

Received Pronunciation

It is pivotally important that I introduce a name that figures extensively almost whenever pronunciation is the topic under scrutiny. The word **received pronunciation** or its initialism **RP** are used to refer to the accent spoken mainly in the British Isles and deemed by many to be the accent of educated people. Hence, this accent is used mainly by people who have had some former decent schooling because it is highly unlikely to run into laymen in Britain abiding by all the rules of pronunciation this accent requires of its speakers.

In a nut shell, we can safely accurately call this name, though through using a lengthy construction, the **schooled people's accent which they use in formal contexts**. The last part of this sentence is key. Even those people who are purported to use RP do not necessarily use it whenever they are called upon to use language: they do not typically use it in their daily interactions which operate outside formal milieus. They use the accent of the surrounding community in its stead. This, nonetheless, does not imply that the accent used outside formal context has to be markedly different from RP. There are many accents in the British Isles which share many affinities with RP.

Back to the make-up of the word *per se*: so many of the Algerian learners are led astray, so to speak, by this name. They seem to know only one of the primary meanings of the word *received*, like the one it conveys in: *she received a daunting reply from the company*. However, the meaning it carries here is far removed from this: interestingly enough, it means *accepted*. Then, RP is used to refer to the accent that has been deemed to be the only accent accepted in schools and universities and other institutions. Because RP has not emerged only comparatively recently; it dates back to the nineteenth century. It was the accent used by students and teachers who studied and taught at prestigious universities mainly Oxford and/or Cambridge. It was also the accent used and taught to the privileged few at public schools. In order that you will not gain faulty understanding fuelled by the word public: *public* does not mean the meaning that you might have already thought of: people irrespective of their socio-economic status can attend: far from it. Public is the British English (henceforth BE) word for private. The word BE uses to refer to schools that the poor as well as the rich can go to is state school.

Nowadays, however, contemporary phoneticians, by no means all, prefer to use other terms which are less confusing to foreign learners because in some countries in the world teachers require of their students to try their hardest to imitate speakers of this posh accent. Many students (you were possibly one of them prior to reading these hopefully enlightening paragraphs) find it hard to imitate an accent

whose speakers are non-existent. The immense spread of the television and the World Wide Web have made of using some of the terms introduced below a tangible reality.

The term that most phoneticians that have welcomed the shift is **BBC Accent**. In other words, it is the accent that news readers on the BBC channels be they radio or TV use. However, even this second label is not entirely without problems. Not all the news readers and programme presenters use RP; some use American accents; others use Scottish accents, etc. Other labels which are less contentious are the **queen accent, the king accent**.

For the purposes of this book, I surmise that knowing the term BBC accent will be of much help because as you know the characteristics of this accent (as the discussion unfolds) you will be able to identify who on the BBC programmes uses RP and who uses a different accent. You will ultimately be able to find people to imitate because ours happened to be amongst the countries that require of English students to acquire RP.