



A contrastive analysis of southern welsh and cockney accents

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Abstract

This study is concerned with comparing the pronunciation in Southern Welsh, a Celtic language, and Cockney, an English dialect, regarding the place of articulation. The study uses a comparative method to shed light on the similarities and differences between the two accents. The data were collected from YouTube videos of speakers of Southern Welsh and Cockney and the consonant sound systems were analysed and compared. This study answers two main research questions: Do Southern Welsh and Cockney accents have the same consonants? What are the phonological differences between Southern Welsh and Cockney regarding place of articulation? The findings show that there are some phonological differences between Southern Welsh and Cockney in terms of bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar, lateral, palatal, velar, and uvular sounds. However, they are similar in terms of post-alveolar and glottal sounds. Awareness of these phonological differences is important for EFL learners to develop strong competencies in dealing with these accents which are gaining an increasing popularity due to the unprecedented spread of social media networks and applications.

Keywords: accent; Cockney; place of articulation; phonological differences; Welsh

1. Introduction

There are many different accents in the United Kingdom (UK), such as Received Pronunciation, Estuary English, Cockney, Geordie, and so on. There are also different languages, such as Scottish Gaelic and Welsh, as well as numerous dialects, which again have their own accents (Hughes, Trudgill, & Watt, 2012; Wells, 1982). The term accent is used to describe aspects of pronunciation that determine the social and regional background of a speaker (Hall & Hastings, 2017). In other words, it refers to the pronunciation, stress, and intonation of a language (Iden, 2012). There can be both phonetic and phonological differences between accents. One of the first things we notice about people is their accent, which is closely linked to their identity. Their accent helps identify the region and social class to which they belong, and their age. Nowadays, we are increasingly exposed to different accents and dialects through the Internet and social media, for example YouTube (Miller, 2016).

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Recently, different regional accents and dialects have come to use globally due to the unprecedented development of social media networks and applications, which have given users the opportunity to address millions of people around the world with no linguistic restrictions. Today, regional accents and dialects of English are very frequently used in social media networks and applications. It is important thus to identify the phonological properties of regional accents, which can represent linguistic hindrance for language competence. In this regard, this study is concerned with exploring the phonological properties of Celtic and Cockney, as well as identifying their similarities and differences. The rationale is that it is still difficult for many EFL learners and even some native speakers of English to identify the speakers of Celtic and Cockney by accent.

1.1. Overview of the Southern Welsh accent

Welsh is one of the surviving Celtic languages and affects the several varieties of accent in Wales (Oppenheimer, 2012). There are four, main traditional Welsh dialects spoken in the different parts of Wales. Y Ddyfedeg is spoken in Dyfed and Y Wenhwysseg in Gwent in the south, and Venedotian is spoken in Gwynedd and Powysian in Powys in the North. Welsh dialects have witnessed many changes over the decades, beginning from the 16th century, in terms of their syntactic structure, grammatical system, and phonological features (Thomas, 1973). For a long time, little was known about Welsh dialects due to a lack of written records, but has since been documented with the emergence of papers. Welsh was commonly spoken in urban areas only; however, it was introduced as a compulsory subject in schools, which led to an increase in the base of Welsh speakers also in rural areas (Davies, 2014). Welsh is broadly divided into two main accents – Southern and Northern. Notably, the features of the Southern Welsh accent include losing the final syllable, stress shift, and other phonetic aspects (Paulasto, Penhallurick, & Jones, 2020).

