

## 2. CONSONANTS

(Readers unfamiliar with the phonetics symbols and terms used will find explanations in the Glossary).

### 2.1 RVE Consonants

Apart from the marginal presence of the Welsh language consonants /ɬ/ and /χ/ for words of Welsh origin, the consonants of RVE are the same as in RP.

**The Consonants of RVE**

	<i>Plosive</i>	<i>Affricate</i>	<i>Fricative</i>	<i>Nasal</i>	<i>Approx.</i>
<i>Bilabial</i>	p, b			m	
<i>Labiodental</i>			f, v		
<i>Dental</i>			θ, ð		
<i>Alveolar</i>	t, d		s, z, (ɬ)	n	l
<i>Post-Alveolar</i>					r
<i>Palato-Alveolar</i>		tʃ, dʒ	ʃ, ʒ		
<i>Palatal</i>					j
<i>Velar</i>	k, g			ŋ	w
<i>Uvular</i>			(χ)		
<i>Glottal</i>			h		

Figure 6. The consonants of Rhondda Valleys English. Brackets denote marginal consonants.

/ɬ/ is the Welsh Language *voiceless lateral fricative* (Jones, G. 1984: 46) used for <ll> spellings in Welsh place and personal names e.g. Llewelyn, Llanelli, Llwynycelyn. ⚙️ Nearly all the informants attempting to do so could pronounce it properly. There was no evidence of the extensive anglicization of /ɬ/ as /l/, reported in Cardiff English.<sup>5</sup>

<ch> spellings were pronounced by all informants with a voiceless *uvular* fricative /χ/ or *velar* fricative /x/, e.g. in Clydach Vale, Rhondda Fach, ⚙️ the same as in Welsh (Jones, G. 1984: 47). There were no anglicizations as /k/ as reported in Cardiff English by Coupland (1984: 31-44).<sup>5</sup>

Use of the Welsh language voiceless alveolar trill / hr~ r̥ / for <rh> spellings, e.g. in 'Rhondda', 'rhubarb', 'Rhys', was rare in the data.

## 2.2 Plosives

The voiceless *plosives* / p, t, k / can be strongly *aspirated* in RVE, for example the initial /p/ in 'pit'. Since strong aspiration occurs in Welsh (Figure 7) and in other varieties of Welsh English, for example Port Talbot English (Connolly 1990: 121), it may be supposed that the Welsh Language forms a source of influence, although the feature is found also in other regional varieties of English, including popular London speech.<sup>6</sup>

/p, t, k/aspiration		
	American English (Peterson-Lehiste 1960)	Welsh Language (Ball 1984)
/p/	58	62
/t/	69	82
/k/	75	97

Figure 7. Comparison of Voice Onset Time in initial voiceless plosives between American English and Welsh, measured in milliseconds. (Peterson-Lehiste 1960; Ball 1984.)

Instrumental measurements were taken of voice-onset time of word-initial /p, t, k/ in samples of words taken in the conversation data. Average durations were as follows:

- for /p/ (six samples: 'Penrhys'; 'part-time'; 'the Parry brothers' etc) – 100ms
- for /t/ (five samples: 'typical'; 'Blaina Terrace'; 'before tax' etc – 130ms
- for /k/ (six samples: 'colliery'; 'councillors'; 'Cardiff' etc) – 120ms.

Although the samples are few<sup>7</sup> and speakers are speaking with varying speeds and degrees of emphasis, the findings provide some confirmation of strong aspiration of /p, t, k/.

### Strong aspiration of /t/

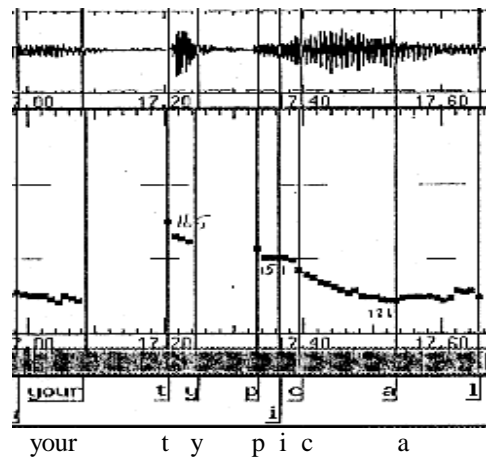


Figure 8. Aspiration of /t/ in 'typical'.

