

The evolution of Received Pronunciation over time: An acoustic analysis of the Queen's Christmas broadcasts

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Abstract

This study presents a longitudinal analysis of some vowels from the annual Christmas broadcasts produced by Queen Elizabeth II over a period of 70 years in order to investigate whether adults adapt to sound changes taking place in the community. The sound changes that were analyzed in this study concern the tensing of the final vowel in words like “happy” which is sometimes known as “happyY tensing” in British English Received Pronunciation over a period of 70 years. The sample of this study was Queen's 7 Christmas broadcasts: 1957(the first recording), 1967, 1977, 1987, 1997, and 2007 and 2017 where there was a gap of 10 years between each recording. The rationale behind selecting this sample is that the Christmas broadcasts are one of the very few recordings of the same person producing similar materials under similar recording conditions annually over a period of almost 70 years. In order to come into conclusions, the chosen words from the recordings were phonetically transcribed and compared. The findings of the study showed that Queen's 1950s happyY vowel is less tense compared to recent years. It was noticeable that there was a change of open vowels /a, ʌ, ɒ/ and /æ/, change of /ɒ/ sound to /ɔ:/ and change of final /I :/ sound words to /i/ at present compared to the past. According to the findings of this study, it can be concluded that there is evidence of accent change within the same individual over time and that the Queen's vowels in the Christmas broadcasts have shifted in the direction of a more mainstream form of Received Pronunciation. These findings could be utilized in the field of sociolinguistics to develop an awareness of how an individual's accent changes over time.

Keywords - Longitudinal analysis, Received Pronunciation, Queen's Christmas broadcasts, Change over time, accent

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