

C O N T E N T S

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W E S T - O F - E N G L A N D A C C E N T

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1. INTRODUCTION

This module consists of this Description and a set of computerised listening exercises: it teaches you the characteristic sounds of the West-of-England accent. This accent is used west of a line running from Bristol to Portsmouth.

2. INDIVIDUAL SOUNDS

This section notes the major differences between the West-of-England sounds and those of Standard Southern British English (SSBE). See the separate Language Engine module for Standard Southern British English.

2.1. Consonants

2.1.1. Treatment of ɹ

The West-of-England accent is *rhotic* - *r* is pronounced wherever it occurs in the spelling. The sound used is a retroflex approximant.

When *r* follows a vowel it coalesces with it, forming a long, *r*-coloured vowel: fɹ:
'ɛvɹ: for ever.

Words that end in unstressed ə or əʊ in SSBE are often pronounced with a final *r* in a West-of-England accent: 'kɒmɹ: comma, 'jɛlɹ: yellow.

2.1.2. Syllabic consonants

a. *n* and *l* are much more consistently syllabic than they are in SSBE. 'lɪʔl
little.

b. *m* is not normally syllabic in SSBE. In the West-of-England accent, however, *m* is syllabic after *p* *b*, e.g. in o:pɪm *open*.

2.1.3. Treatment of t

t is often a tap when it comes at the end of a stressed syllable: 'dɒ:ɾɹ:
daughter. It can also be a glottal stop: 'lɪʔl *little*.

2.2. Vowels

a. A notable feature of the West-of-England accent is that stressed vowels can be long (sometimes almost two syllables), while unstressed vowels can be short. This undermines the SSBE distinction between phonologically long and phonologically short vowels. So the vowel of 'face', for example, which is long in SSBE, could be long in some contexts and short in others in a West-of-England accent.

b. There is a tendency in SSBE for unstressed *ɪ* to become ə (e.g. 'tʃætɪd *chatted* becomes 'tʃætəd, indistinguishable from *chattered*. In a West-of-England accent this tendency is much more dominant: əŋ'kləɪnd *inclined*.

c. The SSBE diphthongs eɪ (as in *face*) and əʊ (as in *goat*) are monophthongs in West-of-England: fe:s, go:t.

d. In a West-of-England accent, the vowel of 'strut' is pronounced higher and further forward in the mouth than in SSBE: stɹʊt.

3. SOUNDS IN FLUENT SPEECH

3.1. Mouth position

All languages have a characteristic position of the mouth, a way of holding the vocal organs that colours the overall sound. In a West-of-England accent, activity is concentrated in the front of the mouth, with vigorous movements of the lips, especially in rounded vowels. Little use is made of the back of the mouth, especially the lower part. The jaw is typically held in an almost closed position.

3.2. Rhythm

West-of-England, like SSBE, makes a strong contrast between stressed and unstressed syllables. It has a 'stress-timed' rhythm, which means that the intervals of time between stresses are approximately equal, irrespective of the number of syllables spoken during each interval. Some syllables are therefore considerably drawn out, while others are very short, barely articulated. This lengthening of stressed syllables is applied to phonologically short vowels as well as phonologically long vowels (in SSBE it affects only phonologically long vowels).

4. SYMBOLS

This section lists the symbols that are not ordinary letters.

- ' Stress-mark.
Means that the immediately following syllable is stressed. kə'ɹɔ Carew.
- ˌ Syllabic mark.
Means that the sound is pronounced as a separate syllable. 'lɪʔl little, 'o:pɪ open, 'wɛ:t ɪ 'slɪ:pɪ wet 'n' slippy.
- : Length-mark.
Means that the preceding sound is prolonged. ma:d ma-ad, fɹ: 'ɛvɹ: forr everr.
- ˘ Unreleased mark.
Means that the preceding plosive is not released. 'bɹɔ:k ɿ broken.
- ʔ Glottal plosive.
The sound in Cockney bu'er (for butter). 'lɪʔl little.
- tʃ Voiceless post-alveolar affricate.
Like ch in English church. tʃɔɪs choice.
- dʒ Voiced post-alveolar affricate.
Like j, dg in English judge. 'vɛ:ndʒənts vengeance.
- ŋ Voiced velar nasal.
Like ng in English long. ɹɑ:ŋks ranks.
- θ Voiceless interdental fricative.
Like th in English thick. 'θɹɔ through.
- ð Voiced interdental fricative.
Like th in English this. ðeɪ they.
- ʃ Voiceless post-alveolar fricative.
Like sh in English shush. ʃi she.
- ɹ Voiced retroflex central approximant.
Like an American 'hard r', with the tongue squeezed into the back of the mouth. The r sound used by pantomime pirates and people pretending to come from the West of England! 'ma:ɹbl marble.
- j Voiced palatal approximant.
Like y in English yoyo. 'jɛlo: yellow.

5. GLOSSARY

Affricate: a plosive followed immediately by a fricative at the same point of articulation, the two sounds coming so close together that they sound like one sound.

Alveolum: the bony ridge behind the upper front teeth.

Approximant: the articulators, by shaping the air-stream through the mouth, create