1.2. Overview of the Cockney accent

The term “Cockney” comes from the word cockeney, which originally meant a small or odd egg and was used as an expression for something strange (Lieberman, Hoptman, & Carlson, 2010). It is very difficult to identify the precise region of London where the Cockney accent originated, but it is known as the traditional working-class dialect of London. The Cockney accent differs from Standard English, for example using stigmatized negative forms. Modern Cockney English includes t-glottaling, h-dropping, and th-fronting. It also has vocalized /l/ to /iw/. For many years, the Cockney accent was used in entertainment media for comedy purposes, a typical example being the famous Eliza Doolittle in Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Cockney is also distinguished as a dialect spoken in several East London boroughs, such as Southwark, Bermondsey, Walworth, and so on (Trudgill & Trudgill, 1984). The term “Mockney” is used to describe the variety of Cockney spoken by people who are not from the East End of London, and it is characterized by articulating the diphthong [eɪ]. Years ago, the Cockney dialect was spoken more than it is now, but the Cockney accent continues to be spoken today and it is a fascinating accent to explore and study in phonetics.

1.3. Research questions

This study aims to answer the following questions: Do Cockney and Southern Welsh accents have the same consonants? What are the phonological differences between Southern Welsh and Cockney accents regarding the place of articulation? To answer these questions, this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a review of the existing literature on the Southern Welsh and Cockney accents. Section 3 sets out the methodology and the data used in the study. Section 4 presents the

analysis and discusses the phonological differences between the two accents regarding place of articulation. Section 5 concludes.

2. Literature Review

Many studies have been conducted to investigate differences between accents in British English and have focused on a variety of accents, such as Cockney, Welsh, Received Pronunciation, and Estuary English, demonstrating the great diversity in the way English is pronounced in different regions of the UK (Ferragne & Pellegrino, 2010; Gordon, 2004; Grice, Ladd, & Arvaniti, 2002; Gussenhoven, 2008).

Orelus (2020), in his article *“Other People’s English Accents Matter: Challenging Standard English Accent Hegemony”*, discusses the ways in which linguistic minorities experience various forms of accent discrimination across the dimensions of ethnicity, race, social class, language, gender, and nationality in American schools and other institutions. As pointed out by Lippi-Green (2012), accent discrimination is a form of systemic linguistic oppression that affects the day-to-day lives of minoritized groups, including African Americans and bilingual and multilingual speakers whose accents do not meet the definition of Standard American English. This article emphasizes the huge impact of accent discrimination on minorities across language, race, ethnicity, social class, nationality, and gender. Also, it shows that people who speak English “with an accent” are often denied opportunities related to employment, housing, and job promotions.

Podhovnik (2010), in his paper *“Age and Accent – Changes in A Southern Welsh English Accent”*, presents the accent of Neath (South Wales) from a socio-dialectological perspective. He describes changes in the accent which are due to the non-linguistic factor of age. Also, he discusses the social variable of age and shows the extent to which it has an influence on people’s accent in Neath. The data were analyzed statistically to show correlations between age and linguistic variants. Podhovnik finds that age is the most influential non-linguistic factor affecting the Neath accent, with some variants becoming more common while others are being used less. There is continuous change with age. To sum up, it is clear that age plays an essential role in one’s accent changing.

In *English Phonetics and Phonology*, Roach (2009) sheds light on English phonology and phonetics, the theoretical context of speech sounds, and the ways they are used in language. In addition, the book provides a detailed analytic description of the production of speech sounds (place of articulation). According to Roach, one needs to be familiar with the study of articulatory phonetics to understand how the sounds of English are pronounced. Articulatory phonetics is known as the study of the different parts of the vocal tract and helps to identify the place of articulation as identified in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) chart (Gick, Wilson, & Derrick, 2012).

As noted by Hannahs (2013), in his book *The Phonology of Welsh*, Welsh English can be divided into two dialects – Northern and Southern – spoken in British communities in particular. He points out that there are many differences between these two dialects, ranging from syntactic variation to phonetic variation. He also points to the differences between the Northern Welsh and Southern Welsh accents being based on certain criteria, including the occurrence of a certain sound in one not being found in the other, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. A representative consonant inventory of northern Welsh (Hannahs, 2013, p. 21)

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Lateral	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
Stop	p b			t d				k g		
Nasal	m			n				ŋ		
Affricate						tʃ dʒ				
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s	l	ʃ		χ		h
Liquid				r ^h r	l					
Glide	w						j	w		

Table 2. A representative consonant inventory of northern Welsh (Hannahs, 2013)

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Lateral	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular
Stop	p b			t d				k g	
Nasal	m			n				ŋ	
Affricate						tʃ dʒ			
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	l	ʃ		χ	
Liquid				r	l				
Approximant	w						j	w	

He deals with many topics related to the phonology of Welsh, including consonants, vowels, syllabification, stress, assimilation, and so forth. Unlike Hannahs' (2013) work, this study focuses on the speaking of Southern Welsh, comparing it to the Cockney accent in terms of place of articulation.

