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Consistency in English pronunciation of pupils

in lower secondary school

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Abstract

The theoretical part of this thesis is focused on standards of pronunciation and its regional and local variants. The two major aspects of this thesis are Received Pronunciation and General American, both of which are explained in their own chapters. The differences between those two are described as well in the next chapter. The practical part is focused on research in lower secondary class, where data were collected of students' pronunciations. The main goal of the research was to analyse the data and decide, whether the participants were consistent in their pronunciation or whether they mixed RP and GA together.

Anotace

Teoretická část této bakalářské práce je zaměřena na standardy výslovnosti a jejich regionální a lokální varianty. Dva hlavní aspekty této práce jsou RP (Received Pronunciation) a GA (General American), které jsou vysvětleny každý ve své vlastní kapitole. Rozdíly mezi těmito dvěma výslovnostními modely jsou také popsány v následující kapitole. Praktická část je zaměřena na výzkum na 2. stupni základní školy, kde byly shromažďovány údaje o výslovnosti studentů. Hlavním cílem výzkumu bylo analyzovat data a rozhodnout, zda účastníci byli ve své výslovnosti konzistentní či nikoli.

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Introduction

English is the most used language in the world right now and due to its expansion, it has many regional variants. Two main variants are, without a doubt, British and US English.

These two types of English differ in many ways but in this thesis, I examine different pronunciation of certain words. My focus is on students in lower secondary class and their consistency in English pronunciation.

The theoretical part first deals with English standard pronunciations, its regional and local forms. However, the main focus is on the two regional forms – Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA), both of which are separately described.

Afterwards, I focus on the differences between those two pronunciations, where I explain, more thoroughly, four aspects that can vary from RP and GA (phonetics and phonology, rhoticity, strong and weak syllables and stress).

In the practical part I prepared a set of words that differ in British and US English. Subsequently, I conducted a research in an elementary school, where students were asked a few questions to find out about their interest in English. Afterwards, the students were handed a paper with the list of words and were asked to read them with their natural pronunciation. Following that, the aim was to analyse their pronunciation and decide whether it was closer to Received Pronunciation or General American. The main point was to observe, if the students were consistent in their pronunciation and if not, what are the factors that made them mix those two types of pronunciation models together and what we can do to prevent it from happening.

I. THEORETICAL PART

1. Standards of pronunciation

Languages are constantly expanding and the changes in the English language pronunciation have been set unevenly i.e., at different geographical locations amongst people with different social backgrounds (Wells 1982: 94).

The pronunciation of English in North America is different from most accents found in Britain. However, you can find accents in parts of Britain that sound American, and on the other hand, some accents in North America might sound English. (Roach 2009:4).

When talking about accents of English, the non-native speaker should be careful about the difference between England and Britain; there are many different accents in England, but the range becomes much wider when we take in consideration the accents of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Accents within England, the distribution that is most frequently used by most English people is between northern and southern. This is a very rough division, and there can be endless argument over where the boundaries lie, but most people would identify Lancashire, Yorkshire or other counties further north, as "Northern" accent (Roach 2009:4).

Most American speakers of English have an accent that is often referred to as General American (GA). Most Canadian speakers of English have a remarkably similar accent (similarly, as in the difference between Australian and New Zealand accent, only few British people can hear the difference between the Canadian and American accents. Accents in America that differ from GA are mainly found in New England and in the "deep south" of the country, but isolated communities everywhere tend to preserve different accents (Roach 2009:163).

1.1 Received Pronunciation

In England, the accepted social standard of pronunciation is called Received Pronunciation (RP), the term suggests that it is the result of a social judgement rather than of an official decision as to what is correct or wrong (received = acceptable) (Cruttenden 2008:77).

Hughes claimed (in *English Accents and Dialects* 2012) that the term Received Pronunciation got rather old-fashioned or even negative connotation in British society. Taking into consideration the modern development and the changes in its features, some phoneticians use the term Standard South British English.

There was no real plan of setting the chosen pronunciation model as an intentionally targeted aim for English speakers. Thus, the main reason for having the standard pronunciation system had most likely developed from the rising interest in learning English in countries all around the world, together with the increased education in primary schools and the following increasing interest in spoken language. One of the main phoneticians in England throughout the first half of the 20th century, Daniel Jones, released three publications in which he appointed the term “Received pronunciation” or RP as a term for the standard British pronunciation model. Nevertheless, he brought to attention that models of pronunciation that differ exist and that he was not trying to set RP as superior to other accents. His works, despite his claim, became the set standard for English pronunciation and was followed by many other books released at that time, which solidified the position of RP as the standard pronunciation. (Cruttenden 2008:76).

In the 1920s, RP started spreading amongst people, one of the main reasons for that was the start of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The institution included among others even The Advisory Committee on Spoken English, which involved two phoneticians. Their strategy was not to set a uniform pronunciation model, but rather the speech of the educated social class. Therefore, even though throughout the initial years of the BBC broadcasting, RP was used predominantly

by news presenters, but not because of the BBC speech policy, but because of the fact that the BBC newsreaders and other employees usually came from the same social class, using an identical pronunciation model (Cruttenden 2008:76).

Even today the RP standard continues to be connected with the upper social class, resulting either from title, education, profession or other factors. Furthermore, RP is very strongly connected to the accent spoken by those studying at British public schools (which are in the United Kingdom private and for most families financially unobtainable). As it was argued in the previous parts of this thesis, RP is not a pronunciation model of any region, it is rather linked with a social background. Still, it is believed that it has origins in the area of London and its surroundings. The understanding and opinion on RP differ with consideration to the place where the question is asked; in other countries it is usually considered as a general British accent, even though for example in northern England, it is considered mostly as a southern accent (Hughes 2012:3).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, an estimation has been made, which observed that only about 3 to 5 percent of the population in England spoke RP English. Nowadays, it would be difficult to argue, whether the percentage decreased or increased throughout the last years, and it would be even more controversial since RP has been experiencing many alterations and therefore the comparative model has changed since the last estimations as well (Hughes 2012:4). Nonetheless, this model is the most suitable for foreign learner, for even such a low proportion as 3 percent is still said to be higher than any other established model in the world (Cruttenden 2008:78).

