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**Bi-accentism, translanguaging,
or just a costume?
Margaret Thatcher's pronunciation and its
portrayal in films as a case of sociolinguistic
boundaries and ideologies**

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Abstract

This paper discusses the extent to which some well-known traditional notions of English language studies, above all Received Pronunciation (RP), can be considered valid in light of present-day sociolinguistics. Language and superdiversity, translanguaging and related concepts are recent approaches to the variations that can be found in speech communities. Arguably, most speakers are not static but dynamic in that their linguistic repertoires consist of many styles and registers, as well as dialects, accents and/or separate languages. Terms such as *monolingual speakers*, *homogeneous speech communities*, separate named languages and dialects, even the names of accents, can only be considered as convenient approximations. Some of the most rigidly defined concepts seem to be those related to codified or standard dialects and accents. In this article, the example analyzed to illustrate the point is a comparison of the way in which the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, pronounced English in a Thames TV interview of

1987 and how her pronunciation was represented by two American actors: Meryl Streep in *The Iron Lady* (2011) and Gillian Anderson in Season 4 of *The Crown* (2020). The material aims to demonstrate the transcending of borders: those of RP and of individual bi- or multi-accentism.

Keywords

bi-accentism, Margaret Thatcher, Received Pronunciation, sociophonetics, superdiversity, translanguaging

Dwuakcentowość, transjęzyczność czy przebranie? Wymowa Margaret Thatcher i odzwierciedlenie jej w filmach jako przykład granic i ideologii w socjolingwistyce

Abstrakt

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest omówienie, w jakim stopniu pewne dobrze znane, używane tradycyjnie pojęcia, w szczególności akcent zwany Received Pronunciation, można uznać za odpowiednie w świetle współczesnej socjolingwistyki. Język a superróżnorodność, transjęzyczność i pokrewne pojęcia stanowią dość nowe podejścia do wariantowości we wspólnotach językowych. Można przyjąć za pewnik, iż większość użytkowników języka cechuje nie stałość, lecz dynamiczność: ich repertuary językowe składają się z licznych stylów, rejestrów, jak też dialektów, akcentów lub osobnych języków. Terminy takie jak *jednojęzyczni użytkownicy języka*, *jednorodne wspólnoty językowe*, osobne języki i dialekty, także nazwy akcentów można uznać najwyżej za poręczne przybliżenia czy uproszczenia. Wśród najmniej elastycznych pojęć są te dotyczące odmian językowych i akcentów skodyfikowanych, standardowych. By zilustrować postawioną tezę, autor porównał cechy angielskiej wymowy premier Wielkiej Brytanii Margaret Thatcher w wywiadzie dla Thames TV z 1987 r. i sposób, w jaki jej wymowę odtworzyły dwie grające ją aktorki amerykańskie: Meryl Streep w filmie *Żelazna Dama* (2011) i Gillian Anderson w odcinku czwartej serii serialu *The Crown* (2020). Celem prezentacji materiału badawczego jest unaocznienie przekraczania granic akcentu RP oraz indywidualnej dwu- lub wieloakcentowości.

Słowa kluczowe

dwuakcentowość, Margaret Thatcher, Received Pronunciation, socjofonetyka, superróżnorodność, transjęzyczność

1. Introduction

The Right Honourable Baroness Margaret Thatcher was the first woman to serve as British Prime Minister (1979-1990). Loved by many and disliked by many, called the “Iron Lady”, widely discussed, admired, criticized, ridiculed, and parodied, Margaret Thatcher was undoubtedly one of the most vivid figures of twentieth-century politics. This article does not discuss her life, policies or legacy, nor does it make an attempt at a detailed analysis of her individual manner of speaking. Instead, its aim is to observe the sociophonetic borders that Thatcher crossed and the way this crossing has been interpreted by two actors who play her in dramas (as opposed to satires or comedies), with the aim to explore this phenomenon in connection with some of the latest theoretical developments in sociolinguistics which challenge many traditional concepts and their boundaries.

The article begins with a discussion of three notions: bi-accentism, superdiversity – as described by scholars like Jan Blommaert and Ben Rampton – and translanguaging, which is connected to superdiversity. The following part is devoted to a brief definition of Received Pronunciation (RP), a more detailed description of which can be found in works devoted to English phonetics and phonology like Gimson and Cruttenden (1994) or Wells (1982), as well as histories of English (Crystal 2004). The next part presents examples of Thatcher’s pronunciation as well as the way it was interpreted by Meryl Streep in *The Iron Lady* (2011) and Gillian Anderson in Season 4 Episode 2 of *The Crown* (2020). This will form the basis of a discussion of the different challenges posed to traditional linguistic notions by superdiversity and related concepts.