Czerniak's (2012) dissertation argues that the colloquial variety of Welsh English is not uniform. Initially, he discusses the issue of vowel sounds and how they differ in length between the Southern and Northern Welsh accents, a feature that can be noticed through the stressed syllable. Also, he presents the main features of the consonant sounds and discusses in depth the manner of articulation, including fricatives, nasals, and liquids.

Mott (2012) undertook a study of traditional Cockney and popular London speech, with the specific objective of providing a full description of the phonetics and phonology. His paper starts by introducing the history of the Cockney accent, then moves on to discussing the vowels and how they are pronounced based on an analysis of recordings made with three men from London. In addition, he analyses the consonants according to their manner of articulation, as well as offering some significant insights into lexical stress, rhythm, and intonation. Nonetheless, he concludes that little is known as yet about Cockneys' use of consonants in speech. Therefore, this paper focuses on this aspect, making a comparison with the use of consonants in speech among Southern Welsh speakers.

Johansson (2016) provides a socio-linguistic and phonological comparison of three British English accents: Cockney, Estuary English, and Received Pronunciation. He investigated the status of the three accents and looked for the sound features that characterize them in Britain today. Moreover, he used four authentic lectures on YouTube to compare the opinions expressed in them with those in previous research in sociolinguistics. The analysis of phonetic differences shows that although there are some areas of agreement, there are differences in opinions between those in the YouTube clips and previous research due to the nature of overlapping and change in the three accents. However,

Johansson does not provide a comparison of the accents based on places of articulation as in this paper.

Kopřivová (2018) discusses the differences between the Cockney accent and Received Pronunciation (as the Standard English variety) in both theoretical and practical respects. Theoretically, the study addresses the accents' origins and features, changes in them, and their influence on other accents. The practical aspect focuses on six recordings, which provide representations of Received Pronunciation and Cockney, and employs a case study approach to conduct a synchronic and diachronic comparative analysis. However, Kopřivová (2018) does not compare the two accents from a specific perspective, such as the place of articulation, as in our paper.

Despite the many studies that have focused on accents in British English, none has yet focused on the Cockney and Southern Welsh accents. This paper addresses this gap in the literature through exploring the features of the Southern Welsh and Cockney accents regarding their place of articulation.

3. Method

The study adopted a comparative approach to analyze two accents: Southern Welsh and Cockney. The aim was to highlight the sound system differences between the two accents in terms of the place of articulation of consonants. Data were collected from YouTube videos, which facilitated the analysis of phonological sounds between the two accents, a key advantage being accessibility to speech exemplars and the clarity of the sounds produced.

4. Results

The selected videos were analysed in terms of how sounds are articulated in both Welsh and Cockney to identify the similarities and differences between the two accents.

