



E-ISSN: 2522 – 7130 P-ISSN: 2410 – 1036

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<https://doi.org/10.26750/94zmh471>

Date Received: 12/09/2024

Date Accepted: 24/12/2024

Date Published: 29/12/2025

Rhoticity as a Distinguishing Factor Between British and American Accents: Preferences and Awareness among Students

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Abstract:

American and British English are widely used by English language learners to improve their language proficiency and for communication across borders. Rhoticity, or the post-vocalic pronunciation of the /r/ sound, is a key characteristic that helps differentiate between the two accents, Received Pronunciation and General American accents. The purpose of the study is to determine the rhotic and non-rhotic accent preferences, awareness, and usage among English Department students at Salahaddin University's College of Education during the 2023-2024 academic year. The study utilizes a mixed methodology (qualitative and quantitative) to obtain the data, including voice recordings, questionnaires, and interviews. The results demonstrate that students primarily speak with a rhotic General American accent. They are conscious of the differences between rhotic and non-rhotic American and British accents and favor rhoticity since it is a characteristic of the American accent. The results are helpful for linguists and educators in teaching students about rhoticity, which distinguishes the two accents. Gaining an understanding of this phonological feature enhances communication clarity and comprehension. To help students adapt their spoken language to various contexts, English language teachers need to be aware of rhoticity. Future research could focus on other aspects of pronunciation that distinguish the American and British accents, such as flapping.

Keywords: Rhoticity, British Accent, American Accent, Preferences, Awareness.

وهک فاكتهه رئيکي جياکه رهوه له نيوان شيوهه زاري بهريتاني و ئه مرئيکي: هه لبزاردن و هوشيارى له نيو قوتابيان

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بەشى زمانى ئينگلېزى، كۆلىزى پەروەردە، زانکوی سەلاھەددين، هەولىز، هەريمى كوردىستان، عيراق.

پوخته:

شيوهه زاري ئينگلېزى ئه مرئيکي و بهريتاني له نيو فېرخوازانى زمانى ئينگلېزى بهريلاون و يارمهه تىدەرن بۆ پەيوەندى نيوان سنورەكان و لە يەكتىيەتىن بۆ مەبەستى جۆراو جۆر. Rhoticity واتە دەرىپىنى دەنگى /ر/ لەدواي بزوين، تايىبەتمەندىيەكى سەرەكى زمانە كە يارمهه تىدەرە بۆ جياوازى كردن له نيوان دو شيوهه زارەكە، RP و GA. ئامانج لە توپىشىنەوە كە زانىنى هەلبزاردن و هوشيارى قوتابيانى بەشى ئينگلېزى لە كۆلىزى پەروەردە زانکوی سەلاھەددينە سەبارەت بە بەكارھييانى شيوهه زاري رۆتىك و نا رۆتىك لە سالى خويىندى ۲۰۲۴-۲۰۲۳. توپىشىنەوە كە مىتۆدىكى تىكەللاو (چۈنۈتى و چەندىيەتى) بە كاردهەتىنەت بۆ بەدەستەتىنەن داتاكان، لەوانە تۆماركىدى دەنگ، راپرسى و چاۋپىكەوتىن. ئەنجامەكان ئەوە دەردەخەن كە قوتابيان بە شيوهه زاري ئه مرئيکي قسەدە كەن، ئەو شيوهه زارەي كە لاي خەلک بە سەتىدارد دانراوە (GA). بە پشتىبەستن بە دەرەنجامەكان دەتوانىن بلىئىن كە ئەوان ئاگادارى جياوازى نيوان شيوهه زاري ئه مرئيکي و بەريتاني رۆتىك و نا رۆتىك بون و حەزىان لە رۆتىسيتى كەن كەن، ئەمە تايىبەتمەندى شيوهه زاري ئه مرئيکييە. ئەنجامەكان يارمهه تىدەرن بۆ زمانناسان و پەروەردەكاران لە فېرکىدى قوتابيان دەرىبارە رۆتىسيتى، كە دو شيوهه زاري سەرچاوه جيا دە كاتەوە. تىيگە يىشتن لەم تايىبەتمەندىيە فۆنۇلۇزىيە رۇنى و تىيگە يىشتنى پەيوەندى قسە كردن باشتى دەكتات. بۆ يارمهه تىدەنەن خويىندىكاران لە گونجاندى زمانى قسە كردىيان لە چوارچىوهى جۆراو جۆردا، زۆر گىنگە كە مامۇستاياني زمان ئاگادارى ئەمە بن. توپىشىنەوە كانى داھاتو گىنگە جەخت لەسەر تايىبەتمەندىيە كانى ترى دەرىپىن بىكەن، وەك، كە شيوهه زارە كانى سەرەتە جيا دە كاتەوە تايىبەتە بە شيوهه زاري ئه مرئيکي.

كلىلەوشەكان: رۆتىسيتى، شيوهه زاري بەريتاني، شيوهه زاري ئه مرئيکي، پەسەندىكىرىن، هوشيارى.

Introduction

Native and non-native speakers use English as the language of communication, which is called lingua franca because it is widely spoken worldwide (Al-Mutairi, 2019). The two most important varieties of English are British and American, as DaCosta and Arias (2021) mention. Novari et al. (2021) discuss rhoticity as one of the most significant features distinguishing British and American English. Different vowel sounds, variations in intonation and stress patterns, and variations in how "t" and "h" are pronounced are additional characteristics of pronunciation that set the two accents apart (Crystal, 2003; Roach, 2000; Gomez, 2009). It is easy to notice that many non-natives use rhoticity and non-rhoticity to sound more American or British. Novari believes that the use of rhoticity

to show a distinction between British and American accents is important in countries where English is a foreign language because it is easy for them to differentiate between the two accents. Pronouncing /r/ in all positions in which the letter "r" occurs is called rhoticity, while dropping /r/ in certain positions where the "r" letter occurs is called non-rhoticity. The typical examples of rhoticity and non-rhoticity are British and American English accents, more specifically British RP and GA English (Costa & Serra, 2022).