1.1. Bi-accentism

Bi-accentism can be defined as a narrower version of the more general phenomenon of bilingualism. A bilingual speaker is one who acquired two languages from their parents as a baby (one parent spoke language A, the other parent language B) or acquired one language from their parents and another from the speakers around them: peers, neighbours, friends of the family and subsequently the school system – the latter tends to be the case in immigrant families. Defined less rigidly than in the past, bilingualism may also refer to the linguistic repertoire of speakers who acquired one language as babies and migrated to an area where another language is spoken after they learnt to speak, e.g., at the age of seven or ten. Bidialectalism is a related phenomenon, the difference being that it concerns two codes which are mutually intelligible and non-autonomous, and that are perceived to be two varieties of the same language. In Great Britain a speaker with a parent from Scotland and a parent from Essex in the south of England is more than likely to acquire the regional features of both dialects of English. If one parent speaks Indian English and the other American English but they live in London, the child will have grown up exposed to at least three varieties of English. Since every dialect comprises its particular type of pronunciation, a bidialectal person is also bi-accented. However, it is also possible for a speaker to have acquired Standard English but with different standard or non-standard accents. As a result, the speaker is not only able to understand two different accents with ease but also – often unconsciously – switch between them in different circumstances, in different places and when interacting with different speakers.

There may be some disagreement as to whether bi-accentism can also appear in adulthood, for instance when a speaker aged 18 or above has moved from one dialect/accents area to another to work or study. It is important to note that according to some linguists, Standard English, which is associated with written usage and its grammar and vocabulary, should be separated

from matters of pronunciation, including the codified accent known as RP (Crystal 2004: 530, Trudgill 1999: 118). Thus, a speaker may be regarded as a native user of Standard English even if they do not speak with a standardized accent; in other words, separating standard dialects from pronunciation allows us to say that some speakers are bi- or multi-accented but not bidialectal.

1.2. Superdiversity

Traditional notions of bilingualism and bidialectalism assume that languages and dialects, together with their accents, are separate codes with rigidly defined boundaries and that speakers treat them as such, switching between or among them. This approach to language, convenient though it is, does not provide us with an accurate image of how human language actually functions not only among bilinguals but among all speakers.

A study of the sociology and culture of migration in London was behind the original concept of superdiversity described by Vertovec in 2007 (Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 2, Blackledge and Creese 2017: 2, 5). This different approach moves away from “homogeneity, stability and boundedness as starting assumptions” and moves the linguistic spotlight onto “mobility, mixing, political dynamics and historical embedding” (Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 3). Among the monoliths whose fixed boundaries are challenged by superdiversity are named languages, which can be regarded as politically motivated constructs supporting the ideas of nation states (Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 4). Another questionable concept is that of speech communities, particularly those of native speakers, since they assume a degree of homogeneity which is hardly ever an accurate reflection of the rich tapestry of people and their individual language competence and use. This, in the superdiversity approach, is replaced by a consideration of the “linguistic repertoires” of individuals in which they take advantage of various linguistic genres, registers and other lexical, gram-

matical or phonological means at their disposal “bringing very different levels of personal commitment to the styles they speak (often ‘putting on’ different voices in parody, play etc), and of course this also applies with written uses of language” (Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 5). This thought seems particularly apt in the context of portraying a speaker in a film and will be returned to below.

1.3. Translanguaging

The notion of language repertoires rather than knowing and using distinct languages is the basis of translanguaging, a concept related to or perhaps lying within the scope of language and superdiversity. Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015: 281) define it as follows: “the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (quoted in: Blackledge and Creese 2017: 13). In the case of speakers traditionally referred to as bilingual or bidialectal, as well as speakers who are fluent in foreign languages and use these codes for different purposes, constructing a message in a particular social and situational context must be regarded as more profound than switching from one code to another like a machine: it is part of semiotics, communicating meaning together with extralinguistic signals such as body language (Blackledge and Creese 2017: 14). Translanguaging has been discussed above all in educational contexts with a view to studying the optimal ways of approaching multilingual students (mentioned by Sayers and Láncoš 2017: 42).