RP's prestigious historical position is another reason for choosing it as a model for foreign learners and therefore teachers usually teach what has been for a long time considered as the "most correct" of accents. Hughes later claimed as well that inside the borders of Britain, it has become the most widely understood accent of all, due to the television and radio broadcasting pronunciation, which is another

reason for learning RP. Potential learners may have the impression that if they master this pronunciation model, they have the best chance of being understood well anywhere, inside the boundaries of the British Isles.

1.2 General American

The standard division of the United States for pronunciation purposes is into Eastern (New England, New York City), Southern (Virginia, Texas) and General (all the remaining area). General American (GA) can be considered as that form of American which does not have marked regional characteristics and is in this way comparable to RP (Cruttenden 2008:84).

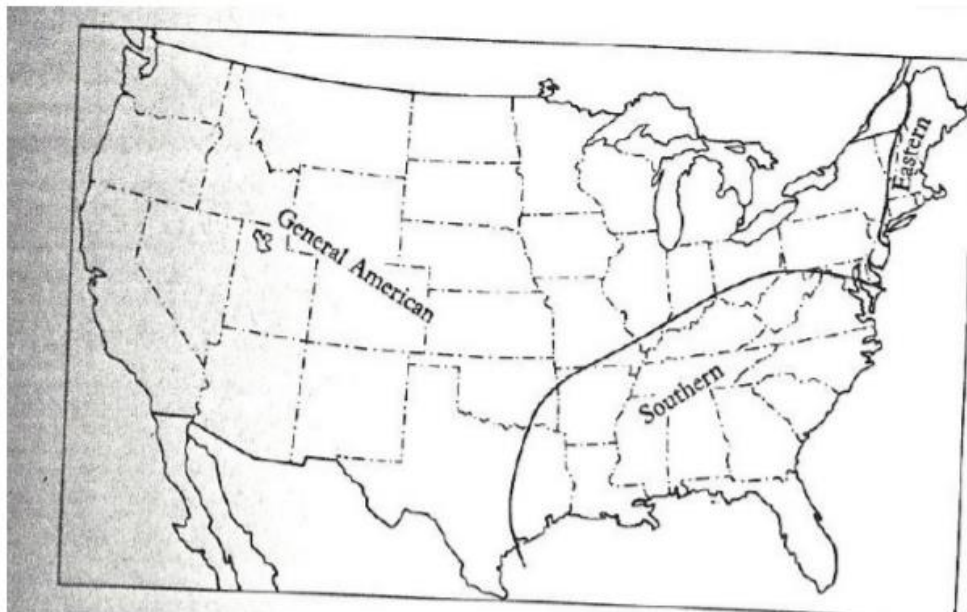


Figure 1: Geographical speech distribution of US (Wells 1986)

Identically, as the RP pronunciation was spread mostly due to the British colonial period, GA was influenced by the historical development as well.

GA had a chance for a greater expansion supported by both political and economic

growth in many parts of the world, especially after the end of British colonialism, (for example South and Central America). “it is more appropriate for learners to acquire an American accent rather than the British RP”. With the help of US TV programmes, films and pop music, it is an accent heard very often and it is practically spread to all corners of the Earth (Brown 1991:34).

Because GA is the model mostly acceptable by national televisions in the USA, it is occasionally referred to as Network English. (Wells 1986:470). In the world of the technical and media spread, GA is a pronunciation model available to many people all around the world. The popularity of American television films, shows and pop music is a factor helping to this effect. Thus, GA stands “as a viable alternative to RP” owing to both easy accessibility, as well as being simpler from the viewpoint of articulatory phonetics (Brown 1991:36).

2. Differences between RP and GA

2.1 Phonetics and Phonology

There are two major aspects in different pronunciations: phonetic and phonological. Some accents can vary only phonetically, which means they will be different only in the phoneme realisation, or with different usage of stress or intonation with no change in the meaning of the utterance.

In practise, for example Australian pronunciation is evidently different from the RP for the listener, even though it still uses the same group of phonemes. The second aspect deals with the phonological differences. This shows that the variations of a phonological kind may have differences in the set of phonemes they apply in spoken language in contrast to other accents, for example a few northern English accents do not differ the phonemes /ʌ/ and /ʊ/ from each other, resulting in both being pronounced as /ʊ/. As for consonants, some accents do not use the phoneme /h/, so for example the word “heart” is pronounced /ɑ:t/, which could be mistaken for a word “art”, which is pronounced in the same way. The differences might just as well go the opposite direction and have more phonemic contrasts than others (Roach 2009:161).

2.2 Rhoticity

A rhotic accent comprises the pronunciation of the sound /r/ in all possible positions, whenever it is present in spelling, for example in a word “car” /kɑ:r/. Rhotic accents can be found in Ireland, Scotland, certain parts of England, most of the USA, Canada and certain parts of the Caribbean (Wells 1982:76). On the other hand, non-rhotic accents involve the loss of the sound /r/ in post-vocalic positions, as in the word “car” /kɑ:/. Therefore, the sound /r/ appears in speech only before vowels, either initially or intervocalically (McMahon 2003:232). These accents can be found in England and Wales, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, some eastern and southern parts of the USA and in some parts of the Caribbean (Wells 1982:76).

Roach said (in *English Phonetics and Phonology* 2009:115) The phoneme /r/ cannot occur in syllable-final position in RP, but when a word's spelling suggests a final /r/, and a word beginning with a vowel follows, the usual pronunciation for RP speakers is to pronounce it with /r/. For example:

- a. "here" hɪə but "here are" hɪər ɑ:
- b. "four" fɔ: but "four eggs" fɔ:r ɛgz

The consonant changes throughout history were proved to be much less distinctive than the changes of vowels. The modification in 18th century that brought the partial loss of /r/ could be considered as one of the most important changes, since it gave rise to non-rhotic accents (Cruttenden 2008:83).

2.3 Strong and weak syllables

We could describe strong and weak forms partly in terms of stress (i.e., weak syllables are unstress and strong syllables are stressed).

