4	Deserted	/dɪzɜ:ʔɪd/	/dɪzɜ:tɪd/	From /t/ to /ʔ/	Consonant	No distortion.
5	Private	/praɪvɪʔ/	/praɪvɪt/	From /t/ to /ʔ/	Consonant	No distortion.
6	North	/nɔ:f/	/nɔ:θ/	From /θ/ to /f/	Consonant	Ambiguity.
7	Much	/mʌʃ/	/mʌtʃ/	From /ʌ/ to /ʊ/	Short vowel	Ambiguity.
8	More	/mu:/	/mɔ:/	From /ɔ:/ to /u:/	Long vowel	To express annoyance.
9	For	/fu:/	/fɔ:/ or /fə/	From /ɔ:/ to /u:/	Long vowel	Ambiguity.
10	Her	/ʔɜ:/	/hɜ:/ or /hə/	From /h/ to /ʔ/	Consonant	It means 'err'.
11	Stressed	/strest/	/strest/	From /s/ to /ʃ/	Consonant	Ambiguity.
12	Ate	/aɪʔ/	/et/ or /et/	From /ei/ to /ai/ and from /t/ to /ʔ/	Diphthong and consonant	Ambiguity.

13	Bowl	/bauw/	/bəʊl/	From /əʊ/ to /aʊ/ and from /l/ to /w/	Diphthong and consonant	Means 'bow the front end of a ship.
14	Porridge	/pa:ɾɪdʒ/	/pɔ:ɾɪdʒ/	From /ɔ/ to /a:/ and the use of tap [ɾ]	Long vowel and consonant	No distortion.
15	Face	/fais/	/feɪs/	From /ei/ to /ai/	Diphthong	Ambiguity.
16	Hurry	[hʊɾɪ]	/hʌɾɪ/	From /ʌ/ to /ʊ/ and the use of tap [ɾ]	Short vowel and consonant	It points to 'hour'.
17	Plain	/plam/	/pleɪn/	From /ei/ to /ai/	Diphthong	Ambiguity.
18	Fleece	/fleɪʃ/	/fli:s/	From /i:/ to /ei/ and from /s/ to /ʃ/	Diphthong and consonant	Ambiguity.
19	Up	/ʊp/	/ʌp/	From /ʌ/ to /ʊ/	Short vowel	Ambiguity.
20	Waiting	/waɪʔɪŋg/	/weɪtɪŋ/	From /t/ to /ʔ/ and the additional /g/ after /ŋ/	consonant	No distortion.
21	Gave	/gaɪv/	/gerv/	From /ei/ to /ai/	Diphthong	Ambiguity.
22	Letter	/leʔə/	/letə/	From /t/ to /ʔ/	Consonant	No distortion.
23	Implied	/ɪmplɔɪd/	/ɪmplaɪd/	From /ai/ to /ɔɪ/	Diphthong	It is heard as the verb to 'employ'.
24	Foot	/fuʔ/	/fʊt/	From /t/ to /ʔ/	Consonant	No distortion.
25	mouth	/maʊf/	/maʊθ/	From /θ/ to /f/	Consonant	Ambiguity.
26	Only	/aʊnli/	/əʊnli/	From /əʊ/ to /aʊ/	Diphthong	Ambiguity.
27	Dog	/dʌg/	/dɔ:g/	From /ɔ/ to /ʌ/	Short vowel	Perceived ad either 'Doug' or 'dug'.
28	Made	/maɪd/	/merd/	From /ei/ to /ai/	Diphthong	Ambiguity.
29	Sentimental	/sentɪmetw/	/sentɪmetl/	From /l/ to /w/	Consonant	Ambiguity
30	feel	/fi:w/	/fi:l/	From /l/ to /w/	Consonant	Ambiguity
31	Sorry	[sɔɾɪ]	/sɔ:ɾɪ/	From the use of tap [ɾ]	Consonant	No distortion.