1.4. Received Pronunciation

RP, despite being the most codified and widely described accent of English, often escapes attempts at a coherent and uncontroversial definition. Rather than trying to arrive at such a definition, it is perhaps better to mention two issues where attitudes

and ideologies clash the most. Firstly, RP is supposed to be an accent detached from regional features. Nonetheless, not only is it clearly connected to England, not Scotland, Wales or any other part of the UK, but it shares more features with south-eastern accents than with other varieties of English pronunciation (Giegerich 1992: 44); notable features include the lack of rhoticity, /ʌ/ clearly distinguished from /ʊ/ as in the minimal pair *luck* and *look*, /ɑ:/ instead of /æ/ in words like *bath*, *pass* and the diphthong /əʊ/ starting with a mid-central vowel. An individual's accent may be slightly different from General RP, with only a few features of regional pronunciation and the majority of sounds typical of RP, in which case some linguists have attempted to devise labels like *Regional RP* (Gimson and Cruttenden 1994: 80-81, Wells 1982: 280-283, 297-301) to take this variation into account without imposing excessively rigid boundaries. Secondly, although RP was said to be an accent of the middle class or one devoid of strong class connotations, it soon became a marker of upper middle class or upper class speakers (Giegerich 1992: 44), people with particular backgrounds, educated in particular places and employed in particular professions (see section 2). The fact that for decades the BBC required a rather conservative or upper-class version of RP of its newsreaders and other announcers (Crystal 2004: 470) left its mark on popular attitudes towards RP in Britain and among foreign speakers of English abroad.

Although changes in RP have not been rapid, since the main objective of codification is to reduce linguistic synchronic variability and the speed of diachronic change, it should be borne in mind that the analysis undertaken in this paper deals with the RP of the 1980's, hence sources like Gimson and Cruttenden (1994) or Wells (1982) as used regularly in the main part of the analysis are wholly appropriate, perhaps even more so than a source dealing exclusively with the RP of the 2020s would be.

2. Margaret Thatcher's pronunciation as a case study

Margaret Thatcher was a person who turned her way of speaking into a recognisable trademark. Born Margaret Roberts in Grantham, Lincolnshire in 1925, where she grew up among speakers of an East Midlands dialect and accent, Thatcher went to Oxford University, where she became increasingly involved in the activities of the Conservative Party. It is perhaps impossible to say with any degree of certainty when her pronunciation *per se* (as opposed to vocabulary, structures or speed of speaking) became her individual variety of a Conservative RP accent. What is certain, however, is that in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s, adopting an RP accent was more than welcome both at Oxford University (RP is still sometimes referred to as “Oxford English”) and among the Conservatives, many of whom came from upper class or upper middle class families. RP was also often associated with men more than women as the accent of all-boys public schools such as Eton (Crystal 2004: 469) and a few decades earlier, with the upper ranks of the British army (as described by Henry Wyld in 1934, see Milroy 1999: 32-33). In other words, in many contexts RP was arguably more desirable than it is today and even its conservative version, which is usually associated with the royal family, was considered prestigious rather than “posh”, “stiff upper lip” or socially “distant”, attitudes that according to Crystal (2004: 472) appeared in the 1990s (see also Beal 2008: 29).

Thatcher succeeded in an environment dominated not only by the upper classes but also, perhaps more importantly, by men. In order to facilitate the process of breaking the glass ceiling and becoming the first woman Prime Minister of the UK, Thatcher adjusted her speech to the speech of the powerful men around her, in a process that sociolinguists call “accommodation” (Matthews 2007: 5) and in particular “upward convergence” (Kerswill 2001: 9). Wardhaugh (2006: 317) puts it as follows:

There is also a very interesting example from English of a woman being advised to speak more like a man in order to fill a position previously filled only by men. Margaret Thatcher was told that her voice did not match her position as British Prime Minister: she sounded too “shrill”. She was advised to lower the pitch of her voice, diminish its range, and speak more slowly, and thereby adopt an authoritative, almost monotonous delivery to make herself heard. She was successful to the extent that her new speaking style became a kind of trademark, one either very well-liked by her admirers or detested by her opponents.