Roach argues (in *English Phonetics and Phonology* 2009:64) that the most important thing to note is that any strong syllable will have as its peak one of the vowel phonemes (or a triphthong), but not "Schwa". Weak syllables, on the other hand, only have four types of peak:

- a. The vowel ("ə")
- b. A close front unrounded vowel (i: and ɪ)
- c. A close back rounded vowel (u: and ʊ)
- d. A syllabic consonant

Weak syllables compared to strong syllables tend to be shorter, of lower intensity and different in quality. For example, in the word "father" /fɑ:ðə/, the second syllable is weak and therefore shorter and less prominent than the first syllable which is strong and long. In a word like "bottle" /bɒtl/ the second syllable is weak and is without a vowel but consists of the consonant "l". This state is called a syllabic consonant (Roach 2009:64).

2.4 Stress

Skaličková claimed (in 1982:44) that it has so far not been resolved what exactly stress (also called prominence or salience) is. She pointed out that this is not a simple phenomenon, but a complex of several different sound attributes, which interact and are in some relationship with each other.

The production of stress is usually believed to depend on the speaker using more muscular energy than is used for unstressed syllables. Measuring muscular effort is difficult but is possible. Many experiments have been carried out on the perception of stress, and many different sound characteristics are important in making a syllable recognisably stressed (Roach 2009:73).

2.5 Other differences

There are many other differences between RP and GA pronunciation models, many of them are the subject of comic debates such as tomato in RP /tə'mɑ:təʊ/ and tomato in GA /tə'meɪtəʊ/ (Roach 2009:164).

3. Accent variations

The word accent is often confused with dialect. Dialect is used to refer to a variety of a language that is different from others but not just in pronunciation but also in grammar, vocabulary and word order. Differences of accent, on the other hand, are only in pronunciation (Roach 2009:3).

As languages expand and change, they are continually developing different shapes and forms. Variations in the English language concern distinctive pronunciation and use of vocabulary and grammar. While a speaker's dialect involves differences within pronunciation, morphology, syntax and vocabulary, an accent relates to pronunciation only. Geographical distinction, social status, gender and ethnic identity, or a particular situation of the speaker are all factors which potentially affect a person's accent (Wells 1982:8-25).

Speakers of RP tend to be found at the top of the social scale, and their speech gives no clue to their regional origin. People at the bottom of the social scale speak with the most obvious regional accents. Between the two extremes, in general the higher a person is on the social scale, the less regionally marked will be his or her accent, and the less it is likely to differ from RP (Hughes 2012:4).

This relationship is well represented in the form of a triangle below:

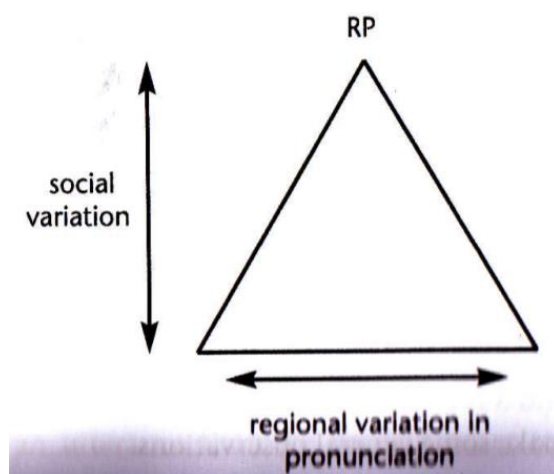


Figure 2: The relationship between class and accent (Hughes 2012)

II. PRACTICAL PART

For the practical part of my thesis, I prepared a set of words that I showed to 16 students in lower secondary class. Students were asked to read the words in their natural accent. The conversations were recorded and afterwards analysed. The main focus was to decide, whether their style of pronunciation was closer to Received Pronunciation or General American.

4. List of words

Words	Received Pronunciation	General American
Aunt	/ɑːnt/	/ænt/
Tomato	/tə'mɑːtəʊ/	/tə'meɪtəʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəmiːn/	/'vaɪtəmiːn/
Zebra	/'zebrə/	/'ziːbrə/
Garage	/'gærɑːʒ/	/'gə'rɑːʒ/
Water	/'wɔːtər/	/'wɑːdər/
Bath	/bɑːθ/	/bæθ/
Advertisement	/əd'vɜːtɪsmənt/	/əd'vɜː'taɪzmənt/
Either	/'aɪðər/	/'iːðər/
Laugh	/lɑːf/	/læf/
Were	/wər/	/wɜːr/
Can't	/kɑːnt/	/kænt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/	/'moubeɪl/
Missile	/'mɪsaɪl/	/'mɪsəl/
Hard	/hɑːd/	/hɑːrd/
Ask	/ɑːsk/	/æsk/
Chair	/tʃeə/	/tʃer/
Better	/'betər/	/'bed.ər/
Address	/ə'dres/	/'ædres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/	/'raɪdɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvəlaɪ'zeɪʃən/	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'heɪtɪd/	/'heɪtɪd/
Class	/klɑːs/	/klæs/

Table 1: List of words for the research

4.1 Participants

The research took place in March 2021. The participants of the research attended an elementary school in Zruč nad Sázavou. I have interviewed 16 students, 5 of whom were girls. They were 12 to 15 years old, and their level of English was approximately B1.

4.2 Procedure

When I was preparing the set of words, I had to take some things in consideration. Firstly, I had to choose words, that are not that complex and are taught in elementary schools. Secondly, the words had to consist of enough significant differences between pronunciations, that it would be clear to analyse.

Due to covid-19 restrictions the interview had to take place online, during their standard lesson. The session took place on a website called Jitsi, due to its easy connection and user-friendly interface. The instructions were given in the oral form and students were interviewed one by one.

At the beginning of the conversation the respondents were asked a few questions (usually 4 or 5):

1. How old are you?
2. When did you start learning English?
3. Do you ever get in contact with English outside of the school?
4. Have you ever heard about different pronunciations of words?
 - a. YES – Do you pay attention to your own pronunciation?

After a brief conversation, the respondents were given the set of words and they started reading. The whole conversation was recorded and afterwards analysed. The aim was to prepare a variety set of words with many different changes of pronunciation. The pronunciation of the words I have chosen differs in 3 main aspects: rhoticity, consonants r and t, and stress.

5. Pronunciation differences

5.1 Rhoticity

Water
Either
Were
Hard
Chair
Better

Table 2: Rhoticity

When the sound /r/ is in post-vocalic positions RP tend to drop it (i.e., hard, were). Whereas in GA the letter “r” is pronounced.

In RP, the sound /r/ at the end of the word is also dropped (i.e., water, either, chair, better). Whereas in GA the letter “r” is pronounced.