Yan et al. (2003) see that the most fascinating aspect of acoustic speech is the accent. He defines an accent as "a distinctive characteristic manner of pronunciation, usually associated with a community of people with a common regional or social/cultural background" (p.345). He further mentions that accents are not static but dynamic because they evolve as a result of immigration and cultural shifts. Costa and Serra (2022) refer to rhoticity as a dynamic sociolinguistic phenomenon because it has changed over time to show social class changes over centuries, and even now it is constantly evolving. Rhoticity is also connected to social mobility in English-speaking countries and is an indicator of social displacement from one social class to another. Costa and Serra (2022) focus on the relation of rhoticity to social class, social mobility, and social differentiation in English-speaking societies.

This study will address the students' accents (rhotic and non-rhotic), their awareness of rhoticity, and their preferences. By examining the students' answers, this study aims to shed light on how rhoticity can serve as a predictor for distinguishing American (General American) and British (Received Pronunciation) accents. Understanding the differences in rhotic pronunciation can provide valuable insights for language learners and users, helping them navigate the complexities of English pronunciation and accent variation. The research questions that this study poses are as follows:

1. What is the level of awareness among students regarding rhotic and non-rhotic accents?
2. How do students perceive their own accents in relation to rhoticity?
3. What preferences do students have regarding rhotic vs. non-rhotic accents?

Literature Review

Historical Background

The emergence of rhoticity can be traced back to the 18th century, when people from higher social classes considered non-rhoticity to be prestigious. Non-rhoticity is considered a late development of English varieties because the English accents were rhotic until the early Modern English period, and the non-rhoticity variety was a relatively late development. Later on, factors like colonization and frequent contact between British and American English led to the appearance of distinct rhotic vs. non-rhotic pronunciations (Demizeren, 2012; Boyce et al., 2016; Villarreal et al., 2020). Labov (1972) was the first one to talk about rhoticity and non-rhoticity. He wrote and discussed many things about rhoticity and non-rhoticity. Mather (2011) revisited Labov's study in New York and Villarreal et al. (2020) talked about rhoticity and non-rhoticity. Demirezen (2012) mentions that the British phonetician John Wells (1982) coined rhotic and non-rhotic terms to refer to pronouncing and not pronouncing "r", which are regarded as fundamental contrastive features.

To understand further why the rhoticity had spread over the continent, Labov's (2012) study clarifies it. What Labov said was opposite to what was meant by rhoticity in British English because, for Labov, those who pronounced "r" were more prestigious than those who didn't. He believed that the shifting was caused by economic growth and cultural centers had been an important reason for most of the USA states being rhotic. The hypothesis of Labov predicts that salespeople in the highest-ranked store will have the highest value of (r), those in the middle-ranked store will have the intermediate value of (r), and those in the lowest-ranked store will show the lowest value.

The northern accent, or General American accent, is considered standard and rhotic. In contrast, Received Pronunciation, the standard British English pronunciation or educated spoken English of England, is non-rhotic. It is represented in the pronunciation schemes of most British dictionaries. RP is rather a social accent and not a regional accent. It is a prestigious variety associated with the educated upper classes or with other people who have attended public schools for education in Britain. RP is regarded as an accent of British English. Non-rhotic countries are England, especially the south-west, Wales, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Black Africa, and the Caribbean; the American southern states, the Boston area of New England, New York City vernacular speech; and Black English vernacular in the US. The main rhotic countries are the US (the northern and western states of the US, apart from the Boston area and New York City), Canada, India, Ireland,

southwestern England, Scotland, and Barbados (Demizeren, 2012; Boyce et al., 2016; Villarreal et al., 2020).

Phonological Analysis of Rhoticity

Researchers like Demizeren (2012), Lockenvitz et al. (2015), Boyce et al. (2016), and Villarreal et al. (2020) talk about rhotic varieties of English that pronounce the consonant /r/ in all positions; in other words, they pronounce /r/ word-initially, word-medially, and word-finally. However, non-rhotic varieties pronounce /r/ in one position when a vowel sound follows it in the same phrase or prosodic unit. This exclusion of the sound /r/ before a consonant or prosodic break characterizes non-rhotic accents. The postvocalic rhoticism, where the /r/ sound is pronounced after vowels, and the pre-vocalic rhotism, where /r/ is pronounced before vowels, are the characteristics of American English. In contrast, the post-vocalic omission of /r/ and the prevocalic pronunciation of /r/ are related to British English and typically exhibit non-rhotic speech.

Rhoticity needs modifications of tongue shape to pronounce vowels plus "r", and retroflexion is one form of it. The /r/ sound, known as the post-alveolar approximant or a liquid, is produced with the tongue near the roof of the mouth and voiced out (Catford, 2006). The /r/ phoneme is spelt with the consonant "r", or sometimes with a double "r" as in the word *carry* /'kæri/. Words can start with the phoneme "r", and end with it. RP, which is a non-rhotic accent, does not typically end with the /r/ phoneme because non-rhotic accents change the /r/ phoneme to schwa, leading to variations in pronunciation that create complexity for non-native English speakers in comprehending rhoticity (Khaleel et al., 2024). Although rhoticity and non-rhoticity are the ones mentioned by most of the researchers, researchers rarely talk about semi-rhoticity. Asprey (2007) says that "some accents are semi-rhotic, retaining /r/ in certain word-final environments while losing it pre-consonantly" (p.82).

In most non-rhotic varieties, /r/ becomes schwa in words like *fear*, /fiə/, and lengthens the vowels in words like *star*, /sta:/, and *port*, /pɔ:t/. One complexity of non-rhoticity is that the change from /r/ to schwa has caused an assortment of triphthongs to exist that do not exist in rhotic varieties, such as /faiə/ in *fire*. Non-rhotic varieties are complex; the pronunciation of some sets of words, such as *pander-panda*, /pændə/, and *source-sauce*, /sɔ:s/, has become homophones (Khaleel et al., 2024). Another complexity that Roach (1991) talks about is linking /r/ and intrusive /r/ that are used for the ease of articulation.