Speaking “like a man” is interesting when we consider the fact that on some occasions parodies of Thatcher were done by male comedians: Harry Enfield in the comedy series *Harry and Paul*, the drag artist Baga Chipz in *RuPaul’s Drag Race UK* and the voice of Steve Nallon in the satirical puppet show *Spitting Image*, both the 1980s original and the 2020 return of the show. The discussion below will not be concerned directly with the pitch of Thatcher’s voice or her speed of speaking, even though it is sometimes impossible to separate such features from other aspects of pronunciation; rather, it will concentrate on the pronunciation of individual sounds.

3. Thatcher’s pronunciation and its interpretation by Streep and Anderson

For the purposes of this article three video materials were analyzed: a 26-minute interview with Thatcher conducted by Jonathan Dimbleby on Thames TV and first aired on 4 June 1987 (ThamesTv 2018), scenes from the 2011 film *The Iron Lady*, starring Meryl Streep, and a 2020 episode of *The Crown* (Series 4, Episode 2), starring Gillian Anderson. In *The Iron Lady* Meryl Streep’s performance follows two main timelines: Margaret Thatcher as an elderly lady (the film was completed over a year before Thatcher’s death), constantly talking to the ghost of her husband Dennis, and a series of memories traversing her entire life, with Alexandra Roach playing the protagonist in her youth,

i.e., until the beginning of her political career. The words analyzed are only those said by Thatcher during her time as Prime Minister, from 1979 to her last months in office in 1990. The examined episode of *The Crown* takes place around the year 1980, when Thatcher and her husband were invited by the Queen to Balmoral Castle amidst rising tensions in the cabinet regarding spending cuts and other unpopular decisions made by Thatcher at the time. By selecting those particular pieces of the film and the series I made sure that the time depicted was similar to the time when the Thames TV interview was produced.

An important disclaimer that must be made at this point is that a phonetic analysis per se is not the most important point of this paper: hence, I did not write down or transcribe every word, nor did I use dedicated software to analyze the sound waves. I noted down examples showing the presence or absence of features typical of Conservative RP (also known as *Refined RP* in Gimson and Cruttenden 1994) as opposed to changes which were already taking place in RP in the last decades of the 20th century (as described by Gimson and Cruttenden 1994, Kerswill 2007, Trudgill 2008). It could be argued that *conservative* and *refined* or *upper-class* are not identical variants of RP, yet in practice they share so many features that conflating these categories and using the terms interchangeably should not be seen as controversial. Each example word provided below is accompanied by a time stamp. The amount of material studied and the number of features discussed necessitated a less in-depth analysis than one that would have been undertaken in a typical paper on articulatory or acoustic phonetics. To provide an example of the latter, van Buuren (1988) conducted a detailed analysis of Thatcher's pronunciation in a fragment of an interview on Dutch television; suffice it to say that just seventeen lines of text provided him with enough material for an entire paper on English pronunciation in connection with Thatcher's individual accent and its implications for the listener. The focus on sociophonetics in this paper, that is pronunciation as heard,

understood and interpreted by other speakers, is another argument for a simple study conducted by ear and by hand as opposed to one that could be made by means of speech analysis software.

The following section contains large fragments of the results, with particular emphasis laid on vowel sounds as the clearest indicators of accent variation, particularly regional (Giegerich 1992: 44). In some descriptions, lexical sets as devised by Wells (1982) are employed, all in capital letters, in order to facilitate the labelling of vowel phonemes. References to features which are older or more conservative than late 20th-century General RP are provided throughout.

3.1. Monophthong vowels

The first feature to discuss is the lack of HAPPY tensing: /ɪ/ is not realized as front close [i] in word final position or occasionally a morpheme final position inside a word but it is the vowel of KIT [ɪ] (Gimson and Cruttenden 1994: 82, 99, Trudgill 2008: 8-9). Thatcher uses this feature constantly, e.g., in *obviously* (0:38), *really* (0:55), *country* (1:17), *secondly* (1:57), *very* (2:01) and *undoubtedly* (3:57). Streep uses it in most instances, e.g., in *really* (57:33), *economy* (59:06), *Jeffrey* (59:30), *industry* (1:00:10) and *secretary* (1:11:20) but she also employs HAPPY tensing in some words, e.g., *guilty* (1:17:15). As for Anderson, HAPPY tensing is absent from some words, e.g., *very* (7:24), *hurry* (8:00), *especially* (11:38), *fundamentally* (29:40), whereas in many others it does occur: *opportunity* (7:20), *country* (7:40; 9:06) and *reality* (28:42).

