



Curriculum subject: English Language

Level: Key Stage 5, Undergraduate (English Language/Linguistics)

Topic: Phonological change

### Article

[Phonological change in the English language](#)

### Activities

1. Listen to a Traditional Dialect recording on this site and try and concentrate exclusively on pronunciation. Jot down any words with unusual pronunciations, and focus on one vowel sound by making a list of words that share the same vowel, such as *face*, *cake*, *rain*, *eight* etc. Compare the pronunciation of this vowel sound with similar words in a Contemporary Dialect recording from the same area.
2. Look at the list (below) of 'unmediated' recordings featured on this site. Listen to a couple of recordings from near where you live. Jot down any words with unusual pronunciations, and focus on one vowel sound by making a list of words that share the same vowel. Consider the following;
  - Do you hear this vowel sound a lot in your area or not?
  - Do you and your friends use it or not?
  - Do you associate it with older or younger speakers?

England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
<a href="#">Whitehaven</a>	<a href="#">Uig</a>	<a href="#">Bangor</a>	<a href="#">Londonderry</a>
<a href="#">Middlesbrough</a>	<a href="#">Portsoy</a>	<a href="#">Resolven</a>	<a href="#">Downpatrick</a>
<a href="#">Bradford</a>	<a href="#">New Cumnock</a>		
<a href="#">Salford</a>			
<a href="#">Boston</a>			
<a href="#">Bristol</a>			
<a href="#">Castle Bromwich</a>			
<a href="#">Peckham</a>			
<a href="#">Southall</a>			



3. Prepare a series of sentences or a reading passage featuring a number of words that contain a potential <y> sound before an <oo> vowel (e.g. *computer, beautiful, amusing, knew, refuse, review, cute, regular, enthusiastic, human, tube, during, suit, issue, visual, attitude, education, particular* etc.) Ask a range of speakers at your school/in your family to read the sentences or passage and note their pronunciation preferences. Do you notice any patterns – after which consonants is the <y> sound present or absent or where is it combined into a <sh>, <ch> or <j> sound? Are there any differences in speaker preference according to age?

### Research task

The following words currently appear to be undergoing a shift in pronunciation – preferences seem to differ across the UK according to the age of the speaker. Test whether this is true in your community. Ask a sample of at least 20 people – half of them school age and half over 50. You might like to give them a word list or a series of sentences containing the target words. Do you spot any definite tendencies? What are the newer, 'innovative' pronunciations in each case? Find out if people are aware of the differences and what opinions they have about the changes in pronunciation.

You can check the age distribution of the different pronunciations of these words and others in the *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* edited by J. C. Wells (Longman, Harlow; 2000)

#### applicable

traditionally pronounced with the same initial vowel as in *apple* and with stress on the first syllable (as is the case with the noun *application*); increasingly pronounced with a weak initial vowel, as in *about*, and with stress on the second syllable (as is the case with the verb *apply*).

#### associate

the <c> in the spelling is traditionally pronounced with a <s> sound; this is increasingly heard as a <sh> sound.

#### ate

traditionally pronounced to rhyme with *get*; increasingly pronounced to rhyme with *gate*.





### bedroom

final syllable is traditionally pronounced to rhyme with the first vowel in *woman*; it is increasingly pronounced to rhyme with *womb*.

### casual

<s> in the spelling is traditionally pronounced with a <z> sound followed by a <y> sound; it is now far more often pronounced like the medial consonant in the word *leisure*.

### envelope

the initial vowel is traditionally pronounced to rhyme with *don*; it is increasingly pronounced to rhyme with *den*.

### forehead

the first syllable is traditionally pronounced like the first syllable in *foreign* and without the <h> sound in *head*; the first syllable is increasingly pronounced like *four* with the <h> in *head* retained.

### garage

the final syllable is traditionally pronounced to rhyme with *barge*; it is increasingly pronounced to rhyme with *bridge*; pronunciations where the last syllable gives a clue to the French origins of the words and rhymes with *mirage* are increasingly rare.

### gradual

the <d> in the spelling is traditionally pronounced with a <d> sound followed by a <y> sound; it is now far more often pronounced with a <j> sound and thus the last two syllables sound like *jewel*.

