

# Kurdish EFL Learners' Preference in the Selection of a Pronunciation Model

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# In this Presentation

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- The importance of pronunciation in English language learning and teaching language
- Pronunciation as a Cinderella skill, and thoughts of some EFL teachers on the issue
- Major varieties of English in the world today and the Kurdish EFL learner's familiarity with these varieties
- British English (BrE) Vs. American English (AmE)
- Factors affecting the learners' selection of either model.
- The Kurdish EFL learner's selection

# The importance of pronunciation in English language learning

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Good pronunciation is always associated with, and is the secret to **fluency** in any language.

# Native speakers' reaction to pronunciation

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- **Native speakers**

- **1) Do not understand you.**

At this level, the non-native speakers' (NNS) pronunciation of English words is drastically different that native speakers find it very difficult to understand them, which very frequently calls for the need for the NNS to repeat what they say.

- **2) understand you with concentration.**

At this level, native English speakers can understand NNS, but they need to pay attention carefully because of their *accent*. NNS need only to repeat things sometimes.

- **3) understand you easily.**

At this level, NNS may still have an accent, but they can speak English clearly enough to be understood all the time. They almost never need to repeat what they say in English

# Pronunciation as a Cinderella skill

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- (Adrian Underhill, 2010)
  - *I suggest that pronunciation is the Cinderella of language teaching. It has been neglected, and disconnected from other language learning activities.*
  - *It has always been dominated by her two sisters: grammar & vocabulary*
- (Kelly, 1969). .
  - *Indisputably, teaching pronunciation is one of the most complicated yet significant aspects of EFL / ESL teaching. That is why it has been looked upon as the “Cinderella” of language teaching.*

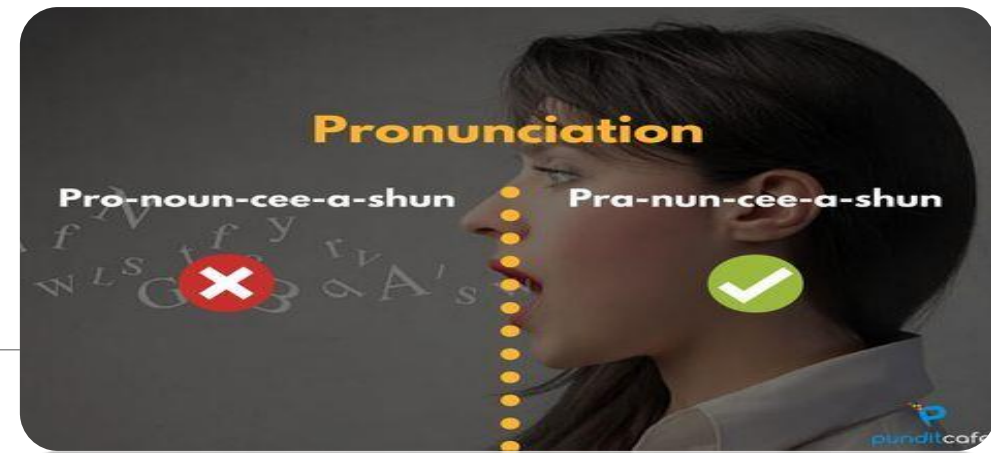
# What Some teachers say, and ask about (teaching) pronunciation

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- Some teachers think that other aspects of language are more important, and so, they deserve to be given more attention than pronunciation
- **(Leahn- China)**
- *I think pronunciation is definitely the ‘Cinderella’ of ELT. She hardly ever gets to go to the party so to speak. I have to admit that in the first ten years of my teaching I managed (more or less) to avoid any kind of direct pronunciation work in class.*
- Others believe that learning pronunciation is a far-fetched goal for the learner to achieve compared to the other aspects of language:
- **(Michael Greenberg- Moscow)**
- *Why on Earth would you even think of teaching pronunciation? And: How would you motivate learners to pay more attention to it?.. my best-motivated students.... will never sound like native speakers anyway, so why do they need this time-consuming pronunciation work? They would definitely prefer something practical, like drilling the functional language or learning vocabulary*