Non-rhotic speakers tend to pronounce /r/ in certain positions between two words, as in *faraway* /fa:rə'wei/. This commonly used linking /r/ smoothly bridges the gap between words ending in /r/ and beginning with a vowel. Moreover, in some cases, speakers may use intrusive /r/, which is absent in spelling to connect two words, as in *law and order* /lɔ:rən'ɔ:də/. However, the so-called intrusive/r/r/ is less frequent and generally regarded as incorrect. All of this complexity regarding rhoticity has the potential to confuse non-native English language learners who are unaware of or have a low level of awareness of non-rhoticity.

Rhoticity and Prestige

There are studies in psycholinguistics that deal with learners' perception and identification of accents depending on rhoticity. It is not the only difference between the American and British English varieties, in fact, there are differences between them, but research suggests that listeners can effectively differentiate between American and British accents through the presence or absence of rhoticity. Non-rhotic accents are often viewed as prestigious globally due to their association with RP. However, studies, such as those conducted by Labov, reveal that non-rhoticity is utilized by lower-class individuals in New York City. Non-rhotic speakers typically pronounce "r" only if it is followed by a vowel, which means pronouncing /r/ pre-vocally. This feature shows that variations in accents can occur across different regions and social classes (Demizeren, 2012).

England was the initial influencer of the spread of non-rhoticity in many regions worldwide as it has historical importance and prestige (MacArthur, 1998). Rhoticity is seen as prestigious in America, while non-rhoticity is prestigious in Britain. Elliot (2000) uses the two terms "r-ful" and "r-less" instead of rhotic and non-rhotic accents. She further explains that rhoticity displays the regional and social variation in English, as well as the speakers' demography, prestige, and stigma. Phonological stereotypes, such as "Hahvahd Yahd" in Boston and "Toity-Toid Street" in New York, shape people's perceptions of particular places and the people who live there (p.103). Beal (2006) mentions that the historical shift from a rhotic to a non-rhotic norm in British English showcases how accent perceptions and standards evolve due to various social and linguistic influences.

Sociolinguistic Factors

The distinctions or differentiations that are available about rhotic and non-rhotic accents that caused controversies in English-speaking communities can be traced back to sociolinguistic factors like regional differences, socioeconomic status, and individual speech patterns. These factors contribute to the complexity of analyzing rhoticity in accents. Variations within both American and British accents can sometimes blur the distinction between rhotic and non-rhotic speech, emphasizing the importance of considering sociolinguistic contexts. Rhoticity is dynamic and has confused researchers and speakers for years because history shows the quick shift from rhotic to non-rhotic or vice versa because of sociolinguistic shifts. Both rhotic and non-rhotic accents can be observed in British and American English, as well as in other English-speaking countries (Costa & Serra, 2022).

Dickson and Hall-Lew (2017) state that there are studies that indicate a significant correlation between rhoticity, socioeconomic status, and gender. He further talks about the need for new phonetic measures to differentiate non-rhoticity from derhoticization, along with the recognition of socioeconomic status as fluid and subject to change throughout one's lifespan. Elliot (2000) cited Lass 1987; Romaine 1984; Labov 1966; Labov 1994; and McDavid's 1964 studies that the loss of a pronounced syllable coda (/r/) was an innovation in Southern and Eastern England that spread to standard speech by the late eighteenth century. The American elite in Eastern seaports during the nineteenth century may have imitated this shift toward non-rhoticity, or it may have crossed the Atlantic as a form of prestige with immigrants. The adoption of non-rhotic pronunciations by upper-class Americans in specific regions led to the diffusion of these features regionally. Interestingly, in the twentieth century, rhoticity has made a resurgence in many U.S. regional varieties that had previously become non-rhotic, resulting in a variable degree of rhoticity in these areas.

Methodology

Research Design and Procedure

The researcher used an eclectic method of qualitative and quantitative tools. The first tool was a voice recording; participants were asked to read a list of words (39) that contained the letter "r" without revealing the aim of the recording. Participants recorded their voices reading specific words to capture variations in rhotic pronunciation patterns. The second tool was interviewing several participants. Interviews were conducted to gather qualitative

data on participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes towards rhoticity. The third and last tool was a quantitative questionnaire. A structured questionnaire was administered to assess participants' awareness, understanding, and preferences related to rhotic accents in British and American Englishes. The comparison of the results from the questionnaire, interviews, and voice recording allows for a better comprehension of the language attitudes held by students at Salahaddin University, College of Education, English Department than any one method could have provided on its own (Kircher, 2015). Voice recordings will undergo phonetic analysis to evaluate rhotic pronunciation accuracy and identify any deviations from standard British and American English norms. Interview transcripts have been thematically analyzed to extract recurring themes, insights, and perspectives on rhoticity. Questionnaire responses have been quantitatively analyzed to calculate frequencies, averages, and correlations regarding participants' views on rhotic accents.

Research Participants

The research participants for this study consist of third- and fourth-year students in the Department of English at the College of Education, Salahaddin University, in the academic year 2023-2024. All the participants were between the ages of 20 and 24, and their English language levels were mostly similar as they successfully completed the first and second stages, studying the same subjects. The participants of all three tools of data collection were 166; 45 students were tasked with recording their voices while reading specific words in the first data collection tool; a smaller group of 6 students were selected for interviews. The largest group of participants, totaling 115 students, completed the third data collection tool, a questionnaire related to rhoticity in British and American Englishes.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure that the interview questions and the questionnaire variables were valid, they were sent to researchers (see Appendix A) for face validity to ensure that the items were relevant and appropriate for the study. The feedback that came back from face validity enhanced the questionnaire's ability to measure what they were intended to measure. Obtaining data that is appropriate for the intended use of the measuring instruments is what Whiston (2012) defines as validity. In this instance, validity tests ascertain whether the scale's expressions provide appropriate measurements in light of the study's objectives.

