



THE CHOICE OF RP AS THE TEACHING NORM

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Abstract this article discusses the reasons for choosing Received Pronunciation (RP) as the main teaching norm in English language education. It examines the historical, social, linguistic, and pedagogical factors that have made RP a prestigious and widely accepted pronunciation model. The article highlights the advantages of RP for teaching, its role in international communication, and its importance in providing a consistent standard for learners.

Keywords: Received Pronunciation, teaching norm, phonetics, standard accent, pronunciation model

The choice of RP as the teaching norm

Received Pronunciation (RP) has long been considered one of the most influential and prestigious accents of British English, and it occupies an important place in English language teaching. RP is traditionally associated with educated speakers, historical prestige, and national broadcasting institutions. For many years, it has served as a reference model for learners because of its relative stability, clear phonetic system, and international recognition. The choice of RP as the teaching norm is rooted in both linguistic and socio-cultural factors that support its use in education.

One of the primary reasons RP is chosen as the teaching norm is its historical status as the “standard” accent of England. Unlike regional accents, RP is not tied to a specific geographical area. Instead, it developed as the pronunciation of the British



upper and upper-middle classes and later became associated with formal education and high social status. As a result, RP came to symbolize correctness, refinement, and authority in spoken English. This social prestige contributed to its adoption by institutions, schools, and dictionaries as a neutral and respectable model for learners.

Another important factor is the clarity and stability of RP phonetics. RP has a well-described vowel and consonant system, making it easier to analyze, teach, and standardize. Its sound patterns have been widely documented by linguists, which provides teachers and learners with reliable references. Since RP does not contain strong regional features, it offers learners a pronunciation model that is consistent and predictable. This makes it efficient for academic instruction and practical for learners who aim for an accent that is widely understood.

Furthermore, RP has traditionally been the accent of the BBC and other national broadcasting services. This wide media exposure helped RP become familiar to international audiences. Many English learners around the world are exposed to RP through textbooks, recordings, films, and pronunciation dictionaries. Because RP is recognizable and commonly used in teaching materials, it naturally became the standard in classrooms. Its international intelligibility is one of the key reasons it remains a teaching norm today.

Another significant reason for choosing RP is its usefulness for learners. RP is often considered easier for non-native speakers to perceive and imitate compared to many strong regional accents. Its relatively regular stress patterns, absence of local dialectal vocabulary, and moderate degree of connected speech phenomena contribute to its pedagogical value. RP provides a solid foundation on which learners can build comprehensible, standard English speech.

It is also important to note that RP does not aim to replace or diminish the value of other accents. Today, English is a global language with many varieties, and teachers increasingly recognize the legitimacy of world Englishes. However, a common reference model is still necessary to ensure consistency in teaching. RP serves this purpose effectively because it has historically been codified as a standard and is widely understood by speakers of different English varieties.

The use of RP in teaching also helps learners develop accurate listening comprehension. Since many dictionaries and phonetic transcriptions use RP symbols, knowing RP makes it easier for students to interpret pronunciation guides. Additionally, exposure to RP helps learners recognize standard forms of spoken English and develop more confident communication skills.

In conclusion, the choice of RP as the teaching norm is based on its historical prestige, clear phonetic structure, international recognition, and pedagogical practicality. RP provides learners with a consistent and widely accepted pronunciation model that supports effective communication. While many English accents are equally valid, RP continues to play a central role in education because of its stability, clarity, and traditional status as the standard form of British English. Understanding the significance of RP helps learners appreciate why it remains an essential part of English language teaching.

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