

The Mitford Voice: A Diachronic Inquiry into the “Upper-Crust” Accent of the Mitford Sisters

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The present paper sets out to investigate whether the conservative or upper RP accent of selected elderly speakers, namely three of the Mitford sisters, all members of the English aristocracy, manifests change or diachronic stability and uniformity over time. The typical conservative RP features looked for were: the LOT-CLOTH split, absence of the CURE-FORCE merger, SQUARE vowel realised as diphthong /εə/, SMOOTHING, KIT vowel in unstressed ending syllables and TRAP vowel realised as /æ/ instead of /a/. The procedure of the study consisted in the identification of the presence or absence of these specific features in the speech of three selected speakers in recordings made over, at least, a 15-year time span. The individuals studied were: Lady Mosley (née Diana Freeman-Mitford), Jessica Lucy Freeman-Mitford and Deborah Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire (née Deborah Vivien Freeman-Mitford). The results of these comparisons suggest that elderly upper RP speakers are not highly influenced by changes in pronunciation taking place around them and mostly maintain the preferred pronunciation of their youth. In some cases, however, a general uncertainty amongst speakers of the accent, here detected in the presence of the CURE-FORCE merger, does affect the speech of individuals over the course of time.

Keywords

Nancy Mitford; U and Non-U English; English Aristocracy; Received Pronunciation; upper RP; Lady Mosley; Jessica Mitford; Duchess of Devonshire

1. Introduction

In “Linguistic Class Indicators in Present-Day English”, an article that was published in 1954 in a learned Finnish journal, *The Bulletin of the Neo-Philological*

Society of Helsinki, Professor Alan S. C. Ross, who occupied the Chair of Linguistics at the University of Birmingham, famously distinguished “U” from “non-U” English language usage (where “U” stands for upper class and “non-U” for the aspiring middle classes) in terms of its distinctive pronunciation, vocabulary, and written language conventions (Crystal 2003, 224). Through this differentiation, Ross, who also argued that “it is solely by their language that the upper classes nowadays are distinguished – since they are neither cleaner, richer, nor better-educated than anybody else” (Ross in Mitford, 1956, 55), shed light on a particular aspect of English, namely upper-class speech, which in a class-conscious country such as Britain has long been a source of interest and object of study not only by prominent linguists and phoneticians,¹ but even by some of the most notorious members of the English aristocracy such as Nancy Mitford. Daughter of David Bertram Ogilvy Freeman-Mitford, 2nd Baron Redesdale, Nancy Mitford wrote several articles, essays, and biographies, but, above all, novels, in which she satirically portrayed her own social class: for instance, *The Pursuit of Love* (1945) is dominated by the eccentric and xenophobic character of Uncle Matthew (Lord Alconleigh), whose complaints about his niece’s working class jargon² and whose “pronouncements on correct English usage had the honour of being quoted by Professor Ross” (Acton 2004, 65). Nancy Mitford took up the usage of Ross’s definitions of “U” and “non-U” English in an essay entitled “The English Aristocracy”, which was firstly published in Stephen Spender’s magazine *Encounter* in 1954 and then in *Noblesse Oblige*, providing a glossary of terms considered “U” that included “napkin” (not “serviette”), “looking glass” (not “mirror”), and “cycle” (not “bike”) (Dent 2007, 52).

In “The Spoken Language”, the second section of his article, which was later reprinted as “U and non-U: An Essay in Sociological Linguistics” in *Noblesse Oblige: An Enquiry into the Identifiable Characteristics of the English Aristocracy* (1956), an anthology edited by Nancy Mitford containing contributions by Evelyn Waugh, John Betjeman and Osbert Lancaster, Professor Ross also identified some examples of “U pronunciation”:

- (1) In a few cases, a difference of stress serves to demarcate a pronunciation as between U and non-U. Thus *yésterdày* [...] is non-U against U *yésterday* [...]
- (3) Many (but not all) U-speakers make *get* rhyme with *bit*, *just* (adverb) with *best*, *catch* with *fetch*. [...]

- (5) U-speakers do not sound the *l* in *golf*, *Ralph* (which rhymes with *safe*), and *solder*; some old-fashioned U-speakers do not sound it in *falcon*, *Malvern*, [...]
- (6) *Real*, *ideal* have two, respectively, three syllables in U speech, one, respectively, two in non-U speech (note, especially, non-U *really*, rhyming with *mealie*).
- (7) *Fault*, also, *Balkans*, [...] are pronounced by the U as if spelt *faʊlt*, *awʊlso*, *baʊlkans*, etc.
- (8) In *Berkeley*, *Berkshire*, *clerk*, *Derby*, U-speakers rhyme the first syllable with *dark* (or *bar*) [...]
- (9) Some U-speakers pronounce *tyre* and *tar* identically (and so for many other words, such as *fire* – even going to the length of making *lion* rhyme with *barn*) [...] (Ross 1956, 74-77).

It goes without saying that this list of phonetic features, which according to Ross constitute the instant indicators of upper-class speech, are a bit exaggerated or, at least, quite old-fashioned; it is nonetheless true that the cut-glass accent of the English aristocracy was – and is – immediately recognisable. In the BBC documentary *Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters* (1980) by Julian Jebb, Lady Diana Mosley recalls how, during World War II, her sister Nancy was asked to lecture a group of fire-watchers and how she was invited to give up shortly after because of her “extremely posh” way of speaking: “Well you see it’s your voice. It irritates people so much, they said they’d like to put you on the fire” (Thompson 2015, 147). This was due primarily to the famous Mitford voice, namely “a halting, clipped bon ton delivery exaggerated even for their class and generation” (Jebb 2014), a mixture of the typically languid Mitford drawl,³ which was “partly a matter of pronunciation, partly of exaggerated emphasis and intonation, partly made up of special words and locutions” (Guinness 2005, 156), and a marked upper-class accent, the well-known conservative or upper Received Pronunciation (URP). This particular accent, which Wells calls “upper-crust RP” (Wells 1992, 279-283), namely the old-fashioned and more conservative type, is “the accent popularly associated with, say, a dowager duchess [...]; the speech of many upper-class army officers; that of a Noel Coward sophisticate; to that of a Terry Thomas cad; [...] that of the popular image of an elderly Oxbridge don; and [...] that of a jolly-hockey-sticks schoolmistress at an expensive private girls’ school” (Wells 1992, 280). Upper RP has distinctive hallmarks that make it unique