Conducting a pilot study is a crucial step in assessing the reliability of a questionnaire and interview questions before the full-scale implementation of a research study. The questionnaire was sent to a small sample of participants, and interviews were conducted with a small sample of participants to evaluate the effectiveness of the research instruments. Teijlingen & Hundley (2001) talk about the importance of 'pilot studies' in their research. They use the terms mini versions of a full-scale study or 'feasibility' studies of a particular research instrument, such as a questionnaire or interview schedule. Although conducting pilot studies does not guarantee success in the main study, it does increase the likelihood. They are regarded as a crucial element of a good study design.

Results

The researcher listened to the recorded voices and coded each word as either rhotic (1) or non-rhotic (2). Table 1 shows 39 words and 39 participants; all of the words have their means around 1, which means that most of the participants read the words as rhotic and a small portion as non-rhotic. The words have "r" at the end or in the middle before consonants. Most of the participants (24) pronounced the words 'better, water, mother, butter, letter' as rhotic, and 15 participants pronounced the words as non-rhotic. 25 participants pronounced the words 'feather, weather, and father' as rhotic, while 14 pronounced them as non-rhotic. 31 participants pronounced the words car, share, care, sure, more, star, and four as rhotic, while 8 pronounced them as non-rhotic. 27 participants pronounced the words 'farther, doctor, sister' as rhotic, while 12 participants pronounced them as non-rhotic. 29 participants pronounced the words 'harbor, faster, harder, tougher, slaughter, purse, river' as rhotic, while 10 pronounced the words as non-rhotic. 32 participants pronounced the words 'park, start, your' as rhotic, while 7 pronounced the words non-rhotic. 28 participants pronounced the words 'party, dollar, mirror, color, creator, greater, cancer, farm' as rhotic, while 11 pronounced them as non-rhotic. 26 participants pronounced the word 'guitar, brother' as rhotic, while 13 as non-rhotic.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Valid	Mean	Std. Deviation
better	39	1.385	0.493
feather	39	1.359	0.486
weather	39	1.359	0.486
repair	39	1.205	0.409
farther	39	1.308	0.468
harbor	39	1.256	0.442

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Valid	Mean	Std. Deviation
car	39	1.205	0.409
park	39	1.179	0.389
start	39	1.179	0.389
water	39	1.385	0.493
mother	39	1.385	0.493
butter	39	1.385	0.493
letter	39	1.385	0.493
party	39	1.282	0.456
guitar	39	1.333	0.478
dollar	39	1.282	0.456
doctor	39	1.308	0.468
mirror	39	1.282	0.456
Color	39	1.282	0.456
brother	39	1.333	0.478
father	39	1.359	0.486
Sister	39	1.308	0.468
creator	39	1.282	0.456
greater	39	1.282	0.456
faster	39	1.256	0.442
harder	39	1.256	0.442
cancer	39	1.282	0.456
tougher	39	1.256	0.442
slaughter	39	1.256	0.442
Share	39	1.205	0.409
Your	39	1.179	0.389
Care	39	1.205	0.409
Sure	39	1.205	0.409
Farm	39	1.282	0.456
More	39	1.205	0.409
Purse	39	1.256	0.442
River	39	1.256	0.442
Star	39	1.205	0.409
Four	39	1.205	0.409

Most of the interviewees mentioned that they learned about rhoticity in their phonology subject. Some mentioned that they watched and heard songs and movies that helped them understand how the Americans pronounce their "r" s. The first interviewee refers to the RP accent as non-rhotic and the American accent as rhotic. The interviewee gives examples like "car" and "park" to explain what rhoticity is. She also mentions that she intentionally uses rhoticity because it gives fluency to her speech. The second interviewee shows a full understanding of rhoticity because she mentioned that in American English, "r" is fully

pronounced and so strong, while in the British accent, they drop "r" in many places. It seems that this interviewee was imitating the American accent by pronouncing "r" without any awareness of rhoticity. She also believes that even without knowing about rhoticity, most EFL students can notice that pronouncing "r" makes you sound more American. The second interviewee talks about rhoticity and non-rhoticity, referring to British and American English. The interviewee gave examples like "bird" and "word" that are pronounced with the phoneme /r/ in the American accent. He intentionally pronounces the phoneme /r/ because he wants to speak with an American accent.

The third interviewee likes the American accent because, when speaking, she doesn't want to remind herself where to use "r.". After all, the British accent uses /r/ in certain places. She talks about rhotic as the "extra highlight on the /r/ sound" and non-rhotic as "dismissing "r" and lengthening the vowel that precedes." She states that rhoticity, as a feature, distinguishes American from British English. Even before knowing about rhoticity, she realized that Americans are interested in pronouncing /r/ while the British are allergic to /r/. She doesn't like non-rhotic accents because it makes her lose focus. While the American accent has been her accent for years, she mastered American pronunciation after years of listening and practicing by imitating native speakers of the GA accent. The fourth interviewee mentioned that she heard about rhoticity from native American speakers, and this is what she liked about the American accent. She gave an example of a 'bird' to elaborate on rhoticity. She prefers rhoticity to look like American native speakers.

The fifth interviewee showed an understanding of rhoticity from the start of the interview, as she mentioned that she doesn't like to pronounce /r/ when she speaks because it takes a lot of effort. She clarifies it with an example from her speech, like *effort /efərt/*, not *effort /efət/*. She fully understands rhoticity because she pronounces /r/ on purpose when she wants to sound American. She further explains why she prefers rhoticity, and the reason is that pronouncing /r/ takes a lot of effort and energy from speech organs. Another reason for her is the difficulty in remembering where to pronounce "r" in British English, which leads to misunderstandings by the listener. She also focuses on the idea that nowadays many students prefer the American accent because language teachers need to pronounce all the "r"s. The sixth interviewee gives an idea of rhoticity and mentions that she prefers non-rhoticity, but when she wants to look like an American, she deliberately focuses on rhoticity.