32	Long	/lʌŋg/	/lɒŋ/	From /ɒ/ to /ʌ/ and the additional /g/ after /ŋ/	Short vowel and consonant	Change of meaning to 'Lung'.
34	Like	/laɪk/	/laɪk/	From /aɪ/ to /ɔɪ/	Diphthong	Ambiguity.
35	Unsanitary	/ʊnsənɪtri/	/ʌnsənɪtri/	From /ʌ/ to /ʊ/	Short vowel	Ambiguity.
36	kept	/keps/	/kept/	From /t/ to /s/	Consonant	Ambiguity.
37	thought	/fɑ:ʔ/	/θɑ:t/	From /θ/ to /f/ and from /t/ to /ʔ/	Consonant	It leads to the meaning of 'Fort' or 'fought'.
38	Stroking	/strʊkɪŋg/	/strəʊkɪŋ/	From /əʊ/ to /aʊ/	Diphthong	Ambiguity.
39	Able	/aɪbw/	/əɪbl/	From /eɪ/ to /aɪ/ and from /l/ to /w/	Diphthong and consonant	It is heard as 'Eyeball'.
40	Bathe	/bɑð/	/beɪð/	From /eɪ/ to /aɪ/	Diphthong	Ambiguity.
41	Wiped	/wɪps/	/waɪpt/	From /aɪ/ to /ɔɪ/ and from /t/ to /s/	Diphthong and consonant	Ambiguity.
42	cloth	/klɒf/	/klɒθ/	From /θ/ to /f/	Consonant	No distortion.
43	Either	/i:θə/	/i:ðə/ or /aɪðə/	From /ð/ to /θ/	Consonant	Change the meaning to 'Aether' and 'ether'.
44	Cost	/kʌst/ or /kast/	/kɒst/	From /ɒ/ to /a/	Short vowel	Change of meaning to 'cast'.
45	price	/praɪs/	/praɪs/	From /aɪ/ to /ɔɪ/	Diphthong	Ambiguity.

5.2. Audio Text 02: "Comma Gets a Cure" part 2

The following table includes the phonological transcription of words submitted to the different changes in the articulation of Brummie accent compared with their counterparts in RP English. The table is put under the same headings and examines the same points as for Audio text 01.



No	Word	Brummie accent transcription	Expected pronunciation in RP English transcription	Change from RP English to Brummie English	Type of phoneme Vowel vs. consonants	Possible phonological distortion
1	my	/ma:/	/maɪ/	From /aɪ/ to /a:/	Diphthong	Heard as the verb to 'mar'.
2	states	/statts/	/steɪts/	From /eɪ/ to /aɪ/	Diphthong	Ambiguity.
3	flight	/flaɪʔ/	/flaɪt/	From /aɪ/ to /ɔɪ/ and from /t/ to /ʔ/	Diphthong and Consonant	Ambiguity.
4	Birmingham	/bɜ:mɪŋgəm/	/bɜ:mɪŋəm/	The /g/ sound following /ŋ/	Consonant	No distortion.
5	five	/fɔv/	/faɪv/	From /aɪ/ to /ɔɪ/	Diphthong	Ambiguity.
6	pub	/pʊb/	/pʌb/	From /ʌ/ to /ʊ/	Short vowel	Ambiguity.
7	couple	/kʊpl/	/kʌpl/	From /ʌ/ to /ʊ/	Short vowel	Ambiguity.
8	way	/waɪ/	/weɪ/	From /eɪ/ to /aɪ/	Diphthong	Perceived as 'why'.
9	kill	/kɪw/	/kɪl/	From /l/ to /w/	Consonant	No distortion.
10	feeling	/feɪlɪŋg/	/fi:lɪŋ/	From /i:/ to /eɪ/ with a following /g/ after /ŋ/	Diphthong and Consonant	Change of meaning to 'falling'.
11	once	/wʊns/	/wʌnts/	From /ʌ/ to /ʊ/	Short vowel	No distortion.
12	felt	/fewt/	/felt/	From /l/ to /w/	Consonant	Ambiguity.
13	later	/laɪʔə/	/leɪtə/	From /eɪ/ to /aɪ/ and from /t/ to /ʔ/	Diphthong and Consonant	It means 'lighter'.

5.3. Video Text : "The Peaky Blinders"

The following table includes the phonological transcription of words submitted to the different changes in the articulation of Brummie accent compared with their counterparts in RP English. The table is put under the same headings and examines the same points as Audio texts 01 and 02.