and that, at the same time, immediately ascribe it to a specific social class: for this reason, this type of pronunciation has fallen into disuse in the second half of the 20th century and can be perceived as old-fashioned or even “snobbish” nowadays; however, it is still clearly recognisable in the speech of some elderly members of the English aristocracy, who do not seem to have been affected by accent change.

Over the years researchers and phoneticians interested in accents and diachronic accent change have monitored the speech of some upper RP speakers,⁴ in particular that of HM Queen Elizabeth II. Among the most relevant outcomes of these studies⁵ was the evidence that, between the 1950s and the late 60s/early 70s, Queen Elizabeth has slightly modified her accent, “adapting” it to changing times; indeed, as Martin Hinton points out, this “may have been intentional as the social changes of the 60s led to a deliberate narrowing of the distance between the monarch and her subjects” (Hinton 2015, 29).

Yet, this does not apply to all upper RP speakers: in this article I argue that some elderly members of the English aristocracy tend to preserve their original conservative RP accent unchanged, as is the case with the Mitford sisters, whose typical cut-glass accent and intonation accompanied them all their life long. By taking into consideration the speech of Lady Diana Mosley (née Diana Freeman-Mitford), Jessica Lucy Freeman-Mitford and Deborah Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire (née Deborah Vivien Freeman-Mitford), the analysis will try to show the tendency of some elderly upper-RP speakers to maintain the conservative way of speaking of their youth, which still denotes class, privilege and power.

1.1. A Brief History of RP

Although the origins of Received Pronunciation, the “accentless accent”,⁶ can be traced back to the 16th century, when a particular way of speaking started to be associated with prestige and power, this “standard”⁷ variety of English “(which later came to be called ‘RP’, Received Pronunciation) emerged in the public schools of the late nineteenth century as a new ‘suitable’ accent for imperial rulers. In the main it was precise, ungenerous, unengaging, high-pitched, controlled, non-confrontational, un-get-at-able, precious and slightly fey” (Haseler 2016, 44).

The very development of the public school system, “a nationwide network

of residential schools for children of the upper and upper-middle classes” (Hannisdal 2005, 192), including the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, played indeed a key role in the promotion of RP and in its identification with “the most prestigious spoken variety” (Hannisdal 2005, 192). One of the first records of the term Received Pronunciation dates back to 1869, when the English linguist Alexander Ellis used it to define a variety of English recognised “all over the country, not widely differing in any particular locality, and admitting a certain degree of variety. It may be considered as the educated pronunciation of the metropolis, of the court, the pulpit, and the bar.” (Ellis, 1869, as cited in Jones, 292) By 1870, RP had lost its local identity and started to expand geographically; “by 1900 RP had become a regionless accent and the most important marker of social class and education. The conformist practices of the public schools [...] had an eroding effect on local speech forms”. Among the consequences of this development was the fact that “it was no longer acceptable for members of the upper classes to speak with a regional accent” (Hannisdal 2005, 192).

The term Received Pronunciation reappears in the first half of the 20th century, specifically in the works of prominent linguists such as Henry Cecil Wyld, who defined it as

the product of social conditions, and [...] essentially a Class Dialect. Received Standard is spoken, within certain social boundaries, with an extraordinary degree of uniformity, all over the country. [...] It has been suggested that perhaps the main factor in this singular degree of uniformity is the custom of sending youths from certain social strata to the great public schools. If we were to say that Received English at the present day is “Public School English”, we should not be far wrong. (Wyld 1920, 2-3)

Therefore, historically speaking, it can be argued that Received Pronunciation was based on the “educated south-eastern English pronunciation as used by the upper classes” (Hannisdal 2005, 192) and that, even today, social status and education are strongly connected with the Modern variety of RP, which, according to Wells, is “widely regarded as a model for correct pronunciation, particularly for educated formal speech” (Wells 2000, xiii). However, various changes in the way this particular accent is perceived and considered have been taking place since, although RP “is also the usual British pronunciation standard taught to foreign learners of English, [...] “with the increasing

democratisation of British society”, it has lost “its former unique position, and non-RP accents are now heard in many contexts from which they were previously excluded” (Hannisdal 2005, 193).

1.2. RP Varieties

As the aim of the present study is to analyse a specific type of Received Pronunciation known as conservative or upper RP, it is useful to briefly introduce here the different varieties of RP and hint at the modifications RP has undergone, since like all accents, as Hannisdal points out, it “changes over time and incorporates new features while others are lost. As a result, different subtypes of RP can be distinguished, which are more or less conservative or progressive, and which are spoken by different age groups” (Hannisdal 2006, 16).

