

REVIEW

Voices of the UK: Accents and dialects of English. London: The British Library Board, 2010. Two CDs + 32-page booklet. ISBN: 978-0-7123-5107-2.
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Voices of the UK consists of two CDs containing 143 short audio recordings (CD audio tracks) of accents and dialects from across the UK, and an explanatory booklet. The recordings are sampled from four collections held by the British Library: the *Berliner Lautarchiv British & Commonwealth Recordings* (15 tracks, on CD1); the *Survey of English Dialects* (51 tracks, on CD1); the *Survey of Anglo-Welsh Dialects* (8 tracks, 5 on CD1, 3 on CD2); and the *Millenium Memory Bank* (69 tracks, on CD2). The 32-page booklet describes these corpora, provides some general information on the content of the recordings on the CDs, and gives particulars for each track: title, speaker's name, date of birth, and location, recording location, and recording date and duration.

CD1 contains older recordings of traditional English and Scots dialects. The samples from the *Berliner Lautarchiv British & Commonwealth Recordings* are readings of the *Parable of the Prodigal Son* and recitations of dialect poetry, and the performance nature of these recordings sets them apart from the rest of the material in *Voices of the UK*, which consists of naturalistic conversation and informal interviews. Nevertheless, the *Berliner Lautarchiv* recordings are of considerable interest, given their early date (the samples on this CD were recorded between 1916 and 1918) and geographical spread (they are the only source of early recordings in this collection for Scotland and Northern Ireland). The *Survey of English Dialect* recordings, made between 1953 and 1974, are a vital audio accompaniment to the published phonetic transcriptions from the same survey (Orton, Sanderson & Widdowson 1962–1971), and the *Survey of Anglo-Welsh Dialects* tracks provide a fascinating glimpse of the closely related, but less well known, survey of conservative forms of English in rural Wales (see Parry 1999).

The recordings on CD2 are taken from the *Millenium Memory Bank* corpus, collected in 1998–1999, with the addition of a few recordings from the urban phase of the *Survey of Anglo-Welsh Dialects* from the 1980s. These recordings, all but two of which are of white British or Irish speakers, range from very traditional and localised forms of speech, such as those from Lerwick, Shetland (Track 53), and Bleanish Island, Fermanagh (Track 67), to those of young people in urban areas, such as Leeds (Track 9) and Chatham (Track 33), who, nevertheless, have very distinct regional varieties. In addition, CD2 contains three recordings of RP English, and one each of speakers of British Indian and British Jamaican English.

Of the 143 samples in *Voices of the UK*, all but 17 are available online at one or both of the British Library's accent and dialect websites: *Archival Sound Recordings* (<http://sounds.bl.uk>) and *Sounds Familiar* (<http://www.bl.uk/soundsfamiliar>). Although all of the recordings on the *Sounds Familiar* website can be accessed by members of the public, most of the recordings on the *Archival Sound Recordings* website are only available through institutional subscription, making *Voices of the UK* particularly useful for those who do not have such access. However, the samples on *Voices of the UK* are significantly shorter than those on the British Library's websites – the longest track in the set (CD1, Track 54) is 82 seconds long, the shortest (CD1, Track 3) 37 seconds. This is substantially shorter than the versions available online (where these two tracks are, for example, seven minutes and two-and-a-half minutes long, respectively), and even these extended versions are, in many cases, excerpts from longer recordings. *Voices of the UK* is, then, very much a sample of resources already available on

the Internet (with a few extras providing added interest). In terms of their usability, it would have been nice if the recordings on *Voices of the UK* had been organised in a way similar to those on the websites, with interactive maps showing the locations of each of the speakers. As it is, we are presented with a list of CD tracks identifiable by number only, and unfortunately there is no map of localities in the accompanying booklet.

So what, then, is the intended audience for this collection? Perhaps not linguists, who can access almost all of the recordings online through their institutions, and who are probably going to want more than one-minute-long samples of these varieties to find out something interesting and useful about them. That is not to say that the recordings do not contain features of interest to linguists. Take the example of the pronunciation of intervocalic /r/ in traditional northern English dialects. The phonetic transcriptions published in the *Survey of English Dialects* (Orton et al. 1962–1971) oversimplify in almost always giving [ɹ]. In the brief sample from Wearhead, Co. Durham, given in *Voices of the UK* (CD1, Track 5), three relevant tokens appear (*a[ɹ]ound, you [r]e away, a[r]ound*), indicating that there is some variation in the pronunciation of intervocalic /r/ at the locality. More data would of course be necessary to conduct a proper analysis, and this is where the longer sample of the same recording on the *Archival Sound Recordings* website, at five-and-a-half minutes long, is more useful (which, in turn, is not as useful as the original recording, held by the British Library, at almost ten minutes long). That said, the recordings which do not appear on the British Library websites are particularly interesting. Take, for example, the recitation of the poem *Norah Carney* by a speaker from Sixmilecross in Co. Tyrone, recorded in Berlin in 1917 (CD1, Track 71). The speaker produced several tokens of the MOUTH vowel, which he pronounces as [ɐʊ]. This is rather unexpected, given that the MOUTH vowel is typically [əʊ] in Mid-Ulster English (Wells 1982: 443) and is the only vowel I myself have recorded in the same area from speakers born in the early and mid-20th century (see, for example, the Traditional Tyrone speaker on the *Sound Comparisons* website, <http://www.soundcomparisons.com/>). Is this an example of change, or does it represent the kinds of pronunciations used when speakers are consciously reciting Irish verse? We may never know, but this voice from the time of the First World War gives us a view into the past of Tyrone English that we would not otherwise have.

All of the samples on these CDs provide similar moments of interest, and are a good length for demonstration purposes (for example in a lecture or classroom). I suspect that the collection of recordings will be of particular interest to students, teachers, and members of the public who want a quick overview of the range of geographical variation in the UK and who might want to identify key features for further investigation.

In summary, this is an interesting collection of recordings, although of limited use, especially to linguists who either have, or want, longer versions to work with. Although far from exhaustive, this collection highlights the richness of geographical (but not social or ethnic) variation in the UK, past and present, and provides a good example of the important work of dialectologists in the 20th century, and of the British Library in the 21st.

References

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- Wells, John. 1982. *Accents of English*, vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Websites

- Archival Sound Recordings*: <http://sounds.bl.uk>
- Sound Comparisons*: <http://www.soundcomparisons.com/>
- Sounds Familiar*: <http://www.bl.uk/soundsfamiliar>