# The importance of good pronunciation

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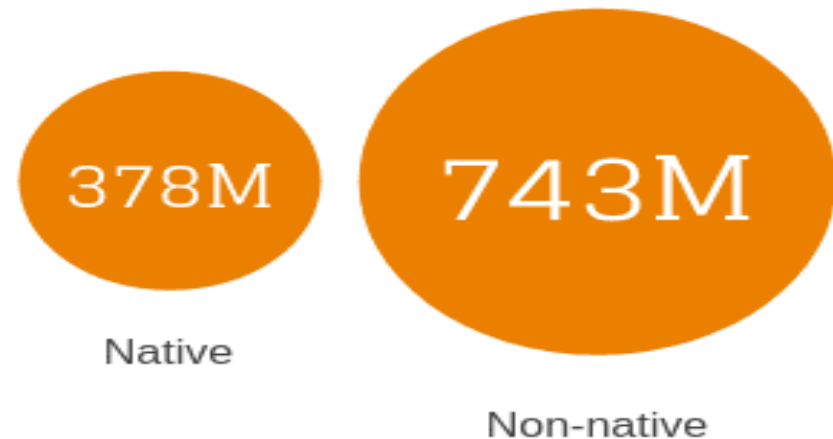


- Pronunciation is vital to proper communication; it makes speech more appealing and effective
- Good pronunciation aids listening correctly. It thus aids comprehension and also boosts the speaker's confidence and self-esteem
- Although good communication also relies heavily on grammar and vocabulary, according to some research, 50% of problems with understanding somebody speaking foreign language is the result of incorrect pronunciation.
- Good pronunciation is a strong motivation for the learners to communicate and to integrate into the foreign language culture.
- Good pronunciation supports other skills: “..thinking, reading, remembering, writing, vocabulary ..... never mind speaking!” (Underhill, 2010).

# English

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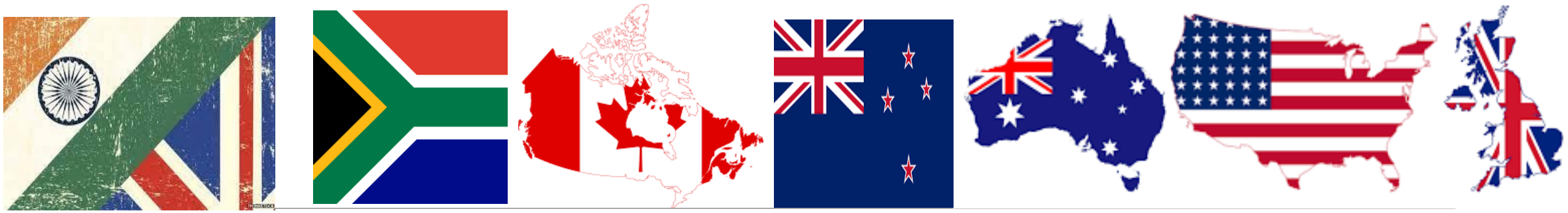
- English is a worldwide language, with between 1.2 billion and, estimated 2 billion speakers of the language across the planet according to different Internet sources,
- Up to 400,000 people are native speakers of English.
- In view of these statistics, many consider the English language to be a **world language**



**No. of native and non-native  
English speakers**

Source: Ethnologue, 21st Edition





- The oldest variety of English is British English, spoken in the United Kingdom.
- Approximately 60 million people are native British English speakers.
- The variety of English with the largest number of native speakers, however, is American English, with over 200 million native speakers.
- The other major varieties of English include Canadian English, Australian English, New Zealand English, South African English and Indian English.
- *(For more details, see also Giegerich, 1992; Hughes and Trudgill, 1997; Hughes et al., 2013; Trudgill and Hannah, 2008, among others)*



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A language traditionally becomes an international language for one chief reason: the power of its people – especially their political and military power. English has become an international language because of its wide diffusion outside the British Isles, to all continents of the world, by trade, technology, colonization, and conquest



# British English



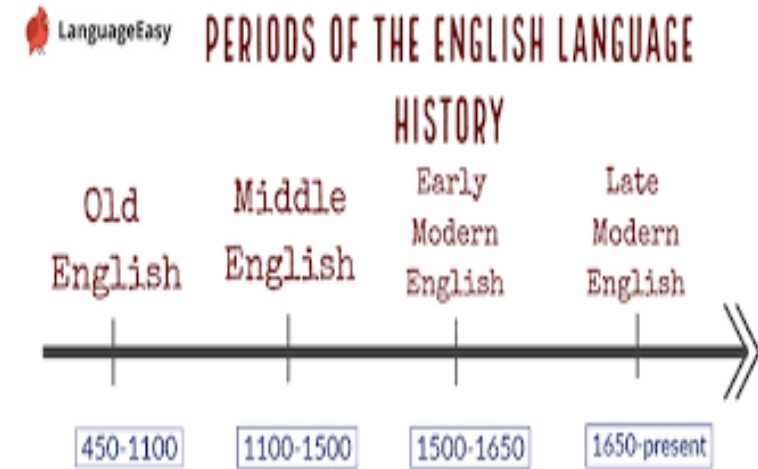
- The English language we speak today developed through history from