Table 2: Interview Results

No.	How did you learn about rhoticity?	Can you explain the difference between rhotic and non-rhotic accents in English?	Which English accent (American or British) is rhotic?	Have you ever consciously practiced or tried to mimic a specific accent (rhotic or non-rhotic) to sound more American or British?
1 st interviewee	I heard about rhoticity this year when our teacher explained it in the phonology subject which we study.	Rhotic accents pronounce 'r' almost in every position but non-rhotic accents drop 'r' in some positions.	American English is rhotic while RP is non-rhotic. For example, the 'r' at the end of the word 'car' and in the middle of the 'park' are not pronounced in British English RP but pronounced in an American accent.	I pronounce 'r' when I speak because I think it gives fluency to my speech. I am trying to imitate American speakers specifically by focusing on rhoticity.
2 nd interviewee	I heard about rhoticity and non-rhoticity in one of the subjects at university.	I know that pronouncing 'r' means rhotic and not pronouncing it means non-rhotic.	American accent is rhotic and British accent RP is non-rhotic. Words like 'bird' and 'word' are pronounced with the /r/ sound in American English while pronounced as /ɜ:/ in British accent.	I intend to pronounce 'r' in my speech because I decided to speak American accent.
3 rd interviewee	I learned in the first semester of phonology and I did a presentation about the differences between British and American accents and realized the noticeable difference was rhoticity.	Rhotic accents pronounce /r/ at the end of syllables while non-rhotic accents don't pronounce /r/. The extra highlight on the /r/ sound is called rhotic, dismissing it and lengthening the vowel that precedes it is the feature of non-rhotic British RP.	American English has a rhotic accent as it emphasizes on /r/ sounds. Are you certain? The two words 'are' and 'certain' can be pronounced with and without /r/.	I pronounce /r/ on purpose because I chose the American accent as my default accent. I am comfortable with it.
4 th interviewee	I learned about rhoticity because I listened to a lot of native speakers and wanted to sound like them.	What I know is that Rhoticity is related to pronouncing the /r/ sound.	It is always associated with the American accent which made me like the accent. A word like 'bird' if pronounced with the /r/ in the middle, is rhotic. But if it is pronounced as /ɜ:/, it is non-rhotic.	I focus on my /r/ sounds to sound American. So, I have seen that pronouncing /r/s will greatly impact on appearing more American.
5 th interviewee	I learned about rhoticity in the phonology subject	Rhoticity is what makes the difference between	The American accent is rhotic because the /r/ is pronounced in the places	I decided to speak British accent RP but when I started

	during the second stage.	American and British accents.	where they are not pronounced in the British accent. Britishers don't pronounce r and emphasize more on the vowel that precedes it.	teaching a language course, my students were using American accent and this encouraged me to work on rhoticity first to sound American.
6 th interviewee	I heard about rhoticity from my instructor of phonology.	Rhoticity means pronouncing /r/ at the end of words.	What makes the well-known difference between American and British English is rhoticity.	I don't like to pronounce /r/ when I speak because I want to talk British accent but when I want to look American I deliberately pronounce/r/.

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the first question in the questionnaire regarding "how often participants intentionally use a rhotic or non-rhotic accent when speaking English to sound more British or American." The measures of central tendency (mode and median) are 3, the mean is 2.991, and the standard deviation is 1.112. The question is a scale of 5 items; 1 corresponds to "never," 2 corresponds to "rarely," 3 corresponds to "sometimes," 4 corresponds to "often," and 5 corresponds to "always.". The most common choice among participants is "Sometimes," indicating that sometimes participants intentionally use rhoticity and non-rhoticity to sound British or American. The mean response was 2.991, suggesting that some participants rarely intentionally use a rhotic or non-rhotic accent for this purpose.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

	Mode	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. How often do you intentionally use a rhotic or non-rhotic accent when speaking English to sound more British or American?	3.000	3.000	2.991	1.112

Table 4 presents the respondents' answers for the second statement, which focuses on the students' ability to differentiate rhotic and non-rhotic accents. The statement from the questionnaire has five Likert scale items: strongly agree, which was coded as 1, agree coded as 2, neutral coded as 3, disagree coded as 4, and strongly disagree coded as 5. The most common response, which is called mode, is 2; it represents the agreement of most of the participants about the statement. The median response was also 2. The mean response was 2.478, reflecting an overall tendency towards agreement with the

statement. The standard deviation of 1.079 indicates the degree of variability or dispersion in the participants' responses around the mean.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

	Mode	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation
2. I can differentiate between a rhotic and a non-rhotic accent when I hear them spoken.	2.000	2.000	2.478	1.079

Table 5 displays the respondents' responses for the third statement concerning their level of comfort in using rhotic accents in English. The responses were based on a scale of 1 to 5, starting with "very uncomfortable" and ending with "very comfortable." The mode was 3, which means neutral, indicating that a significant number of participants rated their comfort level as neutral when using rhotic accents in English. The median response was also neutral, and the mean response was 3.174, slightly above the neutral point, indicating a somewhat higher level of comfort on average among participants. The standard deviation of 1.002 shows the degree of variability or dispersion in the participants' comfort ratings around the mean.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics

	Mode	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation
3. Rate your level of comfort in using rhotic accents in English:	3.000	3.000	3.174	1.002

Table 6 displays descriptive statistics for the fourth question about the importance of sounding more British or American in an English accent. The question has five scale items: "not important at all" coded as 1, moderately important as 2, very important as 4, and "extremely important" coded as 5. The mode and the median are 4, indicating that most respondents rated it as very important. The mean is 3.226, which indicates that most of the participants chose moderately important or very important. The standard deviation is 1.178, suggesting that there is some variability in how important this aspect is to people.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics

