A man's accent has more significance in England than anywhere else in the world. Accent in English society, plays a more important part than it does in any other.

In England the division between RP1 speakers, as we may call them, on the one hand, and educated English people who speak Standard English with some different accent, on the other, is a social one. One either speaks RP, or one does not, and, although some people's speech is strongly influenced by it when they go to a university where it is spoken, if the opportunity to learn it in youth does not arise, it might be difficult to acquire it later in life.

We all have our own opinions as to what is the best pronunciation of English. However regrettable it may be, we should be aware of the fact that, while some kinds of English speech carry a certain prestige, others may prove a positive disadvantage to the user.

RP is undoubtedly a privileged accent in England; one’s social life, as well as one’s career, or both, may be affected by whether one possesses it or not. Moreover, there are some who believe that in all occupations for which an educated person is required, it is an advantage to speak RP, and it may be a disadvantage not to speak it.

Some views on RP maintain that it has intrinsic virtues and that it is the most widely intelligible spoken form of Standard English. However, others consider these views difficult to uphold since, taken objectively as sound, the differences between RP and some of the regional accents are very small.

In the first place, if we restrict our study to the accents to be found in Britain, we are faced with a great diversity of regional accents, to which we react strongly. Thus, the Scot or Northerner may feel that the Londoner’s accent is careless, affected, or even ugly. The Londoner, on the other hand, may associate a Northern accent with bluntness of character, plain—speaking. Although some regional accents seem to be acceptable (Scottish, Irish, West—country English), the local pronunciation of large cities such as Birmingham, Liverpool or Glasgow, is often held to be ugly. In Great Britain, social distinctions of accent are of even greater significance than the regional variations. In any regions there is a hierarchy of distinctions of accent corresponding to the structure of the English society and depending, for instance, on the social environment one belongs to, one’s education and one’s profession.

For those people who have no need to move from their own districts, the regional dialects may be sufficient, but at the present time few people remain all their lives in their native town or village. That language which serves for his own district will not easily serve for a more distant one, and the dialect speaker will find himself at a disadvantage in his travels or in his ambition to improve his position, if he is unable to use any other but his own local form of speech. Furthermore, there are certain types of speech which are considered as belonging to the lower social classes; this obviously sets up class barriers. Therefore, many believe that there is a need for a more uniform pronunciation in order to overcome what is at present one of the few remaining class distinctions.

Abercrombie explains that “... English people are divided, by the way they talk, into three groups; first, RP speakers of Standard English —those without an accent;
second, non-RP speakers of Standard English—those with an accent; and third, dialect speakers. I believe, he adds, “this to be a situation which is not paralleled in any other country anywhere. Everywhere else the division is into speakers of the standard language, and speakers of dialect”. He expresses that the continued existence of this accent-bar, though it no longer reflects social reality, is having a harmful effect on Standard English speech in England. As a consequence of it, we find people who are well educated but have not had an opportunity to learn RP, who become nervous and anxious about their speech-sounds. Lack of confidence in their accent focuses attention on the mechanics of talking, which should be automatic. If we are preoccupied with how we are speaking, the whole of our delivery can be upset with the production of unpleasant voice-quality, and, in addition, this can even perhaps interfere with thinking. It will not be, therefore, until all regional educated accents are genuinely felt in England to be socially equal with RP, that these consequences will vanish. This is in itself a problem to which many have recently drawn attention, but to which no solution has so far been given. Nevertheless, the problem is heavily stressed, and some day a solution will have to be found.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTAS

1. "RP" stands for "Received Pronunciation" or "Accepted Pronunciation".