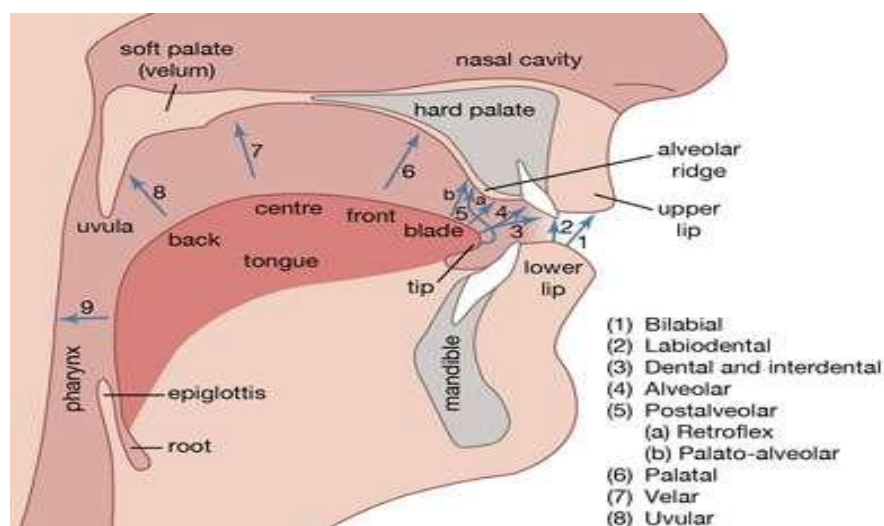


Figure 1. Human vocal organs and points of articulation (Ladefoged, 2014)

Bilabial

Bilabial consonants are the sounds produced when the lips are in contact with each other (Carr, 2012). They include /p/, /b/, /m/, and /w/. Similarly, the Southern Welsh accent has four bilabial

sounds: /p/, /b/, /m/, and /w/. In the Cockney accent, however, while the /b/, /m/, and /w/ sounds are pronounced as they are in Standard English, /p/ can be replaced with a glottal stop.

In Welsh, the /p/ sound is pronounced in words such as “pa” (what) and “twp” (stupid). An example of /b/ is “bach” (small). This sound can come initially and medially, as in “baban” (baby), and finally, as in “bob”. Examples of the /m/ sound are “pump” (five). This sound can come initially, as in “mi” (me), medially, as in “pump” (five), and finally, as in “llym” (strict). Examples of /w/ are “wal” (wall) and “wrth” (by). This sound can come initially, as in “wal”, and medially as in “gwan” (weak). In contrast, in Cockney, /p/ can be replaced with a glottal stop, so “peppa” is pronounced /peʔə/.

Labiodental

Labiodentals are the sounds produced using the upper teeth and the lower lips, such as /m/, /f/, /v/, and /ʋ/ (Knight, 2012). Southern Welsh has two labiodental sounds, /f/ and /v/. When a single f occurs in a word, it is pronounced /v/. However, when double ff occurs in a word, it is pronounced /f/. In Cockney, the /f/ and /v/ labiodentals are pronounced as they are in Standard English. However, /f/ and /v/ are also pronounced instead of /θ/ and /ð/.

Examples of the /f/ sound in Southern Welsh are “ffan” (fan) and “ffa” (bean). The sound /f/ can come initially, as in “ffram” (sash), medially, as in “hoffi” (to like), and finally, as in “craff” (close). Examples of the /v/ sound are “fan” (place) and “braf” (airy). The sound /v/ can come initially, as in “fel” (as), medially, as in “yfed” (to drink), and finally, as in “braf” (airy).

Dental

Dentals are sounds produced when the tongue is touching the front teeth. They include /θ/ and /ð/. In Southern Welsh th is pronounced /θ/ and dd is pronounced /ð/. In contrast, in Cockney, /θ/ and /ð/ are replaced with the labiodentals /f/ and /v/.

In Southern Welsh, examples of /θ/ are “garth” (hill) and “torth” (loaf). The sound /θ/ can appear initially, as in “thus” (thus), medially, as in “bwthyn” (cottage), and finally, as in “math” (kind). Examples of /ð/ are “gardd” (garden) and “baddon” (bath). The sound /ð/ can come initially, as in “ddim” (not), medially, as in “baddon”, and finally, as in “dydd” (day).

In contrast, /ð/ in Cockney, which appears in words like brother, clothes, and leather, is replaced with the labiodental sound /v/, to become /brʌvər/, /kləʊvz/, and /'levər/ respectively. Similarly, /θ/ is replaced with /f/, for instance Thursday is /fɜ:zdeɪ/, thanks is /fæŋks/, and everything is /'evriθɪŋ/.