The raising of the TRAP vowel /æ/ to a vowel close to DRESS [ɛ] is a feature typical of Conservative RP speakers, some of whom realize it as a diphthong [ɛə] or [ɛæ] (Gimson and Cruttenden 1994: 80, 103). Thatcher uses the raised monophthong realization in words like *married* (2:00), *happen* (3:21), *that* (3:26), *factor* (3:58), *shall* (4:55), *value* (7:04), *bad* (8:10) and *tax* (12:13), but not always: the TRAP vowel is clearly open, not

half-open, in: *factor* (3:21), *actual* (7:07) and *actually* (12:25). In Streep's speech the vowel is raised in some instances, e.g., *manage* (58:56), *that* (59:08), *fascist* (1:06:05), *stand* (1:08:45) and *families* (1:11:10), however it is usually open as in General RP, e.g., in *gang* (1:06:06) and *slackers* (1:17:21). In Anderson's pronunciation the raising can be heard only in *bag* (11:38), while all other occurrences contain the open vowel /æ/: *plans* (7:16), *stand* (8:21), *patronize* (9:00), *ambassadors* (9:40), *that* (18:23), *cabinet* (29:25) and *lack* (47:48).

The next feature is a degree of raising and lengthening of the RP vowel LOT /ɒ/ towards the vowel of THOUGHT /ɔ:/. According to Gimson and Cruttenden (1994: 108-109), in selected words it is a feature of Conservative RP. Thatcher uses the raised and lengthened back vowel in some instances: *jobs* (1:57; 2:38), *go on* (2:54), *technology* (4:59), *longer* (5:48), *because* (8:23). However, in other cases it is /ɒ/ as in General RP: *lot* (1:57), *stop* (12:00), *colossal* (12:12), *possible* (14:21) and *communist* (16:09). Streep also uses the long and raised variant in some words, e.g., *wrong* (58:55; 1:14:15) or *prosper* (1:00:54); however, more often than not, she uses the General RP vowel /ɒ/, as in *slot* (1:16:20), *policies* (1:16:35) and *sovereignty* (1:17:45). Anderson, with the exception of the raised lengthened vowel in the word *job* (11:41), uses the short open vowel /ɒ/ consistently, e.g., in *borrowing* (7:28), *what* (8:20; 18:23), *country* (9:06), *God* (9:38) and *not* (21:12).

Lastly, the lack of GOOSE fronting is the use of the back vowel /u:/ instead of realizing it as a central [u:] (Gimson and Cruttenden 1994: 114, Trudgill 2008: 7, see also Kerswill 2007). The central or even front realization of the vowel of GOOSE has become widespread among speakers in many parts of England, including those whose pronunciation is generally close to RP; hence the back realization of the vowel may be regarded as conservative. The lack of fronting is clear in Thatcher's speech, e.g., *continue* (1:06; 1:29), *do* (1:24; 2:44), *absolutely* (1:46), *school* (3:36), *fewer* (3:47), *reduce* (5:01), *communist* (16:09). Likewise, Streep pronounces /u:/ as a back vowel in *do* (59:07), *soon*

(1:07:35), *rue* (1:08:00), *unity* (1:14:00), as does Anderson in words like *solutions* (9:12), *rules* (11:58) and *do* (14:43).

3.2. Diphthongs

The analysis conducted for the purposes of this article originally included six RP diphthongs, however only the most note-worthy results are presented below. Firstly, the GOAT diphthong /əʊ/ beginning with a variant of a front vowel [ɛ], close to the DRESS vowel, is a distinguishing trait of Conservative RP (Gimson and Cruttenden 1994: 125), though interestingly, [oʊ] with a back and rounded initial vowel was pronounced by Conservative RP speakers in the more distant past (Trudgill 2008: 6, citing the 1962 edition of Gimson). Thatcher uses the fronted [ɛʊ] on a regular basis, e.g., in *hope* (1:26), *know* (2:22), *moment* (2:33), *most* (2:34), *ago* (3:40), *growth* (4:52) and *low* (6:40). In Streep's performance the first vowel is usually fronted as well, e.g., in *don't* (58:36), *chose* (59:02), *coal* (1:00:10) and *know* (1:02:00). Anderson, on the other hand, fronts the first vowel in some instances, e.g., *known* (7:40), *no* (11:28; 17:13), *don't* (12:15; 18:47), but not others, where she pronounces the GOAT diphthong as in General RP: *boldest* and *most* (7:35), *programmes* (7:37), *show* (12:10) and *whole* (18:23).

