



Curriculum subject: English Language

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

Topic: Phonological variation

Article

[Phonological variation across the UK](#)

Activities

1. How do you pronounce words like *afternoon*, *last* and *chant*? Do you or your friends ever use different forms? If so, why? Read more about the background to our changing pronunciation of this vowel in the [Changing voices](#) theme. Identify at least one word that belongs in the BATH vowel set in each of the following categories:

1. <a> + <f> (incl. the spellings <-f, -ff, -ph, -gh>)
2. <a> + <ft>
3. <a> + <mpl>
4. <a> + <nch>
5. <a> + <ns> (incl. the spellings <-ns, -nce>)
6. <a> + <nt>
7. <a> + <s> (i.e. the spelling <-ss>)
8. <a> + <sk>
9. <a> + <sp>
10. <a> + <st>
11. <a> + <th>



2. Interview three speakers with different accents – including teachers, friends or members of the family who come from different parts of the UK. Try and describe two principal differences between their accents.
3. Listen to a selection of recordings on this site (between five and ten) from different parts of the UK and make a list of interesting pronunciation patterns. Try and focus on one unusual consonant sound and two vowel sounds and categorise each feature according to the following criteria:
 - Are they restricted to individual words or do they occur on groups of words?
 - Do you associate them with a particular part of the country?
 - Are they heard over a large area or are they specific to one town/city?
4. Look at the list (below) of 'unmediated' recordings featured on this site. Listen to a couple of recordings – one from near where you live and another in a different part of the country – and list any interesting pronunciation patterns. Try and focus on one unusual consonant sound and two vowel sounds and categorise each feature according to the following criteria:
 - Do you hear them in your area or not?
 - Do you and your friends use them or not?
 - Do you associate them with older or younger speakers?
 - Do you think they are regional or national features?

England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Whitehaven	Uig	Bangor	Londonderry
Middlesbrough	Portsoy	Resolven	Downpatrick
Bradford	New Cumnock		
Salford			
Boston			
Bristol			
Castle Bromwich			
Peckham			
Southall			



5. Listen to the recordings on the [Your Voices](#) map and select a couple of examples of the *Mr Tickle* readings submitted to the British Library between 2007 and 2011. You might like to choose one from a location near where you live and another in a different part of the country. Now select one consonant sound and two vowel sounds and try to compare each speaker's pronunciation of these three variables. You can use this [guide](#) to help you identify examples of each variable in the *Mr Tickle* text.

Research task

The following words have more than one pronunciation, although individual speaker preferences do not seem to reveal any clear regional, age, class or gender distribution. Ask a sample of at least twenty people in your community to choose their favoured alternative. Try and include speakers of different ages, genders and backgrounds if possible. You might like to give them a word list or a series of sentences containing the target words. Find out if people are aware of the different pronunciations and what opinions they have about each alternative.

You will find more information about these words and others in the Longman *Pronunciation Dictionary* edited by J. C. Wells (Longman, Harlow; 2000)

absurd/chrysanthemum/disgusting/opposite/transport

some speakers pronounce the <s> in these words with a <s> sound, others with a <z> sound.

clandestine

some speakers pronounce this word with stress on the first syllable followed by a weak vowel, as in the word *Palestine*; others place the primary stress on the second syllable and use a stronger vowel so that the second syllable rhymes with *rest* and the third syllable rhymes with *tin*.

communal

some speakers pronounce this word with stress on the first syllable followed by a weak vowel, as in the word *communist*; others place the stress on the second syllable and therefore use a long vowel here, as in the word *community*.

congratulations

some speakers pronounce the first <t> in this word with a <j> sound, others with a <ch> sound.



cyclical

some speakers pronounce the first syllable with a short vowel, as in *sickle*; others pronounce the first syllable with a long vowel, as in *cycle*.

economic

some speakers use a long initial vowel so that the first syllable rhymes with *cheek*; others use a short initial vowel so that the first syllable rhymes with *check*.

either/neither

some speakers pronounce the initial syllable so that it rhymes with *my*; others pronounce the initial syllable so that it rhymes with *me*.

exit

some speakers pronounce the <x> in this word with a <ks> sound, others with a <gz> sound.

falcon

some speakers pronounce the <al> with a long vowel as in *ball*, others with a short vowel as in *doll* and others with a short vowel as in *shall*.

homosexual

some speakers pronounce the first syllable in this word with a long vowel as in *comb*; others pronounce the first syllable with a short vowel as in *bomb*.

ice cream

some speakers place the primary stress on the word *ice*, others place it on the word *cream*.

longitude

some speakers pronounce the <g> in this word with a <g> sound, others with a <j> sound.

often

some speakers pronounce the <t> sound in this word, others omit it.

quagmire

some speakers pronounce the first syllable in this word to rhyme with *bag*, others pronounce the first syllable to rhyme with *bog*.



research

some speakers pronounce this word with the primary stress on the first syllable so that the initial vowel rhymes with *me*; others place it on the second syllable so that the initial vowel rhymes with *miss*.

sandwich

some speakers pronounce the <ch> in this word with a <j> sound so that the final syllable rhymes with *ridge*, others with a <ch> sound so that the final syllable rhymes with *rich*.

scone

some speakers pronounce this word with a short vowel so that it rhymes with *con*; others pronounce it with a long vowel so that it rhymes with *cone*.

submarine

some speakers pronounce this word with stress on the first syllable, others with stress on the final syllable.

subsidence

some speakers pronounce this word with the primary stress on the first syllable followed by a weak vowel so that the second syllable rhymes with *hid*; others place the primary stress on the second syllable and therefore use a long vowel on this syllable so that it rhymes with *hide*.