Alveolar

Alveolar consonants are sounds produced when the tongue is touching the alveolar ridge. They include /t/, /d/, /n/, /r/, /ɹ/, /s/, /z/, and /l/. Southern Welsh has six alveolar sounds: /t/, /d/, /n/, /s/, /z/, and /r/. In Cockney, [r] is pronounced /ah/.

Examples of /t/ in Southern Welsh are “to” (roof) and “tatws” (potatoes). This sound can occur initially, medially, and finally. An example of /d/ is “cyd” (joint). This sound can come initially, as in “drud” (expensive), medially, as in “damder” (to thaw), and finally, as in “cyd”. Examples of /n/ are “nen” (heaven) and “cnoc” (knock). This sound can come initially, as in “nen”, medially, as in “nant” (brook), and finally, as also in “nen”. Examples of /s/ are “si” (rumour), “sws” (sauce), and “sosban” (saucepan). Examples of /z/ are “sw” (zoo) and “mefus” (strawberries). This sound can come initially, as in “sw”, medially, as in “pitsa” (pizza), and finally, as in “mefus”. Examples of /r/ are in initial position, as in “record”, medially, as in “carreg” (stone), and finally, as in “car”.

In Cockney, examples of alveolar sounds include “doctor”, pronounced /doctah/, “stronger”, pronounced /strongah/, and “faster”, pronounced /fastah/.

Lateral

Lateral consonants are produced when the soft palate is raised and air passes along the sides of the tongue, giving /l/ and /l/. Southern Welsh has both, but in Cockney /l/ is pronounced /aʊ/.

In Southern Welsh, examples of /l/ are “lili” (lily) and “pal” (blade). The sound /l/ can appear initially and medially, as in “lili”, and finally, as in “pal”. Examples of /l/ are “lon” (glad), “alan” (outside), and “twl” (hole). So /l/ can come initially, medially, and finally. In Cockney, the pronunciation of /l/ is /aʊ/, as in /haʊ/ (hall), /iaʊ/ (ill), and /fiaʊ/ (Phil).

Post-alveolar

Post-alveolar consonant sounds are produced when the tongue is in contact with an area slightly further back than the alveolar. These include /ʃ/ and /ʒ/. Both Southern Welsh and Cockney have three post-alveolar sounds: /ʃ/, /dʒ/, and /ʒ/.

In Southern Welsh, si is pronounced /ʃ/, as in “sioc” (shock). The sound /ʃ/ can come initially, as in “siarad” (to speak), medially, as in “brwsio” (to brush), and finally, as in “stwnsh”. The consonants t and s together are pronounced /ʃ/, for example “pitsh” (pitch). The sound /ʃ/ comes finally, as in “rtwsh” and “potsh”. An example of /dʒ/ is “dʒam” (jam). This sound can come initially and medially, as in “dʒidʒo” (judge), and finally, as in “gadʒ”. In Cockney, examples of post-alveolar consonants appear in words like judge (/dʒʌdʒ/), garage (/ˈgærɑ:ʒ/), and teacher (/ˈti:tʃər/).

Palatal

Palatals are sounds produced when the tongue is close to the hard palate; they include /c/, /ç/, /ç/, /j/, /ɲ/, /ɲ/, and /j/. Southern Welsh and Cockney have the same palatal consonant /j/, as in “yes”, pronounced the same as in Standard English.

Velar

Velar consonants are produced when the tongue is in contact with the lower part of the palate. They include /k/, /g/, /ŋ/, /x/, /ɣ/, and /ɣ/. Southern Welsh has four velar sounds: /k/, /g/, /ŋ/, and /w/. In Cockney, /k/ can be replaced with a glottal stop, but /g/ and /ŋ/ are pronounced in the same way as in Standard English.