Much ink has been spilt on the types or varieties of Received Pronunciation: Gimson has distinguished three RP varieties, namely *conservative* RP, “used by the older generation and, traditionally, by certain professions or social groups”, *general* RP, “most commonly in use and typified by the pronunciation adopted by the BBC”, and *advanced* RP, “mainly used by young people of exclusive social groups” (Gimson 1980, 91); in his revised version of Gimson, Alan Cruttenden labels the three chief *RP* varieties as *general*, *refined* and *regional*, where “refined RP is that type which is commonly considered to be upper-class, and it does indeed seem to be mainly associated in some way to upper-class families and with professions which have traditionally recruited from such families” (Cruttenden 2011, 80). Furthermore, Cruttenden highlights how *refined* or upper RP has been undergoing a gradual decline:

Where formerly it was very common, the number of speakers using Refined RP is increasingly declining. This may be because for many other speakers (both of other types of RP and of regional dialects) a speaker of Refined RP has become a figure of fun and the type of speech itself is often regarded as affected. (The adjective ‘Refined’ has been deliberately chosen as having positive overtones for some people and negative overtones for others) (Cruttenden 2011, 78).

This view is supported by other scholars such as Beal, Nocera and Scuriale, who point out that the 20th century “witnessed both the ‘climax’ and ‘fall’ of RP as a desirable accent and by the end of the nineteenth-hundreds, [...],

‘the social benefit of elocution lessons was considerably diminishing, and the ‘market-value’ of a ‘good pronunciation’ no longer apparent” (Beal, Nocera, Scuriale 2008, 11).

Going back to the various definitions of the RP varieties, the distinction drawn by John Honey between *marked* and *unmarked* RP is noteworthy: “‘unmarked’ suggests the mainstream – and arguably socially neutral – form, and ‘markings’ are linguistic signals of certain forms of social privilege or pretension. Thus, in layman’s terms, though neither form is indicative of a speaker’s regional background, unmarked RP is ‘talking proper’ while marked RP is ‘talking posh’” (Honey 1985, 248). Finally, Wells offers a definition of upper RP based on Ross’s formula of U and non-U English: “We may refer to [it] as *upper-crust RP*, or just *U-RP*, and so distinguish [it] from mainstream (upper-middle-class) RP. (The term *Oxford English*, sometimes encountered, is best avoided because of its vagueness)” (Wells 1992, 281).

1.3. The Features of Conservative or Upper RP

This subsection illustrates the most recognisable features of conservative or upper RP, which is the object of this study. The following list is based primarily on descriptions in Wells (1982 and 1992), Hughes, Trudgill (2013) and Jones (1922):

- The LOT-CLOTH split, still present in older or upper RP speakers such as Queen Elizabeth II, results from a late 17th century sound change that caused the lengthening of /ɒ/ to /ɔ:/ before voiceless fricatives and also before /n/. Wells explains how, although “CLOTH words belong phonetically to LOT in RP [...] a more conservative kind of RP [uses] the vowel of THOUGHT, /ɔ:/, rather than the /ɒ/ of LOT” (Wells 1982, 136). As a consequence of the raising and lengthening, in the conservative variety of RP the vowel /ɔ:/ was present in words such as *cross*, *salt*, *lost*, *gone*, *cloth*, *soft*, *often* and *off*. Modern RP speakers use /ɒ/ instead of /ɔ:/ in the aforementioned words as a result of process begun in the early 20th century called CLOTH transfer.
- In conservative RP, the HOARSE-HORSE or NORTH-FORCE merger,⁸ did not occur: there used to be a distinction in the pronunciation of words such as *horse* and *hoarse* or *floor* and *flaw*. As Wells points out: “some older speakers [...] may retain /ɔə/ distinct from /ɔ:/ in some of the FORCE words” (Wells 1982, 161).
- The vowel in words such as *moor*, *poor*, *sure*, *tour* and *cure* was formerly

pronounced as a diphthong, /ʊə/. As a result of the CURE-FORCE merger, /ʊə/ has merged with /ɔ:/: and to many contemporary RP speakers *pore*, *pour* and *poor* are homophones.

- The phoneme /eə/ or SQUARE vowel, which has now turned into the monophthong /ɛ:/, was realised as a centring diphthong /eə/. As Daniel Jones explains: “the regular sound of the group of letters *air*; example *pair* pɛə, *fair* fɛə. The groups *-ear* (when not followed by a consonant) and *-are* also have this sound very frequently; examples *pear* pɛə, *bear* bɛə, *care* kɛə, rare rɛə. Note also the exceptional words *there* and *their*, which are both pronounced dɛə” (Jones 1922, 74).
- The starting point of the FACE diphthong and the DRESS vowel, which has lowered to open-mid [ɛ] in contemporary RP, was realised as a mid [e̞]. Indeed, as Jones states, previously “the sound /ɛ/ only occur[red] in normal Southern English as the first element of the diphthong /eə/” (Jones 1922, 74).
- The starting point of the GOAT vowel was back and rounded in conservative RP, while unrounded and mid-central in modern RP. As a result, in 1962 Crimmon changed the transcription of this diphthong from /ou/ to /əʊ/ (Wells 1997, 22).
- Substituted by the ordinary approximant [ɹ] in contemporary RP, the alveolar tap [ɾ] would usually occur “intervocally [...] when the first vowel is stressed, as in *very*, or following a dental fricative, as in *three*. This variant is realised by the tip of the tongue tapping briefly against the alveolar ridge. In RP [...] [ɾ] has upper-class connotations” (Hughes, Trudgill, Watt 2013, 48).
- SMOOTHING: prevalent in conservative RP but still present in contemporary RP, smoothing is a monophthongisation of a closing diphthong (most commonly /eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ, əʊ, aʊ/) before a vowel. Thus, *chaos*, pronounced [ˈkeɪs] without smoothing, becomes [ˈke:ɪs] with smoothing. (Wells 1982, 238). Wells argues that this process applies particularly readily to triphthongs, namely “/aɪ/ and /aʊ/ in the environment of a following /ə/, [...] hence [fa:ə] for *fire* and [ta:ə] for *tower*, or with the syllabicity loss of /ə/, [faə, taə]” (239). The centring diphthong [aə] deriving from smoothing and syllabicity loss may further undergo monophthongisation, which Wells terms “monophthonging”, realising *fire* and *tower* as [fa:, ta:] or [fa:, ta:], similar or identical to *far*, *tar*. Here are some examples of smoothing: “*science* /ˈsaɪəns/ may be realized as [sæns], *power* /ˈpaʊə/ as [pəə], *Howard* /ˈhaʊəd/ as [haəd], [...]” (Wells 1997, 23). Wells points out that “sociolinguistically

this is clearly part of RP, since it is frequently to be observed in the speech of those native speakers in England who are located towards the upper end of the social scale” (23).