No		accent transcription	in RP English transcription	Change from RP English to Brummie English	Type of phoneme Vowel vs. consonants	Possible phonological distortion
01	Sleeping	/sleɪpɪŋ/	/sli:pɪŋ/	From /i:/ to /eɪ/	Long vowel	Ambiguity.
02	downstairs	/daʊnstet̩z/	/daʊnstet̩z/	From /aʊ/ to /əʊ/	diphthong	'Down' is perceived as 'Doane' or 'Done'.
03	Husband	/hʌzɪbænd/	/hʌzɪbænd/	From /ʌ/ to /ʊ/	Short vowel	Ambiguity.
04	Drunk	/drʌŋk/	/drʌŋk/	from /ʌ/ to /ʊ/	Short vowel	Ambiguity.
05	Money	/mʌni/	/mʌni/	From /ʌ/ to /ʊ/	Short vowel	Ambiguity.
06	Way	/waɪ/	/weɪ/	From /eɪ/ to /aɪ/	diphthong	It is heard as the interrogative pronoun 'why'.
07	Came	/kæm/	/kem/	From /eɪ/ to /aɪ/	diphthong	Acidic fluid in the stomach 'chyme'.
08	But	/bʊ:t/	/bʌt/	From /ʌ/ to /ʊ/	Long vowel	A pair of long walking shoes 'boot'.
09	Up	/ʌp/	/ʌp/	From /ʌ/ to /ʊ/	Short vowel	Ambiguity.
10	noise	/nɔ:ɪz/	/nɔɪz/	From /ɔɪ/ to /ɔ:ɪ/	diphthong	As 'noise' but hard to perceive it right.
11	Calling	/kʌ:lɪŋ/	/kɔ:lɪŋ/	From /ɔ:/ to /ʊ:/	Long vowel	The same pronunciation

5.4. The questionnaire

In this section, (87.5%) of respondents show their interest in the British accents, while the rest selects “not interested” because of three main reasons shared by most of the informants: “difficult to understand”, “too many details”, and “pointless because we just learn the standard accent”. Apparently, despite the problems these students face in context comprehension, the participants are interested mostly in movies (75%), TV shows (56%) and songs (84%) dealt with in British or American accents.

Concerning their attitudes about what they have listened to and seen in both the audio conversation and the video film extract, students’ answers refer to ‘complete misunderstanding of the Brummies’ speech’, ‘difficult to grasp the ideas’, ‘too many changes at the level of sound articulation, contrary to the standard variety we learn at school and university’, and that ‘the Brummie accent is tough, in general’.

6. Data Analysis: Audio recordings and video & the questionnaire

According to the corpora being investigated, the three tables above introduce the different consonant and vowel manifestations in the Brummie accent, in comparison to the standard British English accent (RP). Though many sounds keep the same pronunciation in both accents, several sounds are articulated differently.

6.1. Consonant manifestation

The most noticeably variant concerning the accent being investigated ‘Brummie’ is the extensive use of the glottal stop /ʔ/ in different environments: initial, medial and final positions, within a word. Generally, it takes the place of the /t/ sound in words like ‘veterinary’, ‘letter’, ‘waiting’, ‘deserted’, ‘private’, ‘ate’, ‘flight’ and ‘foot’. This variant, i.e., /ʔ/ also takes the place of /h/ sound, frequently not generally, at the initial position in the word *her*.

The variants of /l/ the dark [ɫ] and syllabic [l̥], most of the time, are realized with an approximant [w]; therefore, the words ‘old’, ‘bowl’, ‘sentimental’, ‘feel’ and ‘able’ have the realization of [w] instead of /l/. In some cases, the sound /θ/ is replaced by [f], as in ‘north’, ‘mouth’, ‘thought’ and *cloth*; yet the word ‘bath’ is realised with /θ/.

In rapid connected speech, the [ʃ] sound takes the place of /s/ in words like *stressed*, *kissed* and in context as in *fleece jacket*. The /t/ sound is replaced by [s] in words like *kept* and *wiped*.

The sound /ð/ is replaced by /θ/, as in ‘either’ and ‘neither’. The approximant /r/ in intervocalic position is realized with a tap [ɾ] in words like ‘porridge’, ‘hurry’ and ‘sorry’. In this case, there is no sort of ambiguity because the tap [ɾ] is just a variant of the central approximant /r/.

The formulation ‘ng’ is frequently, not always, pronounced with [ŋ] sound following /ŋ/, in words like, ‘long’, ‘waiting’ and ‘stroking’. However, this is not a rule for all the cases; it is frequently heard within words, as in ‘singing’ and ‘calling’. Yet, in word-final position, as in ‘sleeping’ the /ŋ/ is heard while the /g/ is silent. This rule is restricted only to the formulation ‘ng’, while the other formulation of the velar nasal sound /ŋ/ -such as ‘nk’ in *drunk*, ‘nc’ in ‘uncle’ and ‘nq’ in ‘conquer’ are not concerned.

6.2. Vowel manifestation

It seems very apparent that great changes take place at the level of vowels in the Brummies’ accent. This includes short vowels, long vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs.

