

Variation in Word and Sentence Pronunciation among British Public Figures

Michelle Putri Al-fitroh^{1*}, Siti Nia Rahma Dani², Salsabila³, Mei Khopipah⁴, Suadi⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Mandailing Natal

Email:

¹michelleputrisiregar@gmail.com,

²nia.rahmadani0206@gmail.com,

³lubissalsabila33@gmail.com,

⁴meikhopipah@gmail.com

⁵suadi@stain-madina.ac.id

Article history:

Received 1 Mei 2026

Revised 15 Mei 2026

Accepted 25 Mei 2026

Available online 1 Juni 2026

Abstract

The study examines whether, in the everyday communication of British public figures, they enounce words and sentences differently. This research focuses on more realistic pronunciation characteristics, addressing the specifics of clarity, stress, rhythm, and other speech-related phenomena (rather than complex phonetic symbols). This research primarily examines how distinct dialects serve as indicators of social background, cultural identity, and occupational role in British society. These data were from interviews, speeches, and public appearances by selected participants, including Emma Watson, Adele, Rishi Sunak, and David Beckham. The analysis uses a qualitative approach based on word formation and sentence delivery. The discoveries are evidence that some speakers have clear, formal pronunciation features. In contrast, others rely on a more relaxed and natural speaking feel, by dropping certain syllables or linking words in sentences." These variations suggest that pronunciation plays a significant role in conveying identity and communication style within British culture.

Keywords: pronunciation variation, British public figures, dialects, speech characteristics.

INTRODUCTION

Language is an important part of cultural identity, and pronunciation is among the most distinctive features of spoken language in the UK. British English is not a monolith; it includes a variety of speaking styles dependent on place, education, and social class. These differences aren't just seen in vocabulary or grammar, but are particularly heard in the pronunciation of words and phrases. Speakers may pronounce a word differently depending on context in everyday interaction. For instance, some speakers pronounce every word distinctly, and others reduce sounds or join words when they come together. This variation is even more noticeable in public figures, whose speech is routinely shaped by personal identity and professional constraints.

Emma Watson, Adele, Rishi Sunak, and David Beckham are champions of different speaking styles in British public life. Some of them speak more formally and carefully in official settings, while others seem more relaxed and natural even in public forums. This paper addresses the pronunciation of words and sentences by these figures, with an emphasis on clarity, stress, rhythm, and connected speech.

The study seeks to demonstrate that pronunciation should be understood as an element of communication style and cultural identity, not merely accuracy.

METHODOLOGY

Pronunciation has traditionally been a hot topic in sociolinguistics and phonology. As noted by David Crystal (2003), we now take for granted that spoken English varies widely from region to region. According to him, it is not just sounds that are pronounced correctly but also the meaning created through stress and intonation with which pronunciation is related. Likewise, as Peter Trudgill (2000) argues, they are caused by both geographical and social variations in speech. Even though how we pronounce words or combine sounds in sentences varies by region and by a person from that area. Such variations become defining features of identity and group membership.

Furthermore, Peter Roach (2009: 42) points out the importance of connected speech. Words tend to flow together and achieve a relative distance from pronunciation isolation. Linking, reduction, and elision are features that affect how sentences are spoken in real-life conversation. For example, the phrase “want to” is pronounced as “wanna”, and more often than not, this happens during holds. Earlier studies also indicate that public figures adapt their pronunciation to suit their audience and purpose. A politician, for example, may speak with clearer, more controlled pronunciation in a formal address to a crowd to ensure understanding; an entertainer may use a similar style without articulating words as much.

Several previous studies have explored similar phenomena. For instance, Hidayat (2019) analyzed accent shifts in British singers and found that social class backgrounds often persist even in professional settings. Furthermore, a study by Smith & Patterson (2015) on the sociolinguistics of public figures suggests that speech accommodation is frequently used to build rapport with specific audiences. These findings align with this research, illustrating how figures like David Beckham utilize 'Estuary English' features to maintain a relatable and authentic public persona.

A Qualitative Descriptive Method. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze pronunciation events in real communication. Data were collected from publicly available video recordings of selected British public figures, including interviews, speeches, and media appearances. Emma Watson, Adele, Rishi Sunak, and David Beckham: The study examines issues around four main subjects. The reason for selecting these individuals was that they come from diverse social backgrounds and work settings, which would influence their speaking styles.

The analysis is based on their:

- Pronunciation (individual words): clear or colloquial pronunciation of individual words
- Both how well you speak full sentences in context
- Stress and prominence: what words are marked up in a sentence
- Speech rhythm and tempo: how quickly or slowly the speaker speaks
- Characteristics of connected speech (e.g., linking)

The data were analyzed by repeatedly watching videos to identify recurring patterns in how voices sounded and in how each speaker pronounced the same words or sentences. Instead, the effort focuses on differences in speaking style rather than correctness.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Based on the qualitative analysis of everyday communication among selected British public figures, several distinct pronunciation variations were identified. The summary of linguistic findings across word pronunciation, sentence delivery, emphasis, and connected speech is presented in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Pronunciation Variations and Examples among Selected Figures

No.	Linguistic Feature	Formal Style	Relaxed Style
1.	Word Pronunciation	Wholly unambiguous Articulation (e.g., "better")	Simplified Pronunciation/ Glottal stop (e.g., "be'er")
2.	Sentence Delivery	Structured articulation (e.g., "I want to make a better future...")	Informal blending of words (e.g., "I wanna make a better Future...")
3.	Stress and Emphasis	Neutral Emphasis across the phrase/ Sentence.	Strong emotional emphasis on Specific words (e.g., "Really")
4.	Rhythm and Speed	Slower highly structured, and measured pacing.	Faster, more natural, and spontaneous speaking speed.
5.	Connected Speech	Penchant for clearer, separate word Articulation.	Frequent use of linked contractions. (e.g., "Wanna, Gonna")