Even though RP is non-rhotic, we can sometimes hear the sound /r/ be pronounced. For example, the word far, would be in RP pronounced /fɑ:/, but the phrase far away would be pronounced /fɑ:rə'weɪ/. This is called linking and it is not something that is dealt with in this thesis.

5.2 Vowels and consonants

Aunt
Tomato
Vitamin
Zebra
Garage
Water
Bath
Laugh
Can't
Mobile
Ask
Writing
Civilization
Hated
Class

Table 3: Vowels and consonants

Whether it is at the beginning of a word, in the middle of a word or at the end of a word, in RP the letter “t” is always pronounced as a /t/ sound.

In GA when the letter “t” is in the middle position of a word, it sometimes changes to a soft /d/ sound. This happens, when the letter “t” is between two vowels or when it’s between “r” and a vowel (i.e., writing, hated).

The letter “z” is usually pronounced as /zet/ in RP, whereas in GA it is pronounced as /zi:/ (i.e., zebra).

5.3 Stress

Advertisement
Address

Table 4: Stress

The placement of the primary stressed syllable in certain words can differ in RP and GA. I have chosen two words with different placements of the primary stress. In RP, the word “advertisement” has a stress on the second syllable, in GA the stress is on the third (sometimes on the first) syllable. In the word “address” the first syllable is stressed in GA and the second syllable is stressed in RP.

6. Students' pronunciations

Student A

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'mɑ:təʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəmn/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	/'gærɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:də/
Bath	/bɑ:θ/
Advertisement	/əd'vɜ:tɪsmənt/
Either	/'i:ðər/
Laugh	/lɑ:f/
Were	/wɜ:ɹ/
Can't	/kɑ:nt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeər/
Better	/'bed.ə/
Address	/'ædres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'heitɪd/
Class	/klɑ:s/

Table 5: Pronunciation of Student A

Student A was a 14-year-old girl, she started studying English when she was 8 years old. Her main source of English comes from TV series (mainly How I Met Your Mother and Friends). She finds English quite interesting and hopes, that one day, she will be able to speak fluently without any big problems.

For a student at her age, she read all the words correctly and she appeared to be familiar with all of them.

Student A has some common knowledge about the differences between the two pronunciations, but she rarely pays any attention to it.

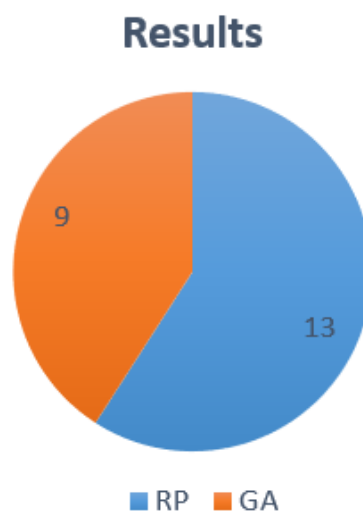


Figure 3: Results of Student A

Student B

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'meɪtəʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəmin/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	/gə'rɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:tə/
Bath	/bɑ:θ/
Advertisement	/ædvɜ:ˈtaɪzmənt/
Either	/'i:ðər/
Laugh	/lɑ:f/
Were	/wɜ:ɜ:/
Can't	/kænt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeər/
Better	/'bed.ə/
Address	/ə'dres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'heɪtɪd/
Class	/klæs/

Table 6: Pronunciation of Student B

Student B was a 15-year-old boy. He started learning English when he was 6 years old. His main source of English comes from computer games, where he mostly reads but does not speak. He also watches some movies in English but only with Czech subtitles.

There were some minor mistakes that Student B made while pronouncing some of the words, but most of them were read without any big problems.

As Student B does not pay much attention to spoken language, he did not have any idea about the differences between the two pronunciations.

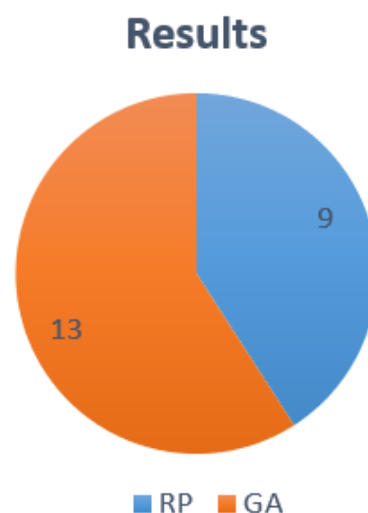


Figure 4: Results of Student B

Student C

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'meɪtəʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəˌmɪn/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	/gə'rɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:də/
Bath	/bæθ/
Advertisement	/əd'vɜ:tɪsmənt/
Either	---
Laugh	---
Were	/wɜ:ɪ/
Can't	/kænt/
Mobile	---
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeər/
Better	/'bed.ə/
Address	/ə'dres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'heɪtɪd/
Class	/klɑ:s/

Table 7: Pronunciation of Student C

Student C was a 14-year-old girl. She started studying English when she was 6 years old. The only time she hears or speaks English is during English lessons in school, otherwise she watches and reads everything in Czech.

There were some mistakes Student C made and she also confessed she did not know the meaning of some of the words (advertisement, laugh, mobile).

I was able to analyse most of the words, but some of them were too mispronounced to be analysed.

Student C did not know anything about the differences of pronunciation, and this was her first time experiencing something like that.

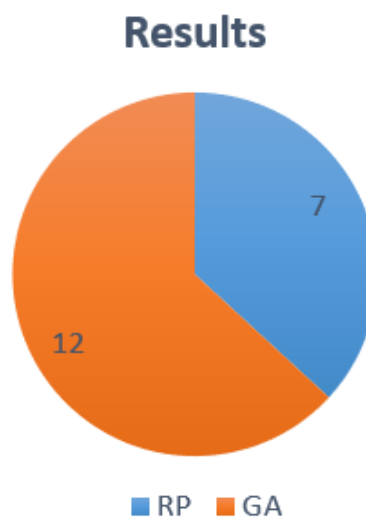


Figure 5: Results of Student C

Student D

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'meɪtəʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəmin/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	/gə'rɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:tə/
Bath	/bɑ:θ/
Advertisement	---
Either	/'aɪðə/
Laugh	/lɑ:f/
Were	/wɜ:z/
Can't	/kænt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeər/
Better	/'bet.ə/
Address	/ə'dres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'heɪtɪd/
Class	/kla:s/

Table 8: Pronunciation of Student D

Student D was a 14-year-old boy. He started learning English when he was 5 years old. Student D spends a lot of time playing computer games with his friends, some of whom are English native speakers, he also watches a lot of movies in English but with Czech subtitles.