Figure 8 above shows strong aspiration of the word-initial /t/ of 'typical' in the utterance 'your typical real Welshman'. The voice-onset time of /t/ is approximately 115ms.

Strong aspiration was also common in word-medial position (*'happen; butter; fucking* etc) and in word-final (pre-pausal) position (*stop, soot, strike* etc).

Glottal reinforcement of /p, t, k/, or their replacement by a *glottal stop* was not common in the data. The instances that occurred were mainly with the younger (the 30s) age group. For example, the final /t/ could be replaced by a glottal stop in the pronunciation of the tag 'isn't it' [ɪznɪʔ~ɪnɪʔ].

Instances were found of intervocalic /t/ being pronounced with a form of voiced [t̚] or tapped [ɾ]. This occurred in a limited number of expressions, for example 'got it', 'matter', 'got to', 'forget it'. A good proportion (17%) of informants produced such pronunciations. An example can be heard from a Treherbert informant (T7A) in his thirties. 'I'll just say what I got to say'. Since nearly all examples were from the 30s age-group, it would seem that the feature represents an innovation in RVE, perhaps spreading from Cardiff English, where it is reported by Collins and Mees (1990: 90). It is a feature observed in many British Isles dialects, including West Country English.<sup>8</sup>

The plosives /b, d, g/ in word-final (pre-pausal) position could be markedly devoiced. This was found principally with the older age group (over 60s).

### 2.3 Affricates

No non-standard features were observed in the pronunciations of the *palato-alveolar affricates* /tʃ/ and /dʒ/. The informants were able to use /tʃ/ in all environments (e.g. 'chickens', 'watching the match'), despite the fact that it is reported to be outside the consonant inventory of the local Welsh Language dialect (Thomas, C. 1961: 61).

### 2.4 Fricatives

Forceful articulation of the voiceless *fricatives* /f, θ, s/ in 'false', 'think', 'salt', etc is common in the RVE data. This may again be influenced by the Welsh language. Ball (1984: 18) has found the length of word-initial /f, θ/ in samples taken from Carmarthen Welsh speakers to average 156ms and 124ms respectively. In the RVE data, measurements were taken of the length of frication in seven samples of word-initial /f/.<sup>9</sup> Four of the tokens come from the excerpt where an informant (M9A) is talking quite excitedly about a boxing 'fight' he heard when he was a child and he is therefore talking more quickly than normal; nevertheless, the average duration of frication over the seven tokens is 102ms. Strong frication was also common in word-medial and word-final positions e.g. 'passing', 'grass', 'tooth'.

Marked devoicing of the voiced fricatives /v, ð, z/ in word-final (pre-pausal) position, e.g. in 'have', 'bathe', 'toes', is common in the RVE data, which may again signify influence from the Welsh language.<sup>10</sup> It occurred most strikingly among

informants in the ‘over 60s’ age group. When there is a final cluster of voiced consonants, both were frequently devoiced, as observed in Abercrave English (Tench 1990: 131). For example in ‘*clothes*’, both /ð/ and /z/ were devoiced by many informants, and by a majority of ‘the over 60s’.

The lenis fricative /ʒ/, reported not to exist in the local Welsh language dialect (Thomas, C. 1961: 69), was present in the inventory of all speakers e.g. in ‘*treasure*’, ‘*measure*’, ‘*television*’.

/h/ was found to be frequently dropped in the RVE speech sampled (Figure 9).

<b>/h/dropping</b>			
	Over 60s	30s	All
Questionnaire responses	45%	50%	47%
Conversation occurrences	89%	93%	91%

Figure 9. /h/-dropping in stressed position: Questionnaire vs Conversation.

A count was made of the number of times stressed /h/ was dropped in the conversational data compared to the questionnaire responses. Figure 9 shows that h-dropping occurred more in the conversational data (91% of potential instances) compared to the questionnaire responses (47%). In cases of /h/-dropping, *sandhi adjustments* are common. For example, ‘*the house*’ is often /ði'Λu:s/, and one informant (M8B) refers to the performer in an evening's entertainment at Maerdy Workmen's Club as ‘*an 'opeless singer*’.

## 2.5 Nasals

Velar /ŋ/ is often replaced by /n/ in <-ing> suffixes in the RVE speech sampled. To investigate this feature, the responses of informants to the questionnaire items ‘*laughing*’ and ‘*waiting*’ were analyzed. It was found that 63% of all informants pronounced the suffix <-ing> as /n/ (60% of the over 60s, and 66% of the 30s age-group) (Figure 10).