Two other diphthongs which are typical markers of Conservative RP are the centring diphthongs, i.e., those in NEAR /ɪə/ and SQUARE /eə/. In both cases the schwa sound is clearly audible or realized as a full vowel, which contrasts with the more recent tendency to turn the sounds, particularly the SQUARE diphthong, into monophthongs (Gimson and Cruttenden 1994: 132-133). The diphthong NEAR is pronounced by Thatcher in a conservative manner, e.g., in *clear* (1:46), *years* (2:51; 3:34), *year after year after year* (3:42), and so is the SQUARE diphthong, e.g., *fair* (7:17), *there* (7:32), *shares* (8:48), *affairs* (12:17, 12:19). Streep recreates this feature accurately; examples of the NEAR diphthong include *really* (57:33), *careers* (58:35), *hear* (1:17:35; 1:17:50), *here* (1:18:42), *realistically* (1:18:20), and

examples of the SQUARE diphthong are *where* (1:16:52), *care* (1:16:53) and *unprepared* (1:19:35). Likewise, Anderson pronounces the two sounds in a way close to Thatcher. The NEAR diphthong can be heard in *ideas* (9:09), *dear* (11:02), *hear* (13:40; 15:24), *here* (28:36), and the SQUARE diphthong in *wear* (11:57; 11:52), *care* (11:58) and *dare* (18:47).

The final centring diphthong that deserves a mention is CURE /ʊə/, the use of which has decreased significantly in RP over the past several decades, a process which is connected to the previous decline of the conservative diphthong /ɔə/ (Gimson and Cruttenden 1994: 134). The lack of monophthongization is perhaps not an upper-class feature but simply an older one. Although words with the CURE sound are not frequent and it is at times difficult to find a convincing number of instances, it is apparent that Thatcher herself, in the word *sure* (19:29), uses a monophthong, namely the THOUGHT /ɔ:/ vowel. Streep does pronounce the CURE sound in *European* (1:17:48), probably owing to the preceding /j/, which generally constrains the process of monophthongization (Gimson and Cruttenden 1994: 134). Anderson's dialogue includes two examples, both of which contain the THOUGHT vowel: *poor* (48:24) and *endure* (58:31). The latter word has /j/; nonetheless, Anderson uses the monophthong variant.

3.3. Consonants and approximants

This section does not separate consonants from semi-vowels or approximants since at times the phonetic realizations cross the line between these categories of sounds. In the first instance, the approximant /r/ is realized as an alveolar tap [ɾ], particularly between vowels. It is important to note that Gimson and Cruttenden (1994: 187-188) do not label it as a feature of Conservative RP. Still, it is an older feature, a relic of the trilled [r] which can still be heard in Scottish English and some other British English accents. Thatcher often realizes the /r/ as a tap in the intervocalic position, e.g., in *very* (2:01; 2:30; 6:48),

everyone (12:40) and *every* (16:55), including as a linking /r/ in *there are* (19:40; 19:44). Occasionally, an ordinary approximant realization of intervocalic /r/ can also be heard, e.g., in *very* (2:14). In Streep's pronunciation the intervocalic tap occurs regularly, e.g., in *sorry* (57:44), *worrying* (1:07:23) and *America* (1:08:20), including the linking sound in *there are* (1:00:35), *for a* (1:00:50) and *her own* (1:08:20). Anderson does not follow this pattern in that as far as the episode analyzed is concerned, she refrains from pronouncing a tapped variant of /r/ altogether.

One conservative shibboleth which is usually missing from Thatcher's pronunciation is the voiceless semi-vowel [ɹ̥] instead of [w] (sometimes described as [hw]) in words whose spelling contains the grapheme <wh>. Only one instance of the voiceless approximant can be heard in the interview, that is *why* (13:39). It is interesting that as far as the material analyzed is concerned, Streep pronounces [ɹ̥] more frequently than Thatcher, e.g., in *white* (1:09:10) and *what* (1:12:02), but not in words like *which* (1:06:10) or *what* (59:35). Anderson does not pronounce the voiceless variant whatsoever and the following wh-words all contain a voiced [w]: *what* (7:32; 8:20; 11:40), *where* (10:57), *when* (11:52).