	Mode	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation
4. How important is it for you to sound more British or American in your English accent?	4.000	4.000	3.226	1.178

Table 7 displays the results of the descriptive statistics for the fifth question related to receiving feedback or comments about rhoticity or non-rhoticity in one's English accent. The question was a scale of five items, starting with "never" coded as 1, "rarely" coded as

2, "sometimes" coded as 3, "often" coded as 4, and ending with "frequently" coded as 5. The mode and median are 3, indicating that most respondents reported that they sometimes receive feedback. The mean score is 2.522, which is between "rarely" and "sometimes," with a standard deviation of 1.172.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics

	Mode	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation
5. Have you received any feedback or comments from others about your English accent regarding rhoticity or non-rhoticity?	3.000	3.000	2.522	1.172

Table 8 displays the respondents' responses to the sixth statement in the questionnaire regarding the pronunciation of the /r/ sound when speaking to sound more American. The responses were rated on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being "strongly agree," 2 being "agree," 3 being "neutral," 4 being "disagree," and 5 being "strongly disagree." The mode and median responses are 2, indicating that most respondents agreed with the statement. The mean score is 2.235, with a standard deviation of 1.134, suggesting some level of variability in the extent to which individuals pronounce the /r/ sound to sound more American.

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics

	Mode	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation
6. I pronounce the /r/ sound when I speak to sound more American.	2.000	2.000	2.235	1.134

Table 9 shows the descriptive statistics for the question related to adjusting accents in different contexts. The question had five items: "Formal settings" coded as 1, "Casual conversations with friends" coded as 2, "When speaking with native speakers of British or American English" coded as 3, "When engaging in public speaking or giving speeches" coded as 4, and "In all situations where English is spoken" coded as 5. The mode, that is the most frequently chosen response, is 2 (casual conversation with friends). The median, which represents the middle value, is 3 (when speaking with native speakers of British or American English). The mean, or average, response is 2.904. The standard deviation, a measure of the dispersion of values from the mean, is 1.439.

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics

	Mode	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation
7. In what contexts do you typically adjust your accent to sound more British or American?	2.000	3.000	2.904	1.439

Table 10 displays the results of the descriptive statistics for the 9th question in the questionnaire about how individuals feel when switching between a rhotic and non-rhotic accent in English. The question is a Likert scale of five items: "Confused" coded as 1, "Uncomfortable" coded as 2, "Neutral" coded as 3, "Confident" coded as 4, "Empowered" coded as 5. The mode and the median are 3, and the mean, representing the average feeling expressed by participants, is 2.774, indicating a tendency towards feeling neutral or slightly closer to feeling uncomfortable when switching accents. The standard deviation of 0.992 shows that the responses were relatively clustered around the mean, indicating a moderate level of variability in how individuals perceived switching between rhotic and non-rhotic accents in English.

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics

	Mode	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation
8. How do you feel when switching between a rhotic and non-rhotic accent in English?	3.000	3.000	2.774	0.992

Table 11 shows the descriptive statistics for responses to the question regarding whether individuals believe that having the ability to switch between rhotic and non-rhotic accents enhances their overall language skills and flexibility. The mode, median, and mean values are 3, further supporting the finding that there is a central tendency toward believing that switching between accents has a moderately positive impact on language skills and flexibility. With a standard deviation of 1.151, there is some variation in the responses, suggesting that while most participants feel moderately about this enhancement, there are some who feel more strongly (or less so) about the impact of switching accents on language skills and flexibility.

Table 11: Descriptive Statistics

	Mode	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation
9. Do you believe that having the ability to switch between rhotic and non-rhotic accents enhances your overall language skills and flexibility?	3.000	3.000	2.991	1.151

Table 12 displays the results of the descriptive statistics for responses to the statement, "I prefer rhotic accents like the General American accent because it is easier for me." The statement has five Likert scale items starting from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The mode, median, and mean are 2 which is used for agreement, indicating that a significant number of participants agreed with the statement. This means that most participants agreed that they prefer rhotic accents like the General American accent because they find it easier. The standard deviation of 1.172 indicates some variability in

the responses, implying that while there is a tendency for agreement, there are also some participants who may strongly agree or disagree with the statement.

Table 12: Descriptive Statistics

	Mode	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation
10. I prefer rhotic accents like the General American accent because it is easier for me.	2.000	2.000	2.530	1.172

Table 13 displays the descriptive statistics for responses to the statement "It is easy for me to pronounce /r/ when I speak. That is why I chose American English." It was also a Likert scale of five items, starting from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The mode, median, and average response or mean are 2, indicating a tendency towards agreement that pronouncing /r/ is easy when speaking, influencing the choice of American English. The standard deviation is 1.165, indicating that the responses varied moderately around the mean, suggesting some diversity in how participants perceived the statement.

Table 13: Descriptive Statistics

	Mode	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation
11. It is easy for me to pronounce /r/ when I speak. That is why I chose American English.	2.000	2.000	2.530	1.165

Discussion

The first research instrument was voice recordings of participants to explore how they pronounced words categorized as either rhotic or non-rhotic. This was done to know if the majority of the students speak American English or British English. The results of the recordings show a predominant tendency towards pronouncing words with rhotic sounds. Across most word categories, such as "better, water, mother, butter, letter," "feather, weather, father," and "repair, car, share, care, sure, more, star, four," a majority of participants pronounced these words with the rhotic /r/ sound. This suggests a strong prevalence of rhoticity in the sample population's speech. FaqeAbdulla et al. (2024) conclude in their study that the students are more inclined toward American accents than British accents. While the majority of the respondents lean towards rhotic pronunciation, there were instances where a notable proportion of participants opted for non-rhotic pronunciation. For example, words like "farther, doctor, sister" and "harbor, faster, harder, tougher" had a higher ratio of non-rhotic pronunciations compared to other categories. It can be said that most of the participants pronounced /r/ in all positions, indicating their

preference for a General American accent. Elliot (2000) mentions that although there is no "officially defined standard American accent" (p.103), there are social and regional factors that lead to the preference for a variety, so the perceived standard in America is the General American accent. This is also the perceived standard accent of actors and actresses, which is often regarded as the prestige variety.