- WHINE-WINE merger: in the late 19th century, RP speakers realised the consonant combination ⟨wh⟩ (as in *which*, *whistle*, *whether*) as a voiceless labiovelar fricative /ɱ/ (also transcribed /hw/). Apart from few exaggeratedly precise styles of speaking, the /ɱ/ phoneme has ceased to be a feature of RP since the beginning of the 20th century (Wells 1982, 228-29). Indeed, for most modern speakers of English, as O’Grady observes, “there is no longer a distinction between [w] and [ɱ] words, so that the following pairs *whine/wine*, *whales/Wales*, *which/witch* are homophonous. [...] However, more recent research indicates that the distinction is being lost and only conservative speakers retain [that] distinction” (O’Grady 2012, 120).
- Prevalence of the KIT vowel /ɪ/ instead of /ə/ in weak syllables such as the following endings: *-ible*, *-ate*, *-less*, *-ness*, *-ity*, *-ily*.
- Laxer pronunciation of the final unstressed *i*-type vowel, which was realised as /ɪ/, in words such as *happy*, *city*, *hurry*, *taxi*, *movie*, *Charlie*, *coffee*, *money*, *Chelsea*. (Wells 1992, 281). As a consequence of a process called HAPPY-tensing, the vowel has become “tense” and modern RP speakers realise it as /i:/ (the vowel sound of *beat*).
- The vowel of words such as *luck*, *fuss* or *cup* was a more centralised back vowel, close to cardinal [ʌ] (Davenport, Hannahs 2013, 10).
- In conservative RP, the vowel sound /æ/ (the TRAP vowel) in words such as *bad*, *fact*, *sad* was halfway between an /e/ and an /a/ sound, “it [even] had an opening-diphthong realisation [ɛæ] or [eæ], thus *that man* [ˈdɛæt ˈmɛæn]” (Wells 1982, 281). Younger RP speakers generally “use a much opener quality, /a/” (281).
- Other features include a more retracted variety of /ʊ/, “traditionally classified as back and rounded” (Wells 1997, 23), which has undergone fronting and reduction in the amount of lip rounding in modern RP.

2. Corpus and Methodology

The present inquiry takes into account interviews of three Mitford sisters in order to offer examples of the aforementioned conservative RP features in the “Mitford voice”:⁹ by conducting three diachronic case studies on these selected speakers, I aim to assess to what extent the features of a specific accent studied

by other scholars still characterise the speech of individuals of a certain age and class and I will try to determine whether their accent manifests change or diachronic stability and uniformity over time. The type of corpus used for this research included YouTube videos of interviews, documentaries and BBC radio broadcasts, which are just some of the examples to be found on the Internet.

3. The Case Studies

3.1. Samples

In the course of drawing up these results it was essential to listen to various recordings, as in just one case was it possible to obtain transcriptions of a very small part of the material and to know where to find examples of certain words and sounds. Only those recordings which have actually been employed in compiling the results tables are listed in the appendix.

As stated before, the great majority of the samples of speech were taken from the YouTube internet site. Only clips with clearly identified and verifiable dates were employed. In some instances, particularly in the case of Lady Diana Mosley, the recording and broadcasting dates may differ, but only very slightly; in situations where archive footage was shown in a subsequent broadcast, the date of the original is, of course, taken into account.

For the present analysis, fifteen recordings in total were selected. Each subject was sampled in two-time sections: the 1970s and 80s, and the 1990s to the present day. The recordings of Jessica Mitford, who died in 1996, cover the shortest time span, the last sample being from 1991, and those of Deborah Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, the longest, reaching from 1982 to 2010.

3.2. Analysis

The assessment criteria illustrated above were applied to each speaker, in each of the two-time categories. The analysis was carried out only perceptually, and no technical instruments were used. The decision to examine the speech samples in this way was made due to this study's being based on an interest in perceptible discrepancies in accent, rather than small modifications in sound quality, the causes of which may be diverse. As regards variation, it is worth noting that, as Hinton points out: "obvious differences such as CURE

lowering [CURE-FORCE merger] would appear to be cases of influence of changing norms in the accent rather than strictly personal factors” (Hinton 2015, 28).

After listening carefully to the samples for each speaker in each time section, the clips with the words containing the target sound/feature were cut out. Subsequently, each of the clips was transcribed orthographically, examples of each category¹⁰ for investigation were detected and the sound used annotated. This annotation was accomplished by listening repeatedly to the clips to make sure that the words that were judged to contain the selected feature were correctly identified.

3.3. Case Study 1 – Lady Diana Mosley (née Diana Freeman-Mitford)

One of the six daughters of David Bertram Ogilvy Freeman-Mitford, 2nd Baron Redesdale and Sydney Bowles (later Lady Redesdale), Lady Diana Mosley married an Irish aristocrat, Bryan Walter Guinness, heir to the barony of Moyne, in 1929. At a dinner party in London in 1932, she met Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists and fell in love with him; consequently, she decided to leave her first husband to become Mosley’s mistress. After her divorce from Guinness in 1932, Mosley and Diana wed in secret on 6 October 1936 in the Berlin flat of Joseph Goebbels, the minister of propaganda for the German Third Reich, with Adolf Hitler as guest of honour (De Courcy 2012, 174-5). In 1940, Diana was arrested and imprisoned in London’s Holloway prison for women: alongside other British fascists, the Mosleys were interned, without charge or trial, during much of World War II under Defence Regulation 18B.¹¹ After the war ended, the couple moved to Ireland and then, in 1950, settled permanently at the Temple del la Gloire, a Palladian country house situated in Orsay, a French town in the southwestern suburbs of Paris. She died in Paris in 2003.