One feature which would perhaps require a lengthy description and will be discussed very briefly here is the use of the glottal stop [ʔ]. General and Conservative RP speakers avoid replacing the voiceless alveolar stop /t/ in some word positions with the glottal allophone, and indeed, the pronunciations of Thatcher, Streep and Anderson lack the glottal stop in this context. By contrast, the glottal stop preceding a word-initial vowel is common in speaking with emphasis; it is not an exclusive feature of RP. Thatcher pronounces it on several occasions, e.g., in *it* (5:02), *is* (5:05), *and* (5:31; 5:56), *obviously* (5:41), *always* (5:42), and *every* (16:55). Streep begins the word *I* with a glottal stop on three occasions (47:15; 1:25:20; 1:25:42), another word being *and* (58:55). Anderson uses this feature more than Streep, e.g., in *upper* (18:47), *am* (28:36), *anything* (29:15), *age* (47:40), *entitlement* (47:52).

3.4. Suprasegmentals and other features

One can agree with van Buuren (1988) that Thatcher's most characteristic suprasegmental and prosodic features are a rather monotonous, authoritative-sounding intonation with only a few rising tones and the quality known as breathy voice, particularly at the end of an utterance. Thatcher in the Thames TV interview uses those traits only to a certain degree, while both Streep and Anderson in scenes where the character of Thatcher becomes angry or anxious make them far more vivid. Throughout her performance in *The Crown* Anderson speaks exceedingly slowly, with numerous almost unnatural sounding pauses, in a very breathy voice and often gives the impression that her Thatcher is older than she was in the 1980s, visibly anxious, overworked and tired. It is a peculiar coincidence that Anderson's voice of sixty-year-old Thatcher sounds similar to Streep's voice of Thatcher in her eighties, i.e., in the main timeline of *The Iron Lady*.

4. Discussion

4.1. Bi-accentism or trans-accentism?

In view of traditional linguistic categories, we may say simply that Thatcher herself and subsequently all those who played her in dramas or satirical parodies put on a different accent the way one puts on different clothes on different occasions. Here is a schematic representation of Thatcher's pronunciation in which she probably grew up speaking a form of East Midlands English in her working-class family and changed it into a form combining features of General RP and Conservative RP:

Margaret Thatcher: Lincolnshire accent (probably) → RP (Conservative/General), narrow range or intonation, slow speed etc.

Meryl Streep, an educated native speaker of American English, was born in New Jersey and was exposed to the local pronunciation of American English. She speaks with a standardized American accent (General American). She observed Thatcher's pronunciation (as marked in curly brackets {...}) in order to play her accurately despite not being a native speaker of British English.

Meryl Streep: American English pronunciation (local accents from New Jersey, a standard GA accent) → {Margaret Thatcher's accent}

Unlike Streep, Gillian Anderson can be considered bidialectal and bi-accented. She is American but spent a large part of her childhood in the UK. She also lived and worked in the USA before returning to the UK, and is known to speak British and American English equally fluently in interviews depending on where she is and to whom she speaks. Ben Smith of *Dialect Blog* devotes an entire blog post (Smith 26.04.2011) to Anderson's speech as an illustration of bi-accentism, noting that occasionally features of one of her accents can be heard in the other accent.

Gillian Anderson: American English pronunciation (accents from Chicago, a standard GA accent) + British English (accents from London, RP/near-RP) → {Margaret Thatcher accent}

This method of classifying accent change appears to be neatly organized, however it leaves much to be desired. We do not know exactly which accent Thatcher used in her childhood or how she spoke on arrival at Oxford. Likewise, we do not know to what extent both actors discussed are native users of standard American English pronunciation or if they learnt it as adults, and whether Gillian Anderson really found it easier than Meryl Streep to play Thatcher just because she had lived in the UK as a child. Focusing on clear labels like *RP*, *GA* or *East Midlands* dialect or accent, imagining that a speaker switched from one

clearly defined code to another, changing her phonetics wholesale when adopting or acting in another accent, does not, therefore, seem to be a viable solution in describing speakers' individual linguistic journeys and choices.

Another problem, though less directly related to the topic at hand, is that of women's speech and men's speech. Claiming that women and men speak different varieties of English perhaps in a way comparable to Japanese (Wardhaugh 2006: 320) and that Thatcher abandoned her native "woman dialect" in favour of the "man dialect" is also grossly inaccurate – to be fair, her idiolect did not sound exactly like the speech of male politicians around her.