### harass

traditionally pronounced with the stress on the first syllable so that *harass* rhymes with *embarrass*; increasingly pronounced with stress on the second syllable so that *harass* rhymes with *morass*.

### historic

traditionally preceded by the indefinite article *an* and with the <h> sound omitted; increasingly preceded by the indefinite article *a* and with the <h> sound pronounced.



### incomparable

traditionally pronounced with the primary stress on the second syllable (*in**com**parable*) so that the <parable> part of the word is only two syllables and virtually rhymes with *trouble*; increasingly pronounced with the primary stress on the third syllable (*incom**para**ble*) so that the <parable> part of the word becomes three syllables and sounds like *parable*.

### issue

the <ss> in the spelling is traditionally pronounced with a <s> sound followed by a <y> sound; it is now far more often pronounced with a <sh> sound.

### kilometre

traditionally pronounced with stress on the first syllable as in ***kil**ometre* so that the first two syllables sound like *killer*; increasingly pronounced with stress on the second syllable as in *kil**om**etre* so that the second syllable rhymes with *bomb*.

### the suffix -less as in hopeless, useless etc.

pronounced with the <i> sound in *list*; increasingly pronounced with a much weaker vowel sound like the initial vowel in *about*.

### mall

traditionally pronounced to rhyme with *shall*; increasingly pronounced to rhyme with *fall*.

### migraine

the first syllable is traditionally pronounced like *my*; it is increasingly pronounced like *me*.

### mischievous

traditionally pronounced with stress on the first syllable (***mis**chievous*) so that the second syllable rhymes with *give*; increasingly pronounced with stress on the second syllable (*mis**chie**vous*) so that the final two syllables rhyme with *grievous*.

### necessary

traditionally pronounced with three syllables with the final syllable sounding like the <sri> of *Sri Lanka*; increasingly pronounced with four syllables so that the final two syllables rhyme with *sherry*.





### nephew

the <ph> in the spelling is traditionally pronounced with a <v> sound thus the final syllable sounds like *view*; it is increasingly pronounced with a <f> sound thus the final syllable sounds like *few*.

### ordinary

traditionally pronounced as three syllables or four with a weak penultimate vowel so that the final two syllables virtually rhyme with *curry*; increasingly pronounced as four syllables with a stronger penultimate vowel so that the final two syllables rhyme with *sherry*.

### patriotic

the first syllable is traditionally pronounced to rhyme with *mat*; it is increasingly pronounced to rhyme with *mate*.

### poor

traditionally pronounced to rhyme with *sewer*; increasingly pronounced to rhyme with *saw*.

### princess

traditionally pronounced with the stress on the second syllable – *prin**cess***; increasingly pronounced with stress on the first syllable – ***prince**ss*.

### questionnaire

the first syllable is traditionally pronounced with an initial <k> sound as in *kestrel*; it is increasingly pronounced with an initial <kw> sound as in *quest*.

### really

traditionally pronounced with three syllables; increasingly pronounced with two syllables thus rhyming with *freely*.

### salt

traditionally pronounced with a long vowel as in *ball*; increasingly pronounced with a short vowel as in *doll*.

### scallop

the first syllable is traditionally pronounced to rhyme with *doll*; it is increasingly pronounced to rhyme with *shall*.



### **schedule**

the initial consonant is traditionally pronounced with a <sh> sound as in *shed*; it is increasingly pronounced with a <sk> sound as in *skid*.

### **suit**

the initial consonant is traditionally followed by a <y> sound thus rhyming with *cute*; it is increasingly pronounced without the <y> sound thus rhyming with *coot*.

### **tulip**

the initial consonant is traditionally pronounced with a <t> sound followed by a <y> sound; it is now far more often pronounced with a <ch> sound thus sounding something like *chew lip*.

### **voluntarily**

traditionally pronounced as four syllables so that the final two syllables sound a little like the last two syllables of *naturally*; increasingly pronounced as five syllables with the final three syllables rhyming with *merrily*.

### **zebra**

the first syllable is traditionally pronounced with a long vowel like the first syllable of *Zealand*; it is increasingly pronounced with a short vowel like the first syllable of *zealot*.