Lady Diana Mosley was the only one of the cases to have been the subject of previous publications. In analysing front-glide insertion, Laura Wright takes Lady Mosley’s pronunciation of the word *ear* as an example of the fact that this feature occurred in Southern English speech not only initially. Wright indeed argues that

the pronunciation with *initial /j/* glide for the words ‘hear’, ‘here’ and ‘ear’ used to be heard until recently in England but in recent decades it has

been restricted, I believe, to *upper-class RP English: the aristocratic Lady Diana Mosley pronounced the word 'ear' with an initial (j) in a radio broadcast in 1989 when talking about the Duke of Windsor's ear (jis)*. (Wright 1994, 10-11)

In “The Space of English: Geographic Space, Temporal Space and Social Space” (2005), Wright further suggests a possible correlation between word-initial *h*-dropping and front-glide insertion, which seems to find confirmation in Lady Diana Mosley’s speech, as the examination of an interview that Sir Oswald Mosley’s wife gave to BBC’s Desert Island Discs on 26 November 1989 reveals. According to Wright, her “conservative RP retained glide-insertion, a feature mostly lost in twentieth-century London speech. [...] In Lady Diana’s speech, [h] is realised for the lexemes *hear* and *here* but [j] is realised as the first phoneme of *years* and *ear*. This pattern of [h]/o] distribution marked her speech as aristocratic” (Wright 2005, 295-96).

In his book *Diana Mosley* (2000), Jan Dalley observes that Lady Mosley’s variety of “upper-class pronunciation [...] was *current* when they [the Mitford sisters] were young and lasted into the 1960s, but [...] is now rare except in the elderly (‘girl’, for instance, rhymed with ‘fell’ and never with ‘curl’; ‘off’ was pronounced ‘orf’),” and also adds that “Diana said [...] they all [the Mitford sisters] pronounced ‘loss’ to rhyme with ‘horse’” (Dalley 2000, 27-28).¹² What emerges from these studies is the presence of some typical conservative or upper RP features in Lady Diana Mosley’s speech. The current inquiry supports the line of the aforementioned studies, by also highlighting this speaker’s clear tendency of preserving her original accent unchanged during the course of her life, apart from some slight modifications.

The first sample used in this study comes from a television interview for *Good Afternoon*, a programme of Thames TV hosted by Mavis Nicholson, broadcast on 31 March 1977. The second sample is from another television programme called *All About Books* hosted by Russell Harty and broadcast on 26 June 1980 on BBC One. A documentary by Julian Jebb broadcast on BBC Two on 26 May 1980, *Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters*, serves as the third sample. Diana Mosley’s Desert Island Discs interview broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 27 November 1989 constitutes the fourth sample. The final sample is made up of some excerpts from a 1999 interview, which is part of a 2007 documentary on Diana’s sister, Unity Valkyrie Mitford, entitled *Hitler’s British Girl*. The results of the analysis of Lady Mosley were as follows:

	LOT-CLOTH split	CURE-FORCE merger	SMOOTHING	KIT vowel in unstressed ending syllables	HAPPY tensing	TRAP vowel realised as /æ/	SQUARE vowel realised as /ɛə/
<u>Sample 1</u> (<i>Good Afternoon</i> , 1977)	Present	Partial	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Present	Absent	Present	Present
<u>Sample 2</u> (<i>Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters</i> , 1980)	Present	Absent	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Present	Absent	Present	Present
<u>Sample 3</u> (<i>All About Books</i> , 1980)	Present	Present	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Present	Absent	Present	Present
<u>Sample 4</u> (<i>Desert Island Discs</i> , 1989)	Present	Present	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Present	Absent	Present	Present
<u>Sample 5</u> (excerpts of a 1999 interview contained in <i>Hitler's British Girl</i> , 2007)	Present	Partial	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Present	Absent	Present	Present

Table 1. Lady Diana Mosley – Results

The table clearly shows that no significant changes have occurred in Lady Mosley's pronunciation over the period analysed. She has not been at all influenced by the modern trends and remains strongly traditional in the widely old-fashioned usage of /ɔ:/ rather than /ɒ/ in words such as *lost* [lɔ:st], *off* [ɔ:f] and *cost* [kɔ:st]. As far as the CURE-FORCE merger is concerned, it can be argued that Lady Mosley seems to have been affected by it only in some words such as *poor* [pɔ:], which is pronounced to rhyme with *shore* [ʃɔ:], but not in others such as *furious* [fjʊəriəs] or *Europe* [jʊərəp], where the first vowel is clearly the diphthong /ʊə/. However, what Hinton suggests in his study on the Queen's accent, namely that “a separation of the CURE group

