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THE PHONETIC ANALYSIS OF RHOTICITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN AMERICAN AND BRITISH ENGLISH

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Thranslation theory and practice 301

ABSTRACT. This article provides a comprehensive phonetic analysis of the rhotic consonant /r/ across the two primary standards of the English language: General American (GenAm) and British Received Pronunciation (RP). The study focuses on the concept of rhoticity and its influence on vowel length and quality. Furthermore, the paper explores dialectal variations in Scottish and New York accents, complex phonetic phenomena such as "Linking R" and "Intrusive R," and the socio-historical factors that shaped these linguistic divergences.

Keywords: rhoticity, phonetics, American English, British English, Received Pronunciation, Linking R, phonological analysis.

INTRODUCTION. The pronunciation of the letter 'R' is the primary phonological divider between American and British English. This distinction, known as rhoticity, determines whether the post-vocalic /r/ is articulated or omitted. Understanding this difference is crucial for phonetic accuracy and dialect studies.

ARTICULATORY PHONETICS

In American English, "r" is typically realized as a retroflex sound (the tongue tip curls back) or a bunched sound (the tongue body is raised). This gives American English its characteristic "r-coloring." In British RP, /r/ is a soft alveolar approximant, pronounced only when a vowel follows it.

3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF 'R' POSITIONS

Pre-vocalic (Red, Bring): Pronounced in both American and British English.

Pre-consonantal (Hard, Farm): Pronounced in American English (/hɑːrd/), but silent in British RP (/hɑːd/), where it instead lengthens the preceding vowel.

Word-final (Car, Teacher): Pronounced in American English (/kɑːr/), but becomes a silent or a schwa sound in British RP (/kɑː/, /'tiːtʃə/).

DIALECTAL VARIATIONS

While General American is rhotic, some coastal accents like Boston and New York have historically been non-rhotic. Conversely, while RP is non-rhotic, Scottish English is famously rhotic, often using a "tapped" or "rolled" R.

LINKING AND INTRUSIVE R Non-rhotic British speakers often use "R" as a bridge between vowels.

Linking R: "Four" is /fɔː/, but "Four apples" becomes /fɔːr 'æpəlz/.

Intrusive R: Inserting /r/ where it doesn't exist in spelling, such as "Law and order" sounding like "Law-r-and order."

CONCLUSION. The divergence of /r/ pronunciation is a result of 18th-century prestige shifts in London. While American English remains conservative by preserving the rhoticity of Early Modern English, British English has evolved into a non-rhotic system that prioritizes vowel quality.

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