- Old English (5<sup>th</sup>- 11<sup>th</sup> century)

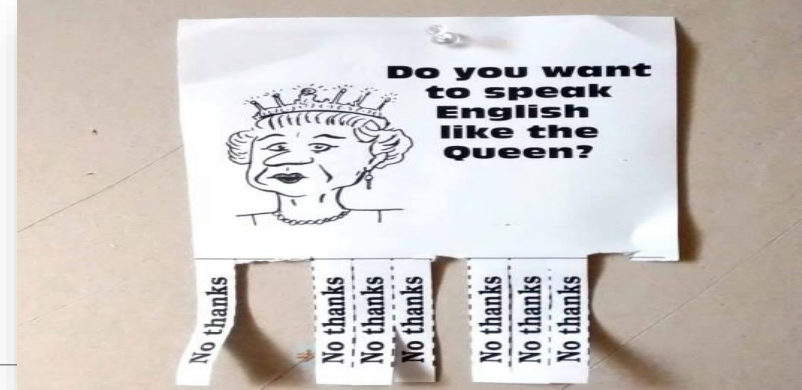
- Middle English (11<sup>th</sup> century – 14<sup>th</sup> Century)

- Modern English (15<sup>th</sup> century- present)

- *(For details of the history of the English language, see for example, Barber C. (1993); Baugh A.C. & Cable T. (1993))*



# Received Pronunciation (RP)



- In the United Kingdom today, there's an incredible amount of regional diversity in the language spoken.. However, the standard is called Received Pronunciation (RP). Yule (2014) defines a standard variety as one that is treated as the official language and that is used in public production, publishing, and education.
- The term RP stems from Daniel Jones, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and refers to the pronunciation of English which is accepted in English society.
- Received Pronunciation is an accent, not a dialect. All RP speakers speak Standard English. In other words, they avoid non-standard grammatical constructions and localised vocabulary characteristic of regional dialects, which is why RP is generally described as a regionally non-specific accent, i.e., it does not contain any clues about a speaker's geographic background. **HOWEVER**, RP does reveal a great deal about the speaker's social and/or educational background.

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- Socially viewed, RP enjoys a unique status among the different English accents. According to Agha (2006: 191), RP is considered as a socially respected accent. This feature has also been highlighted by other researchers like Trudgill (2013) who assures that RP is a social accent that is associated particularly with the upper-middle and upper classes (and those who aspire to membership of those classes).
  - Although RP is probably the most widely studied and most frequently described variety of spoken English (in the world), recent estimates suggest that only 2% of the population in the UK speak i.t
  - *(For more details on RP, see Trudgill, 2013; Trudgill and Hughes, 2012; Thomas et al., 2004; Collins and Mees, 2006, to name but a few)*

# American English (AmE)



- According to Trudgill & Hannah, (2013) General American (GA) is a term, which is quite widely used by American linguists to describe the majority of those American accents, which do not have marked regional north-eastern or southern characteristics.
- GAE refers to the American accent that is used by native and non-native speakers that is void of regional variations that are outstanding , and it is usually taught to foreign learners..
- If compared to RP in Britain, GAE is not as associated with the social class of individuals who speak this accent
- Its reputation as a prestigious accent is based on the fact that it is the speech of many newscasters, as it is most often heard on international radio and television networks, in addition to its being the most impartial and free of regional characteristics.

# RP Vs. AmE

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Both, RP and AmE are regarded as standard English varieties. Despite the great similarities between the two accents, the variations are in

- pronunciation
- Vocabulary
- Grammar



- According to Svartvik and Leech (2006), vocabulary and pronunciation are the most noticeable

## The sound of A (some words)



bath  
laugh  
class  
chance  
ask  
after  
can't  
example



## Phonetics

- Vowels:

American English	Examples	British English
[æ]	plant, grass, half, bath	[ɑ:]
[ɪ] или [ə]	civilization, specialization,	[aɪ]
[ʌ]	body, shot, hot	[o]
[u]	suit, duty, knew, Tuesday, student.	[ju]



STRESS



adult	adult
ballet	ballet
garage	garage
vaccine	vaccine
brochure	brochure
hospitable	hospitable
advertisement	advertisement

6x5wbj6  
c9u,7

### British English



Football  
City centre  
Autumn  
Shop  
Wardrobe  
Cinema  
Shop assistant  
Ground floor  
Car park  
Fortnight  
Pavement  
Bill

### American English



Soccer  
Downtown  
Fall  
Store  
Closet  
Movie theater  
Sales Clerk  
First floor  
Parking lot  
Two weeks  
Sidewalk  
Check

9016L1?6106U

9016L1?6106U



# RP and AmE in EFL Context

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British English RP, and American English AME, remain the most influential and the most widespread among the other accents; they also are the two most familiar accents to *our* EFL learners.