is in progress with the vowels in ‘Europe’ and ‘poor’ now kept distinct by most speakers.” (Hinton 2015, 33), can be also applied to Lady Mosley’s speech. As regards smoothing, Lady Mosley adopts this feature consistently in almost all triphthongs and in some diphthongs produced in the samples: she always realises the triphthong /auə/ as /aə/, pronouncing words such as *flowers*, *admired*, *fire* and *entirely* as [ˈflaɪz], [ədˈmaəd], [ˈfaə] and [ɪnˈtæli], *but she does not smooth* the triphthong /ɔɪə/ into /ɔə/, retaining it, for instance, in *disloyal*, which she realises as [ˌdɪsˈlɔɪəl]; moreover, she tends to smooth the diphthong /au/ into /aə/ in words such as *hounds* and *now* pronounced as [ˈhaʊndz] and [ˈnaə], and sometimes the diphthong /eɪ/ into /eə/ with *came* or *trail* realised respectively as [ˈkeəm] and [ˈtreəl]. The KIT vowel /ɪ/ characterises Lady Mosley’s pronunciation of the final weak syllables of words ending in *-ible*, *-ate*, *-less*, *-ness*, *-ity*, *-ily*, for instance *affectionate*, *deafness*, *hopeless*, *inadequate* and *private*, which she realises respectively as [əˈfɛkʃənɪt], [ˈdɛfnɪs], [ˈhəʊplɪs], [ɪnˈædɪkwɪt], [ˈpraɪvɪt]. In all samples, the TRAP vowel has an opening-diphthong realisation [ɛə] in words such as *bad*, *man* and *fact* – [ˈbeəd], [ˈmɛən] and [ˈfɛækt] –, while the SQUARE vowel is realised as /ɛə/ in *were* [ˈwɛə] and *there* [ˈðɛə].

As can be observed, certain aspects of Lady Mosley’s speech indicate that she is a staunchly traditional upper RP speaker, retaining all the typical features of conservative or upper RP, apart from one very slight modification in the CURE words. Still, what is most noticeable about her speech is her extremely upper-class intonation, also known as “Mitford drawl”, which labels her speech as aristocratic and clearly identifies her as a member of the Mitford family. This feature, which is present in all the samples, becomes particularly evident in Lady Mosley’s general tendency to lengthen the vowels, especially the diphthongs and the triphthongs of words in sentence-final positions, giving the whole sentence a slow and excessively relaxed intonation. Here are a few examples of the drawl: “[...] and then my solicitor came, he was a dear old *boy* [ˈbɔɪ:]” (*Good Afternoon*, 1977); “My father had two magnificent *bloodhounds* [ˈblʌdha:əndz]. [...] Two of us would go off with a good start to lay the *trail* [...] [ˈtre:əl]” (*Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters*, 1980); “[...] and my father sometimes used to say, I think he did it to tease us, really: ‘I hope you children realise you have to earn your own living, I’ve got no money to leave you’, and then we always began to *cry* [ˈkra:ɪ]” (*Desert Island Discs*, 1989).

3.4. Case Study 2 – Jessica Lucy Freeman-Mitford

Sister of Diana Mosley, Jessica Mitford was born in 1917. In 1936 she met her second cousin Esmond Rommilly, who was just back from Spain, where he had joined the International Brigades in the defence of Madrid during the Spanish Civil War: they fell in love and eloped to Spain, where Rommilly found a job as a reporter for the *News Chronicle* (Lovell 2001, 219). After getting married in 1937, they moved back to London's working-class East End, where they stayed for about two years, "refusing having anything to do with her family or to take any money from them [...]" (Benedict 1992, 106). In 1939, the couple emigrated to the US and, after travelling around and working odd jobs because of a desperate need of money, settled in Washington D.C., where Jessica gave birth to a daughter, Constancia Rommilly. Esmond, who had become a navigator for the Royal Canadian Air Force during WWII (Waugh 1980, 541), went missing in action in 1941. In 1943, Jessica moved to Oakland, California, with her second husband, the American civil rights lawyer Robert Treuhft, whom she had married that same year.¹³ In 1943, they joined the American Communist Party, of which they were both active members for many years; however, they resigned from it in 1958 when Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 Secret Speech revealed Joseph Stalin's crimes against humanity. Jessica Mitford became popular first with the publication of *Hons and Rebels* (1960), her memoir about her youth in the Mitford household, and with *The American Way of Death* (1963), an inquiry into the American funeral industry. She died of lung cancer at the age of 78, on 23 July 1996.

The first sample used in this study is Jessica Mitford's *Desert Island Discs* interview broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 8 August 1977. The second sample is from a documentary by Julian Jebb broadcast on BBC Two on 26 May 1980: *Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters*. A 1983 interview by John Pilger entitled *The Outsiders: Jessica Mitford* serves as the third sample. The fourth sample is a 1988 interview by Christopher Hitchens, recorded at the New York Public Library. The final sample comes from a talk given on 30 November 1991 at the San Francisco Public Library entitled *Sex and the First Amendment: Jessica Mitford on How Society Deals with Sexual Matters*. Her results are recorded below.

	LOT-CLOTH split	CURE-FORCE merger	SMOOTHING	KIT vowel in unstressed ending syllables	HAPPY tensing	TRAP vowel realised as /æ/	SQUARE vowel realised as /ɛə/
<u>Sample 1</u> (<i>Desert Island Discs</i> , 1977)	Present	Partial	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Present	Partial	Present	Partial
<u>Sample 2</u> (<i>Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters</i> , 1980)	Present	Absent	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Partial	Absent	Present	Present
<u>Sample 3</u> (<i>The Outsiders: Jessica Mitford</i> , 1980)	Present	Partial	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Present	Absent	Present	Partial
<u>Sample 4</u> (Interview by Christopher Hitchens, 1988)	Present	Present	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Partial	Partial	Present	Partial
<u>Sample 5</u> (<i>Sex and the First Amendment</i> , 1991)	Present	Partial	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Partial	Partial	Present	Present

Table 2. Jessica Mitford – Results

Firstly, it is interesting to observe that, despite having lived in the US for more than forty years, Jessica Mitford's speech has been affected only slightly by the American accent in the pronunciation of some words: it must only be noted that she uses the American pronunciation for *privacy* – [ˈpraɪvəsi] – and not the British /ˈprɪvəsi/, and for *issue*, preferring [ˈɪʃu:] over the more old-fashioned /ˈɪʃju:/ (the former is, however, also the pronunciation preferred by the great majority of people in the UK today). The typical Mitford drawl also characterises Jessica's speech, as the following examples show: “Swinbrook was looking wonderful green and summery and blue *sky* [ˈska:ɪ] [...] Debo is sending the obituary from *The Times* [ˈta:ɪmz]” (*Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters*, 1980); “Well, I started saving up I think when I was about twelve, and

that was right after I was totally *denied* [di'nai:d]" (*Desert Island Discs*, 1989); "[...] the stock went from thirty-five to *five* ['fa:ɪv]" (Interview by Christopher Hitchens, 1988); "and here is what he has to *say* ['se:ɪ]" and *The Rape of Lucrece* by William Shakespeare [...] might easily inspire some modern-day Tarquin to go and do the *same* ['se:ɪm]" (*Sex and the First Amendment*, 1991).