The results of the interviews show that students have a full awareness of rhoticity and non-rhoticity. They consciously use this salient feature to differentiate between the two accents mentioned. The interviews highlight varying perceptions and learning experiences regarding rhoticity among English learners. Many interviewees mentioned learning about rhoticity in their phonology studies or through exposure to American media such as songs and movies. This suggests that understanding rhoticity is often informed by educational contexts and cultural exposure. Students must know about it as it helps them understand the differences between spelling and pronunciation, adapting themselves when speaking with native speakers of British and American English; and finally, this simple feature can help students sound like native speakers. Several interviewees contrasted American and British accents in terms of rhoticity. American English was consistently described as rhotic, where the /r/ sound is fully pronounced in words like "car" and "park." In contrast, British RP was characterized as non-rhotic, with selective /r/ pronunciation or omission in certain contexts. The examples clearly show the understanding of the interviewees about the two accents because Gomez (2009) mentions that the presence of rhoticity is one of the most noticeable differences between British and American English. Not only Gomez but also Kobak (2017) talk about this feature or phenomenon as one of the most significant distinctions between the two accents.

Interviewees expressed varied motivations for using rhoticity in their speeches. Some noted that employing rhoticity, particularly in an American accent, enhanced their perceived fluency and clarity. This sentiment reflects a desire to emulate native speakers and align with cultural norms associated with American English pronunciation. Wakelin (2008) believes that it is important for teachers to know about the difference between the two accents that are considered standard varieties: RP, or BBC English, and General American English, or the pronunciation of American girls and national news. Fitria (2023) also sees that it is important for teachers to recognize the existence of American English and British English in order not to face problems with the learners who are exposed to

these varieties. They need to know and understand the characteristics of the difference between the two variants for the sake of strengthening teaching and learning processes.

A recurring theme was the perceived effort required to pronounce /r/ sounds, particularly in non-rhotic accents like British RP. Interviewees described challenges in remembering when to pronounce "r" and noted that avoiding it in speech could lead to misunderstandings. This highlights the cognitive and practical considerations involved in mastering rhoticity for non-native speakers.

There was a notable preference among some interviewees for the American accent due to its perceived clarity and the practicality of consistently pronouncing /r/ sounds. This preference extends to language teaching contexts, where clarity in pronunciation, including rhoticity, is seen as beneficial for communication and comprehension. This was what one interviewee explained as a factor that makes her prefer the rhotic American accent. Pronouncing /r/ in all positions, especially for EFL learners and EFL teachers, will benefit learners and avoid confusion. It is quite amazing to know that a pre-service teacher thinks about the learners because, according to Hancock (2021), many English teachers are anxious about pronunciation teaching because they worry that their accent is not good enough.

The interviews also touched on how rhoticity contributes to social and linguistic identity. Some interviewees associated rhoticity with sounding more American or aligning with specific cultural identities. This suggests that pronunciation choices, including the use of /r/ sounds, can influence how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived by others linguistically. Research has shown that rhoticity is closely tied to regional and social identity. Labov (1972) found that rhoticity was a key marker of social class and prestige in the United States and the United Kingdom. This link between rhoticity and social stratification has persisted in many English-speaking communities. Furthermore, Trudgill (1974) argued that rhoticity can signify regional identity and cultural affiliation. For example, the widespread use of rhotic accents in the South of America and much of the West of America is an important part of regional linguistic identity in those areas. Rhoticity can also intersect with ethnic and racial identity. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998) noted that African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is typically non-rhotic, which helps distinguish it from the rhotic accents of mainstream American English and contributes to the linguistic identity of many African Americans.

The results of the questionnaire show that most of the participants show a preference for rhotic accents in English; more specifically, they prefer the general American accent. Most participants indicated that they sometimes adopt these accents, but a sizable portion infrequently modify their accents to sound more British or American. This indicates the importance of this phenomenon, as it helps students shift between rhoticity and non-rhoticity when they want to adapt to different situations. The English learners will greatly benefit from knowing about rhoticity because this simple thing can help them imitate the reference accents. Many participants agreed that they could differentiate between rhotic and non-rhotic accents when hearing them spoken. The majority show that they can differentiate between rhotic and non-rhotic accents, which means they are aware of it. This helps them to be better listeners when listening to people talking in other languages.

On average, participants rated their comfort level with using rhotic accents in English around the neutral point. It looks like not all the participants are completely comfortable with being rhotic because the average chose neutral. This might be related to the curricula of English in the Kurdistan region, which follows RP. At the same time, even when they prefer American English, they want to speak the one that is associated with prestige, as RP is regarded as Queen's English. Participants view sounding more British or American in an English accent as an important aspect of their communication. Because knowing that they speak with one of the accents gives them self-confidence and reduces anxiety during communication. The majority of the respondents reported that they sometimes received feedback from others regarding rhoticity or non-rhoticity in their English accent. The feedback is either from their colleagues or from their teachers. Teachers might prefer using non-rhotic British English, while students want to speak the one that is popular and that they are mostly exposed to through social media. Enton (2022) shows his fear of losing different varieties of English because, as people turn on the TV or enter social media, they are exposed to the general American accent.

A great number of participants view the pronunciation of the /r/ sound as a factor contributing to sounding more American. The variability in responses indicated by the standard deviation highlights that individuals exhibit differing degrees of alignment with this notion, showcasing unique approaches to accent modification in pursuit of an American accent. The participants also exhibit a propensity to adjust their accents based on the context of communication. The emphasis on casual conversations with friends and

speaking to native speakers is the most preferred context for accent adaptation, along with the recognition of the significance of interacting with native speakers in aligning accents.