4.2. Margaret Thatcher's pronunciation, superdiversity and translanguaging

The approach to language in society known as superdiversity arose thanks to the study of immigrants living in London. It is an interesting coincidence that Thatcher herself migrated from her hometown of Grantham to Oxford, where Standard English was required and RP allowed speakers to blend in rather than stand out, and subsequently to London, where as a member of the Conservative Party she was further motivated to cultivate her trademark speaking style based on a conservative variant of RP. The way Thatcher pronounced English, however, does not strictly follow the rules of what is commonly, though erroneously, known as "the Queen's English", i.e., a conservative or aristocratic version of RP. Some Conservative RP shibboleths are present: the prevailing lack of HAPPY tensing or GOOSE fronting, the TRAP vowel raised to DRESS, the LOT vowel often made similar to the THOUGHT vowel, the diphthongs NEAR and SQUARE having clearly pronounced schwa vowels rather than being close to monophthongs, the GOAT diphthong beginning with a front mid vowel, not a central one. By contrast, some other features of a conservative variant of RP are missing: the CURE diphthong is substituted with the THOUGHT mono-

phthong, the flap consonant for intervocalic /r/ is used only occasionally, the /w/ in words like *which*, *what*, *where* is voiced, not voiceless or similar to [hw]. Speaking slowly, with few pauses, some strongly emphasized words and little variation in intonation is Thatcher's innovation as, arguably, it does not emulate either the Queen or any of the male politicians that surrounded her. Thatcher, with her story and multiple influences on her speech coming from different sources, wove the fabric of her speaking style out of various pronunciation features, some aristocratic, others generally standard but not upper-class, in order to perform successfully as a powerful politician and a voice of authority. That fabric became part of her semiotics, a message complementing the pitch of her voice and almost monotonous delivery; her body language: the degree of eye contact with her interlocutors, quick walking, deep curtsies to the Queen; her outfits, even her famous hairstyles.

Thatcher's accent is one interesting feature, however as regards the politicians around her, it is important to note that in her government some ministers spoke with accents other than RP, e.g., Norman Tebbit's pronunciation was that of Essex or Estuary English (Kerswill 2001: 57).

All of Thatcher's pronunciation features mentioned in this article were noticed and interpreted by the actors who played Thatcher. In parody and satire, the actor by definition shows an exaggerated, distorted image of the person they play. This in itself is an interesting topic (mocking of accents is mentioned by Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 8), but this is deliberately omitted from this study. In the dramas *The Iron Lady* and *The Crown*, on the other hand, despite a degree of poetic licence, the American actors perceived the character of Thatcher as a whole, received the semiotic message that she had carried by means of words, grammar, pronunciation, body language and other traits of importance to an actor, and used their own linguistic repertoire of active and passive knowledge of American English and British English to provide a rather truthful representation of Thatcher, her idiolect included. In the fragments

analyzed it is clear that some features of Thatcher's accent were followed more diligently, some even exaggerated, while others were replaced with General RP (i.e., less conservative) features.

5. Conclusions

By weaving the aforementioned fabric of her semiotics, Thatcher used translanguaging. Even though it did not involve separate, autonomous codes but varieties of the same language and their pronunciation, she took advantage of the different elements at her disposal in order to construct an image of herself to the outside world, part of the iron that made her "the Iron Lady". The American actors Meryl Streep and Gillian Anderson also constructed their own versions of Margaret Thatcher, though of course kept in check by their directors and having in mind the international target audience, perhaps not entirely familiar with the linguistic minutiae of Thatcher's speech or RP in general. To return to Blommaert and Rampton (2011: 5), linguistics should avoid discussing language varieties as monoliths:

Research instead has to address the ways in which people take on different linguistic forms as they align and disaffiliate with different groups at different moments and stages. It has to investigate how they (try to) opt in and opt out, how they perform or play with linguistic signs of group belonging, and how they develop particular trajectories of group identification throughout their lives.

In this particular view of Thatcher's pronunciation and the actors that emulated her, even though for the sake of convenience I used such terms as *Standard English*, *General RP*, *Conservative RP*, *American English*, or *East Midlands/Lincolnshire English*, I hope to have shown that the individual linguistic histories of speakers and the way speakers play different roles throughout their lives may render such labels as names of dialects or accents perhaps not impractical or obsolete but more akin to convenient approximations that fail to do justice to the semiotic

complexity that speakers as individuals bring into their society, the communities in which they live and the networks in which they participate. After all, such labels are ideological constructs that facilitate our thinking but should not cloud our judgement in sociolinguistic research.

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