Nonetheless, her interviews generally show a laxer intonation and less affectation in her speech in comparison with that of her sister Diana, but, at the same time, the presence of almost all the features of conservative RP. There is, however, clear evidence of the CURE-FORCE merger: she pronounces *obscure* [əb'skjɜ:], *poor* [pɜ:], *sure* [ʃɜ:] and *tour* [tɜ:] to rhyme with *shore* /ʃɔ:/. As far as smoothing is concerned, Jessica Mitford tends to smooth the triphthongs in words such as *entire* [ɪn'taə], *hour* [aə] or *power* [paə], and the diphthong /aʊ/ in words such as *down*, *how*, *south* and *town*, which become [daən], [haə], [saəθ] and [taən]. As regards the KIT vowel /ɪ/ in the final weak syllables of words ending in *-ible*, *-ate*, *-less*, *-ness*, *-ity*, *-ily*, it can be noticed that she does not always adopt this feature, which is however hearable in *endless* [ɛndlɪs], *hopeless* [həʊplɪs] and *unfortunate* [ʌn'fɔ:tʃʊnɪt], sometimes preferring /ə/ to /ɪ/ in words ending in *-ness*, as occurs with *happiness*, *governess*, *righteousness* and *truthfulness*, which she realises as [hæpɪnəs], [gəvənəs], [raɪtʃəsənəs] and [tru:θfʊlnəs]. It should also be observed that the process of HAPPY tensing takes place in the pronunciation of many final unstressed *i*-type vowel in words such as *committee*, *country* and *mostly*, which she realises with /ɪ/ rather than with /i:/ [kə'mɪti], [kʌntri] and [mɔ:stli]. While she maintains, like her sister, the same old-fashioned pronunciation of words such as *across*, *cost*, *lost*, *off* and *offering* – [ə'krɔ:s], [kɔ:st], [lɔ:st], [ɔ:f], [ɔ:fərɪŋ] –, the TRAP vowel in her speech is not realised as an opening-diphthong as in that of Diana, but is more of the /æ/ quality, as can be heard, for example, from *back* [bæk], *bad* [bæd], *camp* [kæmp], *clan* [klæn], *fact* [fækt], *glad* [glæd], *landlord* [lændlɔ:d] and *rally* [ræli]. The realisation of the SQUARE vowel as /ɛə/ occurs only in some words such as *air* [ɛə], *aware* [ə'weə], *rare* [rɛə] and *repair* [rɪ'peə], but not in others, such as *there* or *elsewhere*, which she pronounces as [ðe:] and [ɛls'we:].

3.5. Case Study 3 – Deborah Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire (née Deborah Vivien Freeman-Mitford)

The youngest of the six Mitford sisters, Deborah Mitford was born in 1920. In 1941 she married Lord Andrew Cavendish, younger son of the 10th Duke of

Devonshire, and became Duchess of Devonshire when her husband inherited the title in 1950. She dedicated her life to Chatsworth House, one of the most famous English country houses, playing a key role in the restoration works and in the development of the commercial activities related to it. She died in 2014.

The first sample used in this study is Deborah Cavendish's Desert Island Discs interview broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 3 September 1982. The second sample is from a documentary by Julian Jebb broadcast on BBC Two on 26 May 1980: *Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters*. A 1991 documentary interview by Andrew Cox entitled *Chatsworth House 1991: The Golden Wedding Event*, serves as the third sample. The fourth sample is an interview part of "The Artists, Poets, and Writers Lecture Series" sponsored by *The Frick Collection*, recorded on 10 November 2010. The final sample comes from an interview given to the journalist Charlie Rose on 23 December 2010. The results of the analysis for Deborah Cavendish are detailed in the table below.

	LOT-CLOTH split	CURE-FORCE merger	SMOOTHING	KIT vowel in unstressed ending syllables	HAPPY tensing	TRAP vowel realised as /æ/	SQUARE vowel realised as /εə/
<u>Sample 1</u> (<i>Desert Island Discs</i> , 1982)	Present	Present	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Present	Absent	Partial	Present
<u>Sample 2</u> (<i>Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters</i> , 1980)	Present	Present	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Present	Absent	Partial	Present
<u>Sample 3</u> (<i>Chatsworth House 1991</i> , 1991)	Present	Present	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Present	Absent	Absent	Present
<u>Sample 4</u> (Interview part of "The Artists, Poets, and Writers Lecture Series", 2010)	Present	Present	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Present	Absent	Partial	Present

Sample 5 (Interview by Charlie Rose, 2010)	Present	Present	In almost all triphthongs and certain diphthongs selected	Present	Absent	Partial	Present
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Table 3. Deborah Cavendish (née Mitford), Duchess of Devonshire – Results