<b>/n/realizations</b>	
Age group	% /n/realizations
Over 60s	60%
30s	66%
All	63%

Figure 10. % /n/realizations in Questionnaire items ‘*laughing*’ ‘*waiting*’.

There were no instances of <-ing> suffixes being realized by /ŋg, ŋk/, as reported for Cardiff English (Collins and Mees 1990: 91), in the speech sampled.

## 2.6 /r/

Realizations of prevocalic /r/, e.g. in the questionnaire items ‘rod’, ‘grass’ are very variable in the RVE speech sampled. *Trilled*, *tapped* and *approximant* versions of /r/ are all heard. A trilled (lingual roll) [r], which is the most common Welsh language realization (Jones, G. 1984: 49; Thomas, C. 1961: 73), is the least common one in the RVE data. Nevertheless, it occurred at times in the speech of over half of the informants.<sup>11</sup> It occurred more frequently in the speech of the older age-group (the over 60s), which would seem to confirm both the link with the Welsh-language substratum and a decline in its influence.

Tapped [ɾ] is a more common realization of /r/ in the data. It is found especially in intervocalic position (e.g. ‘ferry’, ‘period’), and in syllable-initial clusters (e.g. ‘tree’, ‘broth’). The approximant [ɹ] is also common in all positions, realized as a post-alveolar continuant without any tendency towards the *retroflexion* found in West Country accents.

Welsh English is considered to be generally non-rhotic, that is to say in words like ‘far’ and ‘farm’ the /r/ is not pronounced, even though the Welsh language itself and neighbouring West Country dialects of English are fully rhotic. Wells is one of the authors who asserts the non-rhoticity of Welsh English. He attributes it to the influence of school teachers, since for many people English was a ‘taught language’ acquired at school (1982: 378-380) and school-teachers would have endeavoured to inculcate ‘correct pronunciations’.<sup>12</sup> To investigate the presence or otherwise of rhoticity in RVE, the responses of informants to seventeen questionnaire responses was examined (e.g. ‘start’, ‘nurse’, ‘father’, ‘beard’, ‘tour’, ‘north’). The speech thus sampled was mainly non-rhotic. Rhoticity, however, was quite common (Figure 11). It was found intermittently in the speech of 50 % of the informants. Instances were more common in the speech of the over 60s (63.3%). An example can be heard in informant T3B’s pronunciation of ‘tour’. Incidences of rhoticity was found in the speech of a smaller, but still significant, number of the 30s age-group (36.7%). A few of the older age group produced rhotic pronunciations quite regularly – for example informant T1B with six of the seventeen items in the questionnaire, and M9B with nine. Realizations of rhotic pronunciations varied from trilled [r] to tapped [ɾ] to approximant [ɹ]-colouring at the end of the vowel.

Rhoticity occasionally present		
Age group	Informants	
	No.	%
Over 60s	19(out of 30)	<b>63.3%</b>
30s	11(out of 30)	<b>36.7%</b>
All	30(out of 60)	<b>50.0%</b>

Figure 11. Informants producing at least one rhotic response in the Questionnaire

/r/-linking between words where orthographic /r/ is present was regularly used by

the RVE speakers sampled, for example in 'pair of shoes' / 'pɛ:ɾʌv'ʃu:z/. By contrast, where orthographic /r/ is not present (as in 'sofa and chairs'), intrusive /r/ was rarely present.

## 2.7 / ɹ /

In Port Talbot / West Glamorgan English (Connolly 1981: 58), Abercrave English (Tench 1990: 131) and SAWD (Parry 1977: 129-134), /ɹ/ is reported to be generally *clear* in all phonetic environments, for example whether in syllable-initial position as in 'lamp', 'blue' and or in syllable-final position as in 'wall', 'film'. In Cardiff English, by contrast, it is claimed to be *dark* in syllable-final 'wall', 'film' etc and thus show a clear-dark /ɹ/ patterning similar to RP (Collins and Mees 1990: 92). In the RVE data, *postvocalic* /ɹ/ in 'wall', 'film' etc is generally clear after a front vowel, but is variable after a back vowel, being sometimes clear but more often dark or neutral.