Student D was unable to pronounce one word (advertisement). The rest of the words were pronounced without any big problems and he seemed to be familiar with most of them.

Student D was, due to his friends abroad, already familiar with different pronunciation and was aware, that there may be some big differences.

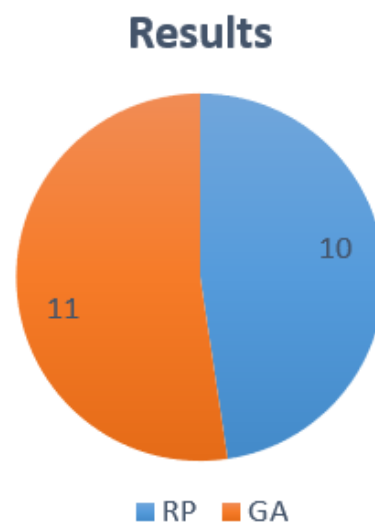


Figure 6: Results of Student D

Student E

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'meɪtəʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəmn/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	/gə'rɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:də/
Bath	/bɑ:θ/
Advertisement	---
Either	/'i:ðər/
Laugh	---
Were	/wɜ:/
Can't	/kɑ:nt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeər/
Better	/'bed.ə/
Address	/ə'dres/
Writing	/'raɪdɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'heɪdɪd/
Class	/klɑ:s/

Table 9: Pronunciation of Student E

Student E was a 13-year-old girl. She started learning English when she was 6 years old. Student E does not spend a lot of time listening or speaking in English, besides English lessons, she mostly just does her homework and nothing else.

Student E struggled with two words (advertisement and laugh). Due to wrong pronunciation of those two words, I was unable to analyse them. She seemed to be familiar with the rest of them.

Student E had no knowledge about different types of pronunciation, and she never really thought about it.

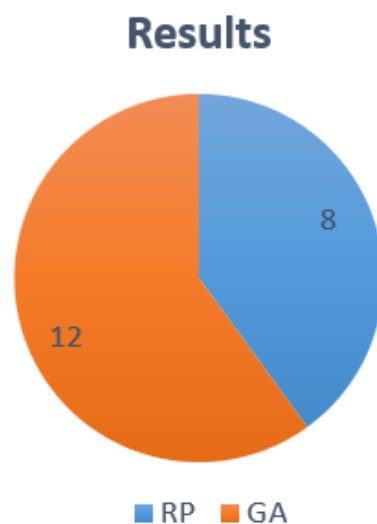


Figure 7: Results of Student E

Student F

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'meɪtəʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəmiːn/
Zebra	/'zebrə/
Garage	/'gærɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:də/
Bath	/bɑ:θ/
Advertisement	/əd'vɜ:tɪsmənt/
Either	/'aɪðə/
Laugh	/lɑ:f/
Were	/wɜ:ɪ/
Can't	/kænt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeə/
Better	/'bed.ə/
Address	/ə'dres/
Writing	/'raɪdɪŋ/
Civilization	/'sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'heɪtɪd/
Class	/klɑ:s/

Table 10: Pronunciation of Student F

Student F was a 15-year-old boy. He started learning English when he was 6 years old. His main source of English comes from TV series (such as Friends and The Simpsons), which he always watches with Czech subtitles, and computer games, where he does not speak to any foreign friends.

Student F struggled with only one word (advertisement), but his pronunciation of this word came close to RP. He seemed to be familiar with all the other words.

Student F was aware of different pronunciations, but he never paid any attention to it.

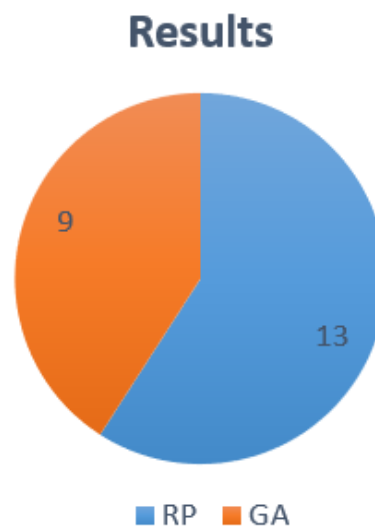


Figure 8: Results of Student F

Student G

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'meɪtəʊ/
Vitamin	/'vaɪtəˌmɪn/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	/gə'rɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:də/
Bath	/bɑ:θ/
Advertisement	/əd'vɜ:tɪsmənt/
Either	/'i:ðər/
Laugh	/lɑ:f/
Were	/wɜ:ɪ/
Can't	/kɑ:nt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeər/
Better	/'bet.ə/
Address	/ə'dres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'heɪtɪd/
Class	/klɑ:s/

Table 11: Pronunciation of Student G

Student G was a 12-year-old boy. He started learning English when he was only 4 years old. Student G plays a lot of online computer games, where he talks a lot to his foreign friends, one of them is from United Kingdom. He also watches a lot of movies in English but only with Czech subtitles.

Student G read most of the words quite correctly, especially for a student of his age. One word (advertisement) gave him a bit of a trouble, but he managed to pronounce it okay.

Because he is talking daily to his foreign friends, he was aware of different pronunciations and accents, but he never paid any attention to his own pronunciation.

Results

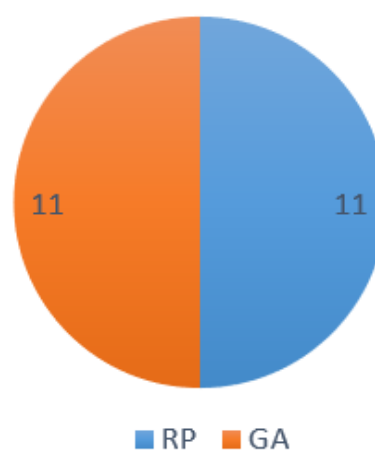


Figure 9: Results of Student G

Student H

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'mɑ:təʊ/
Vitamin	/'vitəmin/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	/gə'rɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:tə/
Bath	/bæθ/
Advertisement	---
Either	/'aɪðə/
Laugh	---
Were	/wɜ:ɪ/
Can't	/kænt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeə/
Better	/'bed.ə/
Address	/'ædres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	---
Class	/klæs/

Table 12: Pronunciation of Student H

Student H was a 13-year-old boy. He started learning English when he was 6 years old. His main source of English comes from school, other than that, he does not listen English nor he speaks English.

