PART I: AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION AND INTONATION

READING

a. Read the article ‘Has the Queen become frightfully common?’ and answer the questions.

1. Why has the Queen changed her accent?
2. What is the current accent spoken by younger people?

HAS THE QUEEN BECOME FRIGHTFULLY COMMON? By David Robson

The cut-glass accent of the aristocracy is losing some of its polish – a change that reflects some fundamental changes in British society.


1. If the Queen’s governess were still alive today, she may have noticed a few discordant notes in her charge’s formerly crystal clear diction. OK, she ain’ exactly droppin’ her Ts and her Gs, but linguists have nevertheless found that her enunciation today might have been considered a little, well, common in her youth. Her Majesty is by no means alone in this. The cut-glass accent of the upper class – the soundtrack to period dramas like Downton Abbey and Upstairs, Downstairs – has become a little rough around the edges over the last few decades, as more and more people adopt a kind of aristo-cockney hybrid.

2. Decrying the fall of the aristocratic accent may seem like a symptom of the peculiarly British obsession with class, but the fact that even the Queen no longer speaks the “Queen’s English” of days gone by offers us a fascinating insight into the forces that shape our voices. It was the increasing popularity of boarding schools that began to change the way the elite spoke, Robinson says, as they began to promote an accent that more closely resembled the sounds of the South East of England (where many of the schools and universities were based). Soon, the accent itself became a marker of class and power, an association that only became exacerbated when the BBC adopted this so-called “Received Pronunciation” for its first broadcasts (you can watch an example below). “It was a voice that everyone in the UK and across the world associated with authority,” says Robinson.

WATCH THE VIDEO: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bn6Sk5_iJA

3. By the middle of the 20th Century, the class system itself had become a little more fluid; now, accent was one of the few ways to mark out those who had inherited their wealth from those who had earned it. Perhaps it was only a matter of time before that linguistic divide would begin to close too. As more and more people of working class background have begun to occupy positions of power – some characteristics of more regional southern English accents have started to creep into the crystal tones of Received Pronunciation. “There are now those who speak a more modern form that verges on ‘estuary’ English, which is a mixture of RP and cockney,” says Jonathan Harrington at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. In the past, for instance, RP speakers may have said “poor” and “moor” with a diphthong – a combination of two vowel sounds – so that it sounds something like “poo-uh”; today, they are more likely to pronounce the words so that they sound identical to “paw” and “maw”. Conversely, the Ys at the end of words like “really” and “very” have become longer, and less clipped than in the past (when they sounded closer to the E in “pet”). Similarly, the As in “the cat sat on the mat” were once produced with a smaller mouth opening on the vowel, so it was pronounced something like “the ket set on the met”. Some younger speakers may even use glottal stops in place of the Ts in phrases such as “it is” or “that is”.

4. As a sign of just how prevalent this is, Robinson points out that even Princes William and Harry can be heard talking this contemporary RP that is verging on “Estuary English”. Indeed, at the time of the Royal Wedding, Robinson noticed that Kate spoke with a slightly more polished, conservative RP accent than her husband –
perhaps an ironic consequence of the snobbery surrounding her lowlier origins, and her nerves at appearing on public display. If you watch the clip below you may see what he means.

WATCH THE VIDEO: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4ReE9G1MhM

5. It's not so surprising that younger people might adopt some of the tones they hear on the streets – perhaps as a reaction against their upbringing. You may not, however, expect to find the same traces in an 89-year-old monarch. Yet Harrington’s studies have shown that even the Queen’s accent has subtly shifted to a more standard, “middle class” Southern English accent over the decades. Where she once said the word “lost” with the same vowel sound as “law”, it is now closer to the more common sound you may hear when Londoner Adele sings “I ain’t lost, just wandering”; family is no longer pronounced “femileh”.

WATCH THE VIDEO (1958): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBRP-o6Q85s

WATCH THE VIDEO (2015): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyb-TwS8J4

Just listen and you might be able hear a subtle but noticeable difference. Compare, for instance, how she pronounces “my own family often gather round (or, to approximate the way it sounds to my own working class ear, “my own femileh awften gether rownd”) in the first televised Christmas Broadcast of 1957 with the way that she says “I have been warned I may have Happy Birthday sung to me more than once or twice” in the 2015 Christmas Broadcast. Even the simple phrase “very, Happy Christmas” at the end of the broadcasts reveals a shift with time.

6. Harrington is sceptical that the Queen took some kind of elocution lessons in a conscious effort to sound less upper class. Instead, he thinks an answer comes from some interesting recent psychological studies looking at the art of conversation. Various experiments have found that each time we speak to someone, our accent moves very slightly to match theirs, perhaps an unconscious effort to build rapport. There is also some evidence that it improves your comprehension of what they are saying.

b. Note down the main ideas and supporting evidence for paragraphs 1-6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paragraph</th>
<th>Main idea</th>
<th>Supporting evidence</th>
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c. Read the text again, mark the True/False sentences and correct the False ones.

1. Ts and Gs dropping is considered a common trait of current enunciation in English.

2. The upper class still adopts the cut-glass accent of dramas like Downton Abbey and Upstairs, Downstairs.

3. The aristocratic accent is currently fading.

4. The spread of boarding schools and universities in the South East of England had no effect on the elite’s accent.

5. The accent began to convey some connotations of class and power.

6. Received Pronunciation has maintained its crystal tones against regional southern English accents.

7. ‘Estuary’ English, which is a mixture of RP and cockney, is particularly spoken by the young aristocracy.
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8. Kate Middleton adopts a more conservative Received Pronunciation accent than Prince William.

9. Young speakers tend to acquire a RP accent to be distinct from other common people on the streets.

10. Recent psychological studies have found that speakers’ accents change during conversation to match their interlocutors'.

LANGUAGE REVISION

d. Verb tenses – Fill in the following table with examples from paragraphs 1-3, then complete the rules in e.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple Present</th>
<th>Simple Past</th>
<th>Pres./Past Continuous</th>
<th>Future</th>
<th>Conditional</th>
<th>Present Perfect</th>
<th>Past Perfect</th>
<th>-ing/to Inf.</th>
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e. Complete the following rules on the use of tenses in English.

We use the

1. ________________________to refer to a state or an action that began in the past and has continued until now.

2. ________________________to refer to something that is generally true.

3. ________________________when the verb is part of the subject/object of the sentence.

4. ________________________to express purpose.

5. ________________________for actions in progress now.

6. ________________________after adjectives.

7. ________________________for temporary situations.

8. ________________________after prepositions.

9. ________________________to talk about completed actions and states.

10. ________________________to describe actions that were in progress at a particular moment in the past.

11. ________________________for actions and events that happened before a particular moment in time.

12. ________________________to talk about future possibilities/plans.

13. ________________________to talk about imagined events or states and their consequences.