The pronunciations of ten informants were examined for clear vs dark /ɹ/ syllable-final realizations in the questionnaire items 'football', 'wheel', 'stale', 'tail', 'salt', 'false', 'sole', 'soul'. There was variation between informants, but their realizations tended to be influenced by articulatory environment. In the items 'wheel', 'stale' where /ɹ/ is preceded by a *front vowel*, realizations were generally clear: ☞

- with 'wheel', only one of the ten informants produced a dark realization, and F1 / F2 values averaged 418 / 1428
- with 'stale' & 'tail', again only one of the ten informants had a neutral-dark realization, and F1 / F2 values averaged 426 / 1340.

In the items 'football', 'salt', 'false', 'soul', 'sole' with *back vowels*, on the other hand, /ɹ/ realizations generally ranged from neutral to dark: ☞

- with 'false' & 'salt', F1 / F2 values averaged 455/999
- with 'sole' & 'soul', F1 / F2 values averaged 351/867.

RVE therefore follows a basically *phonotactic* patterning of syllable-final /ɹ/, i.e. pronunciation varies according to the articulatory position of the preceding vowel. This resembles the pattern noted by Thomas, C. (1961: 72) for the local Welsh dialect of Nantgarw.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.8 Semi-vowels

In RVE, the semi-vowels /w/ and /j/ are articulated in the same way as in RP – as rapid vowel-like glides. There is no evidence in the speech sampled of initial /w/ being *elided* before back rounded vowels in words such as 'woman', 'wool', as is reported by Parry to be common across south-east Wales in SAWD (1977: 90-1).

[hw~ɹ] pronunciations of <wh> spellings are rare in the RVE speech sampled – for the questionnaire responses 'wheel', 'white', only 3 out of the 60 informants (5%) used [hw~ɹ].

Both /w/ and /j/ have some differences in lexical distribution from RP:

- /j/ was used by 97% of informants for 'ear'. Since /j/ is also widely used by Rhondda speakers for 'here' and for 'hear' (and even for 'heard'), 'ear', 'here' and 'hear' may all be homophonous with 'year' as [jɜː ~ jœː] in RVE speech.
- Words of the GOOSE lexical set that are with /juː/ in RP are generally with /ɪu/ in RVE: (e.g. 'tune', 'music') /tɪun, mɪuɜɪk/ (see Section 3.14).

## 2.9 Assimilation and Elision

RVE exhibits assimilation / elision tendencies not unlike RP. It thus holds a position similar to that of Port Talbot English (Connolly 1990: 125), i.e. intermediate between Cardiff English "characterised by remarkably extensive *assimilation* and *elision*" (Collins and Mees 1990: 98-9) and Abercrave English, which Tench observes to contain only a small amount of assimilation and elision, as in the Welsh language (1990: 131-2).<sup>14</sup>

A sizeable minority of the informants released the /t/ of 'football' (25%) in the questionnaire data. There were similar findings in the conversational data, particularly with the over-60s age group, in slow speech.<sup>15</sup>

Elision of initial /ð/ in certain words was quite common with some speakers during rapid speech, particularly those in the 30s age group. Examples from the data include 'in them days', 'didn't they', 'other than that', 'from then on', "down there".<sup>16</sup> As can be seen, elision could occur on *stressed* as well as unstressed syllables

Contractions are found to be a common source of elision during rapid speech. Examples include [ɪznɪt~ɪnɪʔ] for the ubiquitous tag 'isn't it'. Also heard are [wɒznɪt~wɒnɪʔ] for 'wasn't it', [dɪdnɪ~dɪnɪ] for 'didn't he', and [wɒznɛː~wɒnɛː] for 'wasn't there'.

Syllable reduction through elision of weak vowels is quite common in the RVE speech sampled. It appeared at times to be induced by rapid speech, but two environments in which elisions may occur can be noted:

- One is where the weak vowel is in the *penultimate* syllable. Elision of this syllable may have the effect of bringing forward the anti-penult stressed syllable to the penultimate – its most common position in Welsh. Examples of words from the data where this is sometimes heard are 'reg(u)lar', 'con'sid(e)ring'.
- Another pattern of elision that sometimes occurs is the reduction of four-syllable words with front stress to three syllables, as in some informants' pronunciation of 'temp(e)rature', 'ordin(a)ry', 'cemet(e)ry', 'physic(a)lly'. This might again be due to influence from Welsh, in which a tendency has been noted to avoid a succession of more than two weak syllables (Thomas, C. 1961: 130). Such pronunciations are found, however, in many other UK regional and social dialects (Gimson, revised Cruttenden 2001: 236-7).