DISCUSSION

The linguistic variations identified in Table 3.1 suggest that the gap between formal enunciation and relaxed pronunciation is a direct reflection of social identity rather than linguistic correctness. Each pronunciation style effectively encodes the speaker's personal background, education, and social environment. For instance, Adele's consistent use of the glottal stop in everyday words like "better" ("be'er") confirms Trudgill's (2000) theory regarding social variation and the persistence of working-class features in regional London dialects. On the other hand, Emma Watson's clearer, highly formalized speaking style represents the traditional linguistic expectations often associated with elite educational backgrounds. Furthermore, professional context and occupational roles heavily influence how public figures tailor their language. As a politician, Rishi Sunak utilizes a clear, slow, and structured pronunciation to communicate effectively and project authority in formal settings. In contrast, figures from the entertainment and sports industries, such as Adele and David Beckham, express themselves more casually with greater emotional intonation. Beckham's adoption of informal word blending like "wanna" functions as a strategic tool to bridge the gap with his audience, prioritizing relatability and authenticity over formal linguistic precision. These findings offer significant implications for English language learners. While learners are predominantly exposed to formal, standardized pronunciation, real-life communication features a vast array of natural variations. By understanding these dialectal shifts and connected speech phenomena, language learners can develop stronger real-world listening skills and more readily recognize how native speakers communicate naturally within specific social and professional contexts.

CONCLUSION

Pronunciation is the form by which words, sentences, and phrases are used in everyday language, and appears to be rather different between British public figures. Several of these can be seen in clarity, stress reduction, rhythm, and word linking in fluent speech. Certain speakers enunciate words more formally, perhaps in particular professional or official settings, and others speak more casually, often dropping syllables or combining words within phrases. This is what the study's authors, who compared numerous subjects' recorded social media pronunciations in step 3, took away from their findings — namely, that British English pronunciation is closely tied to a person's cultural identity, background, and profession. The speaking style of some public figures may vary deliberately or unconsciously according to their audience and the purpose of their communication. For example, we may choose a more structured way of speaking when giving formal speeches, like politicians who keep their points clear and string them together over time to increase their chances of being heard. In contrast, entertainers or athletes may speak pompously while naturally pulling off an informal conversational tone, keeping prospects glued to them.

The study also suggests that pronunciation variation should be treated as an integral component of language rather than as incorrect or substandard speech. The various speaking styles only present different images of people and the social classes associated with these accents, which has added more charm to British English as a world language! Knowing these differences gives learners and researchers a deeper understanding of how language works in real life. In addition, the findings of this study have practical implications for English language learners. In addition to working with more formal language and getting the pronunciation just right, learners are challenged to spot and identify informal and natural speech that may arise in daily conversation. This increased awareness, in turn, helps a greater command of listening comprehension, speaking fluency, and overall language competence.

Lastly, more public figures from various regions and professions will be needed. A more in-depth investigation of specific pronunciation features, as well as a wider range of dataset sizes, could yield further insights into how different types of British English sound. Such studies would enrich sociolinguistics, one of the most vibrant parts of linguistics today, and would provide further insight into language's inherently dynamic and social nature. politicians who keep clarity and structure for clear communication. At the same time, entertainers might use more expressive, organic speech to create a sense of want. Overall, this study indicates that pronunciation is not just a technical aspect of language, but also an essential aspect of identity and socialization. Realizing these distinctions can enhance a learner's and researcher's appreciation for the riches of British English and inform their understanding of language in social realities.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions are proposed for future research and pedagogical practices. First, future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of analysis by including a larger and more diverse group of public figures, such as those from different age groups or regional backgrounds, to provide a more comprehensive mapping of contemporary British English variations. Second, future studies could employ quantitative acoustic analysis tools, such as software for phonetic measurement, to complement the qualitative observations made in this research. Finally, for English language educators, it is highly recommended to integrate authentic audiovisual materials featuring various British dialects into listening and speaking classes, helping students build practical listening skills for real-world communication.

REFERENCES

- British Broadcasting Corporation. (2026). BBC Learning English. bbc.co.uk
- Crystal, D. (2019). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Hidayat, R. (2019). *Sociolinguistic Analysis of British Singers' Accents*. Degruyter.
- Hughes, A., Trudgill, P., & Watt, D. (2022). *English Accents and Dialects: An Introduction to Social and Regional Varieties of English in the British Isles* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Khan, A. (2022). Sociolinguistic shifts in modern British media: A study of public speech patterns. *Journal of Phonetics and Linguistics*, 15(2), 112-125.
- Kortmann, B., & Upton, C. (2008). *Varieties of English: The British Isles*. Degruyter.
- Labov, W. (2006). *The Social Stratification of English*. Cambridge University Press.
- Morisson, L., & Goldstein, P. (2023). Acoustic analysis of Estuary English and Received Pronunciation among modern British politicians. *English Today*, 39(1), 45-58.
- Patel, S. (2021). The evolution of Received Pronunciation and dialect accommodation in British public speaking. *World Englishes*, 40(3), 201-216.
- Roach, P. (2009). *English Phonetics and Phonology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, J., & Patterson, L. (2015). *Public Figures and Speech Accommodation*. Oxford University Press.
- Trudgill, P. (2000). *Sociolinguistics*. Penguin Books.
- Turner, J. R. (2024). Glottal stopping and speech variations among contemporary British public figures. *Language in Society*, 53(2), 189-204.
- Wells, J. C. (1982). *Accents of English*. Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, E. (2022). Perceptions of identity and class through pronunciation in contemporary Britain. *British Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 8(4), 310-325.