Student H struggled with couple of words (advertisement, laugh, hated). I was unable to analyse pronunciations of those words, due to his mispronunciation.

Student H had no knowledge about different pronunciation. He also never thought about his or others accent, and this was his first time experiencing something like that.

Although, he never paid any attention to pronunciations, he said that this research intrigued him.

Results

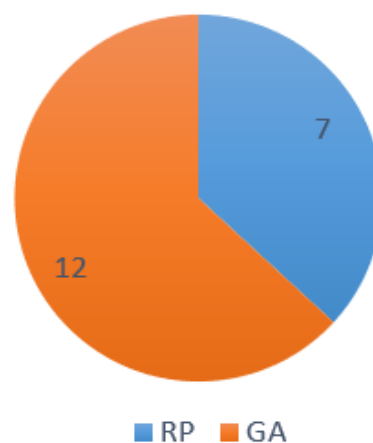


Figure 10: Results of Student H

Student I

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'meɪtəʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəmin/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	/gə'rɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:də/
Bath	/bɑ:θ/
Advertisement	---
Either	/'i:ðər/
Laugh	---
Were	/wɜ:ɪ/
Can't	/kɑ:nt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeər/
Better	/'bed.ə/
Address	/ə'dres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'heɪtɪd/
Class	/klɑ:s/

Table 13: Pronunciation of student I

Student I was a 12-year-old boy. He started learning English when he was 6 years old. Student I spends a lot of time watching TV series and movies in English, mostly with Czech subtitles but he also tries to challenge himself with English subtitles ones in a while.

Student I was unable to pronounce one word (advertisement) and he mispronounced one as well (laugh).

Student I was aware that there are a lot of different accents and pronunciations, but he never paid any attention to his own pronunciation. He finds this research very interesting.

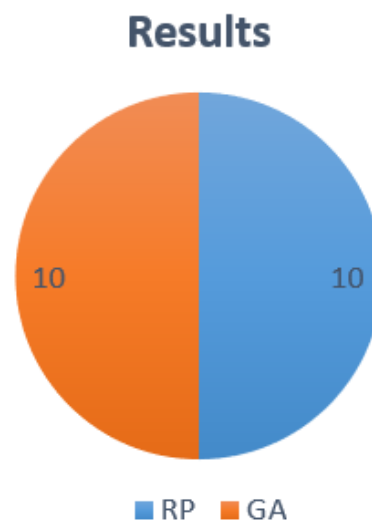


Figure 11: Results of Student I

Student J

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'mɑ:təʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəmin/
Zebra	/'zebrə/
Garage	/gə'rɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:tə/
Bath	/bɑ:θ/
Advertisement	/əd'vɜ:tismənt/
Either	/'aɪðə/
Laugh	---
Were	/wɜ:/
Can't	/kænt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeə/
Better	/'bed.ə/
Address	/ə'dres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'heɪtɪd/
Class	/klɑ:s/

Table 14: Pronunciation of Student J

Student J was a 13-year-old boy. He started studying English when he was 6 years old. He plays computer games, where he reads instructions in English, but he does not speak to anyone. He also watches a lot of movies in English but always with Czech subtitles.

Student J was unable to pronounce one word (laugh), but other words were pronounced quite well.

Student J was unaware of the differences between pronunciations and did not seem interested in the topic.

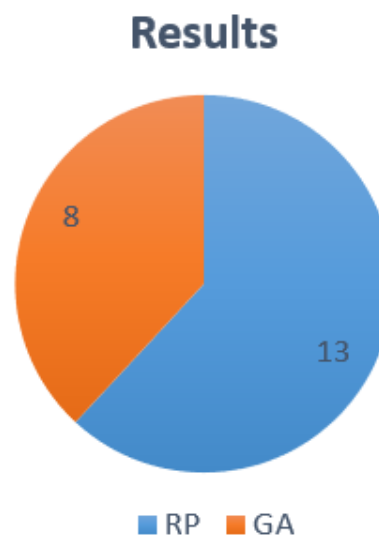


Figure 12: Results of Student J

Student K

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'meɪtəʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəmin/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	/'gærɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɔ:tə/
Bath	/bɑ:θ/
Advertisement	/əd'vɜ:tɪsmənt/
Either	/'aɪðə/
Laugh	/lɑ:f/
Were	/wɜ:ɪ/
Can't	/kænt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeər/
Better	/'bed.ə/
Address	/ə'dres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'heɪdɪd/
Class	/klɑ:s/

Table 15: Pronunciation of Student K

Student K was a 12-year-old boy. He started learning English when he was 7 years old. His main source of English is from computer games, where he does not speak, but reads everything in English and he also watches a lot of TV series (such as How I Met Your Mother and The Big Bang Theory).

Student K was unable to pronounce one word (advertisement) and he mispronounced one word (either). He seemed to be familiar with the rest of the words.

Student K was aware that there are many different accents and pronunciations, but since he does not talk a lot in English, he never paid any attention to his own pronunciation.

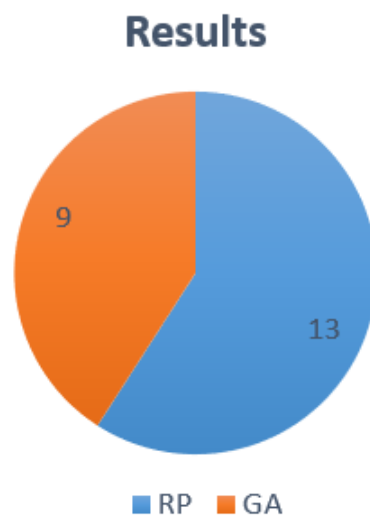


Figure 13: Results of Student K

Student L

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'meɪtəʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəmɪn/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	/gə'rɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:də/
Bath	/bɑ:θ/
Advertisement	/əd'vɜ:tɪsmənt/
Either	/'aɪðə/
Laugh	/lɑ:f/
Were	/wɜ:ɪ/
Can't	/kænt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeər/
Better	/'bed.ə/
Address	/ə'dres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	---
Hated	/'heɪtɪd/
Class	/klɑ:s/

Table 16: Pronunciation of Student L

Student L was a 12-year-old girl. She started learning English when she was 5 years old. Student L has a family in England which she sees every year at least once. She also watches a lot of movies and TV series in English and sometimes with English subtitles.