In Southern Welsh, c is pronounced /k/, as in “castan” (chestnut). The sound /k/ can appear initially, as in “cloc” (clock), medially, as in “acen” (accent), and finally, as in “cic” (kick). An example of /g/ is “go” (rather). This sound can come initially, as in “grug” (heather), medially, as in “gogledd” (north), and finally, as in “grug”. An example of /ŋ/ is “ing” (distress). This sound can come either medially, as in “cangen” (branch) or finally, as in “ing”. An example of /w/ is “wal” (wall). This sound can come either initially, as in “wastad” (always), or medially, as in “gwan” (weak).

In Cockney, the word “Sherlock” is pronounced /sherlo/. However, /g/, as in “governor” [ˈgʊvənə], and /ŋ/, as in “thing” [fɪŋ], are pronounced as in Standard English.

Uvular

Uvular consonants are articulated with the back of the tongue against or near the uvula. They include /q/, /G/, /N/, /R/, /χ/, and /ʁ/. Southern Welsh has only one uvular sound /χ/, denoting ch. In contrast, Cockney pronounces /χ/ consonants as in Standard English.

Examples of the /χ/ sound in Southern Welsh are “bach” (corner), “chi” (you), and “cwch” (boat). The sound /χ/ can come initially, as in “chwim” (quick), medially, as in “dychryn” (alarm), and finally, as in “chwech” (six).

Glottal

Glottal consonants are sounds produced without the use of the tongue and other parts in the mouth. They include /ʔ/, /h/, and /ɦ/. Southern Welsh does not have any glottal sounds. However, Cockney does not pronounce the glottal sound /h/ at the beginning of words. For example, Cockney pronounces the words “who”, “house”, and “have” as /u:/, /aʊs/, and /æv/, respectively. Moreover, Cockney /t/ is pronounced as a schwa, so the words “water” and “bottle” are pronounced /'ɔ:tər/ and /'bɒtəl/ respectively.

5. Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to compare between Southern Welsh and Cockney accents regarding place of articulation in order to explore the similarities and differences between these two accents. It was clear that there are significant differences between Southern Welsh and Cockney. In terms of bilabial sounds, it was clear from the examples mentioned above that there is a difference between Southern Welsh and Cockney accents regarding the bilabial sound /p/. In Cockney accent, /p/ sound can be replaced with a glottal stop. Results also show noticeable differences between Southern Welsh and Cockney accents regarding the labiodental sounds /f/ and /v/. In Southern Welsh a single f is pronounced as /v/ sound and double ff is pronounced as /f/ sound. While in Cockney accent /f/ sound is pronounced in place of /θ/ sound and /v/ sound is pronounced in place of /ð/ sound.

Results also indicate that Southern Welsh and Cockney are different in terms of dental, alveolar, lateral, uvular, and glottal sounds. In Cockney accent /θ/ sound is changed with /f/ sound and /ð/ sound is changed with /v/ sound. While in Southern Welsh th is pronounced as /θ/ sound and double dd is pronounced as /ð/ sound. Likewise, in Cockney accent the sounds /t/ and /l/ are replaced with /ah/ and /aʊ/ sounds respectively. However, Southern Welsh and Cockney show great similarities in terms of post-alveolar and glottal sounds. Both have the same post-alveolar sounds. Both also do not have the glottal sound /h/.

The results reported here agree in principle with the previous studies regarding the unique articulatory system of Southern Welsh and Cockney (Collins & Mees, 2013; Iosad, 2017; Ranzato, 2019; Williams, 1985). The differences between the two accents should be considered given the effect of accent differences on comprehension (Ortmeyer & Boyle, 1985). Furthermore, the differences between the two accents have their implications to the sociolinguistic and translation studies.

6. Conclusions

To sum up, Southern Welsh and Cockney are used among different communities in the United Kingdom. This study has focused on the differences and similarities between the two accents based on the place of articulation. The findings of the study show that there are many phonological differences between Southern Welsh and Cockney in this regard, including those between bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar, lateral, palatal, velar, and uvular consonants. However, they share some similarities in terms of post-alveolar and glottal consonant sounds.

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