Often, the more fluent EFL learners oscillate between these two models of pronunciation, resulting in an inconsistent production, in very strict terms. Furthermore, RP in the UK is found to be influenced by AmE (See MARANO, R. and PAULIUC, K, 2014)

# Research project

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- Based on a study by Biljana Čubrović and Andrej Bjelaković in Belgrade, we attempted to investigate the preferences of the Kurdish university EFL learners' of either model of pronunciation.
- 150 students from the English department (Morning and Evening classes) College of Languages participated in the study. They were 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students.
- 75 were females and 75 males.
- The study was conducted during the academic year 2020- 2021

# The Research Questions

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- The research attempted to answer the following questions:
- Which accent do the EFL students prefer, General American English (GAE) or standard British English (RP)?
- What are the reasons behind the students' preference for either model?
- What influences the students' selection of the model?

# Methodology

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- A questionnaire was constructed consisting of 19 items addressing the major issues that are of concern to the research topic. Some of the questions related to phonological aspects of the two accents. Other questions related to social and sociolinguistic factors affecting the selection.
- A Likert scale consisting of five points (1: Strongly disagree, to 5 : strongly agree) was used to obtain the responses of the students.
- The questionnaire was disseminated among students aged 21 to 27, from the English Language department at the College of Languages, University of Duhok. The participants were 2nd – 3rd and 4th-year students.
- The survey was conducted through “Survey Monkey” and the link of the questionnaire was shared with students through smartphones to receive their responses directly.
- The number of participants was 150 students (75 male 50%, and 75 female 50%). The survey aimed to identify whether the students were more interested in General American English or British English. The questions were designed simply and based on the students' understanding.

# Discussion of Findings

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- Consistently with Čubrović and Bjelaković, the findings revealed that AmE was more preferred by the Kurdish EFLs than RP. Additionally, both, social and linguistic factors play a significant role in the student's choice of the pronunciation model.
- Globalization of American English was one important reason behind the student's preference of AmE over BrE (RP). The fact that the media is mostly AmE oriented is very significant: the film and music and entertainment industry productions which are spread to most parts of the world, ours included, are mostly AmE – based. With the ease of access to these productions through different media and technological channels, this accent finds way to the EFL learner in the most feasible and spontaneous way.
- The phonological features of the accents, on the other hand, play a role in the student's preference of one model over the other. The fact that AmE is a rhotic accent makes it more palatable and convenient for the students to produce than BrE, which is a non – rhotic accent; it is hard for the students to conceive of the "r" sound not being pronounced in some positions in the word where it is orthographically justified. Also, the fact BrE English displays a severe reduction of vowels or sometimes even whole syllables to a short sound /ə/ is very difficult for the Kurdish EFL students, whose mother language does not display such a reduction. These aspects in effect, bring AmE closer to Kurdish, and hence the selection of AmE.

# Conclusions

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- 1- AmE is more preferable to Kurdish EFLs than BrE due to globalization of the accent.
- 2- Age does not seem to play a role, since all the participants belonged to the same age group i.e. they were all adults.
- 3- The Media is a substantial source that affects the student's choice in the selection of a pronunciation model. The students tend more towards watching and following American entertainment and political programs , songs and films (movies).
- 4- The phonological aspect highlighted in the study shows that most of the students (39.33% agree, and 12.36% strongly agree) prefer a rhotic accent like General American English over the non-rhotic accent, Received Pronunciation (RP) (17.98%- agree, and 10.11%- strongly disagree) because it is close to their first language, namely. Kurdish which is also rhotic accent.
- 5- The severity of vowel of reduction in British English or Received Pronunciation influences the student's preference of GAE in which the process is not so severe.

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Adrian Underhill's pronunciation blog <http://www.adrianunderhill.com/the-pronunciation-blog>  
(<https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/how-many-people-speak-english-and-where-is-it-spoken>)



*Thank  
you*