Student L pronounced most of the words quite well but mispronounced one (civilization). Due to her mispronunciation, I was unable to analyse her pronunciation of this word.

Student L had some knowledge about the differences between two pronunciations (mostly because of her family in England), but she never really paid any attention to her own pronunciation.

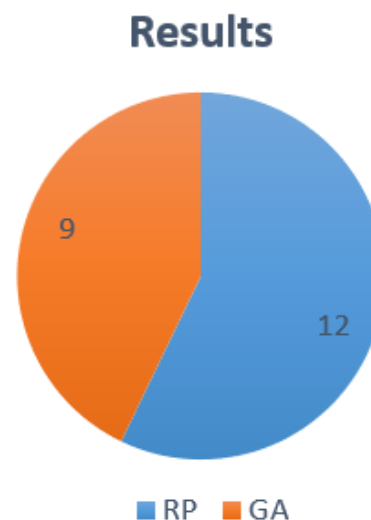


Figure 14: Results of Student L

Student M

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'meɪtəʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəmin/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	/gə'rɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:tə-/
Bath	/bɑ:θ/
Advertisement	---
Either	/'i:ðər/
Laugh	---
Were	/wə/
Can't	/kænt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeər/
Better	---
Address	/ə'dres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'heɪtɪd/
Class	/klɑ:s/

Table 17: Pronunciation of Student M

Student M was a 13-year-old boy. He started studying English when he was 7 years old. His main source of English comes from movies and TV series (such as Friends and Modern Family). He does not speak or listen any English other than that.

Student M was unable to pronounce a few words (advertisement, laugh, better). Other than those three words I was able to analyse to which pronunciation he came closer in the rest of them.

Student M had no knowledge about the different pronunciations, and he never thought much about his own pronunciation.

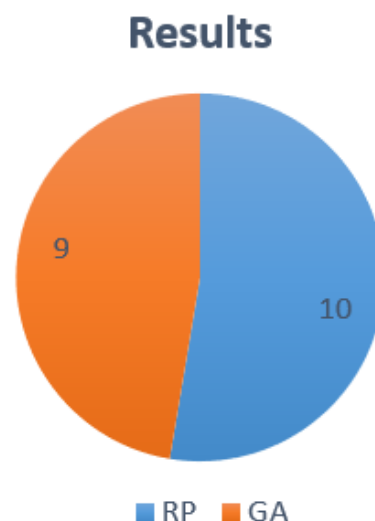


Figure 15: Results of Student M

Student N

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'meɪtəʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəmin/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	/gə'rɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:də/
Bath	/bæθ/
Advertisement	---
Either	---
Laugh	---
Were	/wɜ:/:/
Can't	/kænt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeər/
Better	/'bed.ə/
Address	/ə'dres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'hertɪd/
Class	/klɑ:s/

Table 18: Pronunciation of Student N

Student N was a 12-year-old boy. He started learning English when he was 6 years old. Student N plays a lot of online computer games, but he rarely speaks to any of his friends. Mostly, he is just texting them. He also watches movies in English, but always with Czech subtitles.

Student N misread couple of words (advertisement, either, laugh), so I was unable to analyse them. The rest of the words were read quite well.

Student N was not aware of any pronunciation differences, but he found this research quite interesting.

Results

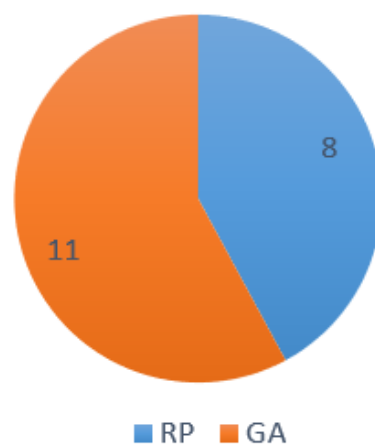


Figure 16: Results of Student N

Student O

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'mɑ:təʊ/
Vitamin	/'vɪtəmin/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	/'gærɑ:ʒ/
Water	/'wɑ:tə/
Bath	/bɑ:θ/
Advertisement	/əd'vɜ:tɪsmənt/
Either	---
Laugh	---
Were	/wə/
Can't	/kænt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeər/
Better	/'bet.ə/
Address	/ə'dres/
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	---
Hated	/'hertɪd/
Class	/klɑ:s/

Table 19: Pronunciation of Student O

Student O was a 13-year-old girl. She started studying English when she was 6 years old. Student O watched a lot of movies and TV series in English, sometimes she tries English subtitles, but she finds it hard.

Student O pronounced most of the words correctly, but there were a few words pronounced wrong (either, laugh, civilization), so these three words I was unable to analyse.

Student O watches a lot of British TV sitcoms (such as *The Office* and *Red Dwarf*) and she also watches a lot of American TV series (such as *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother*), so she was aware of the differences between pronunciations. Although, she never paid attention to her own pronunciation.

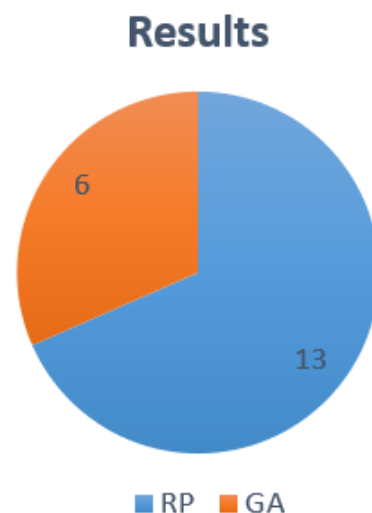


Figure 17: Results of Student O

Student P

Words	Student's pronunciation
Aunt	/ɑ:nt/
Tomato	/tə'meɪtəʊ/
Vitamin	/'vaɪtəmm/
Zebra	/'zi:brə/
Garage	---
Water	/'wɔ:tə/
Bath	/bɑ:θ/
Advertisement	---
Either	---
Laugh	/lɑ:f/
Were	---
Can't	/kænt/
Mobile	/'məʊbaɪl/
Hard	/hɑ:rd/
Ask	/ɑ:sk/
Chair	/tʃeər/
Better	/'bet.ə/
Address	---
Writing	/'raɪtɪŋ/
Civilization	/,sɪvələ'zeɪʃən/
Hated	/'heitɪd/
Class	/kla:s/

Table 20: Pronunciation of Student P

Student P was a 12-year-old boy. He started learning English when he was 5 years old. His main source of English comes from computer games, where he chats a lot with his friends. He also watches some American TV series (such as The Big Bang Theory).