6.2.1. Short vowel manifestations

The use of /ʊ/ instead of /ʌ/ is almost in all positions in words like *much*, *hurry*, *up*, *pub*, *couple* and *once*. This rule is general and used mostly, but a special case in this corpus is noticed on the word ‘colours’ where the sound /ɒ/ is heard instead of /ʊ/ so, the result is /kɒləz/. The /ʌ/ replaces /ɒ/ in words like ‘dog’, ‘long’ and ‘cost’.

6.2.2. Long vowel manifestations

The /ɔ:/ in ‘more’ and ‘for’ is realized with long [u:]. The short vowel /ɒ/ has the realization of long [a:] in the case of ‘porridge’. This realization is the same as the one in North American English, i.e.; /ɑ:/. In some cases, in connected speech, the short vowel /ʌ/ of RP English is changed to a long /u:/, as for the case of ‘but’ [bu:t].

The word ‘my’ is pronounced with the long vowel /a:/ instead of the diphthong /aɪ/.

6.2.3. Diphthong manifestations

The closed diphthong /eɪ/ is realized as [aɪ] nearly in all words, as in ‘daily’, ‘ate’, ‘face’, ‘plain’, ‘waiting’, ‘gave’, ‘made’, ‘able’ and ‘bathe’.

The closed diphthong /əʊ/ is generally realized as [aʊ] in words like ‘old’, ‘bowl’, ‘only’ and ‘stroking’.

The long-closed vowel /i:/ in ‘fleece’, ‘seat’, ‘feet’ ‘sleeping’ is realized as [eɪ] instead.

The diphthong /aɪ/ is uttered as /ɔɪ/ in words like ‘implied’, ‘like’, ‘wiped’ and ‘price’.

The diphthong /aʊ/ is sometimes realized as [əʊ], in words like ‘shout’, ‘down’, ‘crown’ and ‘house’.

6.3. The questionnaire Analysis

The participants in the questionnaire maintain that the perception of Brummie accent is difficult, and presents an impasse towards its understanding. They say it to be hard to master, especially because it is not taught at schools or universities and is rarely heard on television or in films. Moreover, it cannot be recognized among other accents if ever it is used in any means of communication. The results of 87.5% show that both consonant and vowel changes and the prosodic features of its different sounds are the reasons behind creating such hardness. The respondents say they are familiar with RP English ‘standard variety of English’, yet they ignore totally about this accent. As long as they faced problems understanding the audios and the film extract, they say that this accent sounds cold, and to their untrained ear, makes them come across as unfriendly and hostile; thus, they have got a negative attitude towards this accent and its learning.

7. Result Discussion

The study reveals that great changes occur at the level of Brummie accent as compared with RP English accent. Extensive use of the glottal stop /ʔ/ is apparent in almost all words containing /t/. RP English consonant sounds are substituted by others, regardless of any VPM similarities, the case of the voiced labio-velar approximant [w], which takes the place of all lateral variants [l; ɫ; ɭ]; (clear, dark & syllabic). Other changes are also noticed in the articulation of the English fricative sounds where the labio-dental fricative [f] replaces the dental /θ/ or dental /ð/ is replaced by its counterpart [θ]. In rapid connected speech /s/ is very often subrogated by [ʃ]. The post alveolar approximant /r/ is realized as a tap [ɾ].

Concerning vowels, the most noticeable thing is the extreme use of [ʊ] instead of /ʌ/. In some cases /ʌ/ is realized as [ɒ], and /ɒ/ gets a Northern American realization of [ɑ:]. The long vowel /ɔ:/ is generally uttered as [o:].

The diphthong [aɪ] is almost used in all Brummies' speech instead of the sound /eɪ/. The /eɪ/ is very often realized as [a:], /əʊ/ is uttered as [ɔ:], and [ɔɪ] is generally heard instead of /aɪ/.

8. Conclusion

The study shows that Brummie accent is broadly distinct from RP English accent, the standard variety used in schools and universities. The changes that take place at the level of the different sound articulations including vowels and consonants make an unusual pronunciation for RP English learners who become unable to grasp the meaning of words, which are uttered differently. This would certainly create ambiguity and make impediments towards learners' perception of the intended meaning. This unusual pronunciation of the uttered words does not exist in the register of RP English accent and, therefore is considered as phonological distortions which harden learners' perception of sounds, their understanding of the intended meaning and negative impression on British accents, in general, and Brummie accent in particular.

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