Most of the respondents chose neutral and moderate for the two statements related to the code-switching between rhotic and non-rhotic accents. "How do you feel when switching between a rhotic and non-rhotic accent in English?" "Do you believe that having the ability to switch between rhotic and non-rhotic accents enhances your overall language skills and flexibility?" Nevertheless, the central tendency towards a moderate and a neutral positive perception aligns with research indicating that the ability to code-switch between accents and dialects can enhance metalinguistic awareness, communicative competence, and adaptability in language use (Siegel, 2010; Wolfram & Schilling, 2016). The moderately positive view expressed by most respondents highlights the perceived value of developing accent flexibility as part of holistic language proficiency.

Most of the respondents agreed that they prefer rhotic accents like the general American accent because it is easier for them. This indicates that a significant number of participants show a preference for rhotic accents due to perceived ease of comprehension or production. This aligns with research demonstrating that rhotic accents, and the General American accent in particular, are often perceived as more "standard" or prestigious accents in America, especially in professional and educational settings (Lippi-Green, 2012; Wolfram & Schilling, 2016). In the same way, the respondents tend to agree with the statement, "It is easy for me to pronounce /r/ when I speak. That is why I chose American English." This ease of articulation may contribute to a preference for rhotic accents, as reflected in the responses. The reason might be their prior exposure to rhotic accents, as their native language is completely rhotic. The findings align with research demonstrating that the production of rhotic consonants, such as the American English /r/, is often perceived as more straightforward for native and non-native speakers alike, compared to the non-rhotic accents found in varieties like British English (Lippi-Green, 2012). Even though English is learned as a foreign language by Kurdish learners, they learn quickly and easily due to the existence of similarities between the two languages phonologically, syntactically, and grammatically (Paulmony & Hussein, 2019). Massoud and Majid (2011) analyzed the phonological system between the Kurdish and English languages. According to them, many sounds used in the English language are being used in Kurdish too, with slight variations.

Conclusion

The study used rhoticity as the key distinction between American and British accents. Although rhoticity is not the only factor that determines accents, it can help in recognizing accents. The study's first data collection tool reveals that there was a constant preference for rhotic pronunciation among the participants. This lends credence to the idea that rhoticity is still a defining characteristic of modern English speech, despite certain observable alterations that call for more research. The second tool provides a rich exploration of how learners perceive and navigate the concept of rhoticity in English pronunciation. They illustrate how linguistic features like rhoticity are not only linguistic phenomena but also markers of cultural identity and communication strategies in diverse linguistic contexts. About the preferences of English language learners for rhotic and non-rhotic accents, the third instrument offers insightful information. Due to factors including ease of production and intelligibility, most participants said they preferred rhotic accents, especially the general American accent. The influence of their native language, Kurdish, and their exposure to rhotic accents in popular culture and social media are probably the main causes of this. It is interesting to note that although most participants said they preferred rhotic accents, many also said they could change or modify their accents depending on the situation. The majority of respondents said that being able to switch between rhotic and non-rhotic accents improved their overall language proficiency and flexibility. The results also demonstrated how students' opinions and use of various accents are shaped by feedback and outside factors like peers and teachers. Comprehending these viewpoints can help improve language instruction methods and foster a more profound appreciation of the significance of pronunciation in language acquisition and identity development. It is highly recommended to incorporate rhotic and non-rhotic pronunciation into the curricula of departments of English. The students need to know that both pronunciations are correct, and they can choose the one they prefer. Students should be encouraged to modify their accents in different contexts. This can be done by switching between rhotic and non-rhotic pronunciations, as rhoticity helps them appear more like Americans. The results of this study can help English language teachers understand why students prefer one accent over the other and adapt their syllabi according to students' needs.

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Appendix A: Jury Members

No.	Name	Qualification	Workplace
1.	Asmaa Abbas Braim	Assistant Professor	Salahaddin University/ College of Education-Department of English
2.	Arev Mirza Astiffo	Assistant Professor	Salahaddin University/ College of Education-Department of English
3.	Basima Othman Mahmood	Assistant Professor	Salahaddin University/ College of Education-Department of English
4.	Zheen Hamadameen Abdulla	Assistant Professor	Salahaddin University/ College of Education-Department of English
5.	Nazanin Shekh Mhammad Bapir	Lecturer PHD	Salahaddin University/ College of Education-Department of English
6.	Mohammad Abdulwahab Aziz	Assist. Lecturer MA	Salahaddin University/ College of Education-Department of English

Appendix B: Questionnaire & Interview Questions

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. How often do you intentionally use a rhotic or non-rhotic accent to sound more British or American when speaking English?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
2. When I hear them spoken, I can differentiate between a rhotic and a non-rhotic accent.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Rate your level of comfort in using rhotic accents in English:	Very uncomfortable	Uncomfortable	Neutral	Comfortable	Very comfortable
3. How important is it for you to sound more British or American in your English accent?	Not important at all	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important

4. Have you received any feedback or comments from others about your English accent regarding rhoticity or non-rhoticity?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
5. I pronounce the /r/ sound when I speak to sound more American.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
6. In what contexts do you typically adjust your accent to sound more British or American?	Formal setting	Causal conversation with friends	When speaking with native speakers of British or American English	When engaging in public speaking or giving speeches	In all situations where English is spoken
7. How do you feel when switching between a rhotic and non-rhotic accent in English?	Confused	Uncomfortable	Neutral	Confident	Empowered
8. How do you feel when switching between a rhotic and non-rhotic accent in English?	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very much	Absolutely
9. I prefer rhotic accents like the General American accent because It is easier for me.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
10. It is easy for me to pronounce /r/ when I speak. That is why I chose American English.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. How did you learn about rhoticity? 2. Can you explain the difference between rhotic and non-rhotic accents in English as you understand it? 3. Which English accent (American or British) is rhotic? 4. Have you ever consciously practiced or tried to mimic a specific accent (rhotic or non-rhotic) to sound more American or British?					