Student P has a speaking disorder, so it was sometimes hard to analyse his pronunciation. However, he managed to pronounce most of the words quite correctly.

Student P was aware of multiple accents and pronunciations, but he never paid any attention to his own pronunciation.

Results

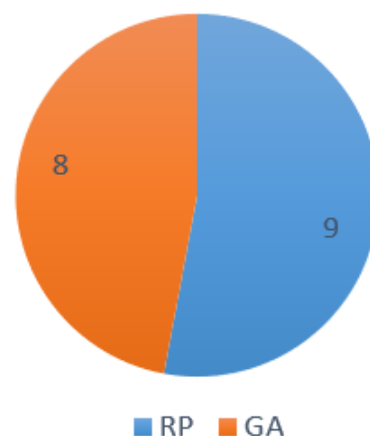


Figure 18: Results of Student P

7. Discussion of the results

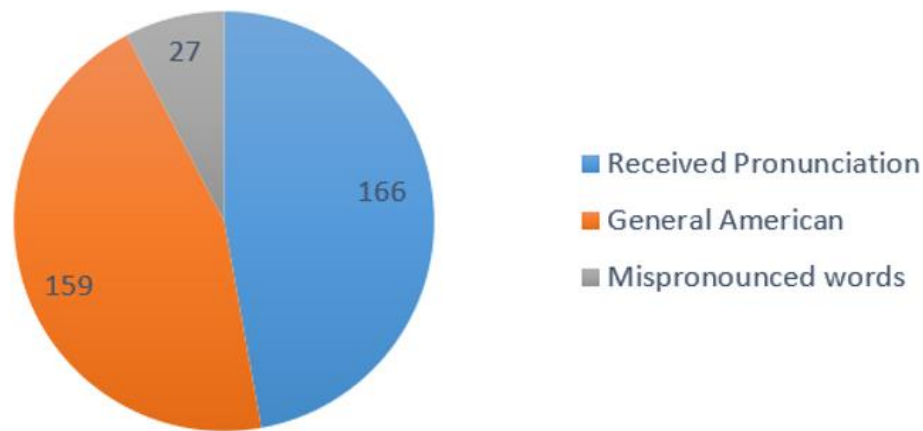


Figure 19: Graph of overall results

In the whole research, there were supposed to be 352 pronunciations of words from 16 students (5 girls and 11 boys). From the 352 pronunciations, 166 words were pronounced closer to Received Pronunciation, 159 were pronounced closer to General America and 27 were mispronounced or not read at all.

From the 27 mispronunciations, 8 were of the word laugh, 7 of the word advertisement, 4 of the word either, 2 of the word civilization and 1 mispronunciation of words hated, address, were, garage, mobile and better.

Surprisingly, the most mispronounced was a word laugh, even though all the students knew the meaning. Most of them pronounced it as /laʊg/ instead of /lɑ:f/ or /læf/.

The biggest struggle though, seemed to be the word advertisement. A lot of the participants did not know the meaning of this words, even though they sometimes pronounced it correctly. In hindsight, I should have used a different (easier) word.

None of the students turned out to be 100% consistent with their pronunciation, which was not surprising for students of their age. What did surprise me though, was that a lot of the students were aware of many different accents and pronunciations and some of them were even able to name some.

From a brief conversation with their teacher, it was clear, that the students are

being taught to use RP. However, almost 50% of the pronounced words were pronounced closer to GA. The influence of television is clear here, since a lot of students admitted, that they are watching a lot of American television and only one of them was able to name a few British TV series that she watched.

From my perspective, the results were not that surprising. It was expected of the students of their age not to be consistent in their pronunciation all the time, but I believe it is more than appropriate to teach them that there is more than one version of saying a certain word and that they are likely to come across different accents from different parts of the world.

It is also my belief, that it is preposterous that the students are not taught more about pronunciation. Many of them had some knowledge of about it, but not from the school. The schools focus on grammar and vocabulary, but pronunciation is given very little attention.

In the school where this research was conducted, lessons with native speakers are being taught as well, which is a huge advantage for the students, and I believe more schools should be taking this approach of teaching English. The teacher is from the United Kingdom, which is convenient because it is much more probable that students are going to visit the UK someday, since it is much closer to Czech Republic than the United States. The school also makes it possible for its students to visit London as a part of a school trip every two years.

The research also shows that most of the students watch their favourite TV shows in the original language, which can help them improve in their pronunciation and in their English in general.

8. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to find out if the students in the secondary class (i.e., 12-15 years old students) are consistent in their pronunciation and if they are even aware of accents and different pronunciations. Rather than conducting a simple questionnaire, the plan was to visit an elementary school in person and have some of the students from secondary class to read the list of words with different pronunciation in RP and GA. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, the research took place online, which turned out to be even more convenient.

Before reading the words, students were asked a few questions to find out about their interest in English. This showed that a lot of the students are in contact with English, whether it is by watching a movie or playing a computer game.

While reading the words, the students showed good knowledge of the words, yet struggled with some of them. None of the students read the words with a 100% consistency, which was expected, since they have been studying English for only a couple of years. The pronunciations were almost equal, with 51% being pronounced closer to Received Pronunciation and 49% closer to General American.

Although, many of the participants were aware of existence of many different accent and pronunciations, none of them paid any attention to their own pronunciation.

Overall, the research can be considered successful since we very clearly found out if the students are consistent, aware of their own pronunciation and if they pay any attention to it. But it is more than clear, that we should change our approach of teaching English and pay more attention to accents and pronunciation models.

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