As with the previous two cases, the LOT-CLOTH split takes place in Deborah Mitford’s speech and she retained /ɔ:/ in words such as *across* [ə'krɔ:s], *gone* [gɔ:n] or *lost* [lɔ:st] up to 2010. As far as the CURE-FORCE merger is concerned, it can be observed that, in the 1982 *Desert Island Discs* interview, her pronunciation of *moor* is [mɔ:] and not [mʊə], as that of *sure* [ʃɔ:] rhymes with *for* /fɔ:/ in all interviews. In her speech, smoothing affects the triphthongs of words such as *entirely*, *power* and *retire*, which she realises as [ɪn'tæɪɹɪ], [pəʊə] and [rɪ'tæɪ], and the diphthongs of *grown*, *house*, *now*, *out*, *pound* and *time*, which she pronounces respectively as [gəʊn], [haʊs], [naʊ], [aʊt], [pəʊnd] and [taɪm]. The KIT vowel /ɪ/ can be distinctly heard in the final weak syllable of words ending in *-ate* and *-ness*, such as *private* ['praɪvɪt], *illness* ['ɪlnɪs] and *immediate* [ɪ'mɪdiət]. Interestingly, the quality of her /æ/ is not as retracted as that of her sisters: the TRAP vowel oscillates between the older /æ/ in words such as *fat*, *mad* and *that*, which she realises as [fæt], [mæd] and [ðæt], and the more modern /a/ of *lack* [læk], *Jack* [dʒæk], *Nancy* [ˈnɑnsɪ] and *tramp* [træmp]. This is particularly evident in her last interviews and may be due to a possible influence of the ongoing trend in Modern RP, which has registered a widespread use of /a/ in preference to /æ/ in the second half of the 20th century.¹⁴ In the Duchess of Devonshire’s speech, the HAPPY tensing does not seem to be present and the SQUARE vowel realised as /ɛə/ always occurs in the words characterised by the group of letters *-air*, *-ear* and *-are* (when not followed by a consonant) such as *air*, *bear*, *care*, *fair* and *fare*, which she pronounces respectively as [ˈɛə], [ˈbeə], [ˈkeə] and [ˈfeə]. Lastly, it can be noted that her drawl is not as strong as that of Diana and Jessica, but it is still present: “[...] they used to have what they called an open day, when lunch [...] was then given [...] to anybody who *came* [ˈkeɪm] (*Desert Island Discs*, 1982); “[...] but the last time he came to *stay* [ˈsteɪ]” (Interview part of “The Artists, Poets, and Writers Lecture Series”, 2010).

4. Conclusions

Two types of conclusions might be reached from these case studies. In the first instance, notwithstanding the narrow group of speakers, certain points can be made about the current state of conservative or upper Received Pronunciation. As far as the LOT-CLOTH split is concerned, all the Mitford sisters maintained the vowel /ɔ:/ in words such as *lost*, *Crossman*, *soft*, *off*, *cost* and *gone*, which they pronounce as [ˈlɔːst], [ˈkrɔːsmən], [ˈsɔːft], [ɔːf], [ˈkɔːst] and [ˈgɔːn]. This tendency towards the preservation of the older form, which may be regarded as old-fashioned or obsolete in the modern day, is not shared, however, by other conservative RP speakers, such as HM the Queen, who, in her 2007 Christmas broadcast, pronounced *off* as [ɔːf],¹⁵ but *lost* as [ˈlɔːst] in 2009 during a State Banquet at Windsor Castle in honour of the former French president Nicholas Sarkozy.¹⁶ Henceforth, differently from the Mitford sisters, Queen Elizabeth II has modified a distinct feature of her conservative upper-RP accent over the course of the years: suffice it to compare the aforementioned example to her 1957 Christmas message, in which the word *lost* is pronounced in the “old-fashioned way” [ˈlɔːst].¹⁷ But, as Hilton argues,

Certain aspects of her pronunciation [...] show that HM Queen Elizabeth is an atypical RP speaker, retaining features of traditional RP but being more advanced in other areas. Given the unusual circumstances of her life and upbringing it is perhaps not surprising that she does not fit easily into any major group but it does mean that using changes in her pronunciation as illustrative of broader changes across the RP speaking community is questionable at best. (Hinton 2015, 30)

The CURE-FORCE merger seems to be the only significant modification in the conservative RP of the Mitford sisters: apparently, they have been affected by this process, preferring the vowel /ɔ:/ to the diphthong /ʊə/ in words such as *poor*, *sure* and *moor*, a tendency which is shared by other upper RP speakers such as the Queen. However, this merger should not be taken as a rule, since, as Hinton explains, “there is a good deal of variation both between speakers and between vocabulary items for the same speaker” (Hinton 2015, 33).¹⁸

The present study can, therefore, claim to have shown that stability and diachronic uniformity in an individual’s speech over the course of time can be observed and that not all features of a particular accent are subject to change. In particular, this pertains to speakers of a specific accent, such as conservative or

upper RP, of a specific age and class, who apparently remain largely unaffected by the changing trends occurring in the accent itself. The case of the CURE words is the only slight modification that can be taken into consideration in these case studies; this, however, cannot constitute a generalisation since, in some cases, the more old-fashioned pronunciation is preferred over the modern one. To conclude, it appears that, upon reaching maturity, the Mitford sisters have retained almost all the features that characterised their original accent without any noticeable change.

Endnotes

1. Among the most significant contributions on this topic are: Fabricius, Anne H., “Variation and Change in the TRAP and STRUT Vowels of RP: A Real Time Comparison of five Acoustic Data Sets”, *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*, vol. 37, no. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 293–320; Harrington, Jonathan, Palethorpe, Sallyanne, Watson, Catherine, “Monophthongal vowel changes in Received Pronunciation: an acoustic analysis of the Queen’s Christmas broadcasts”, *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*, vol. 30, no. 1-2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 63-78; Taylor, Jill and Gérard Walter, “What, Pray, Is Happening to Dear Old RP?”, *La Linguistique*, vol. 34, no. 2 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), pp. 141-52.
2. In a passage of Nancy Mitford’s *The Pursuit of Love*, during an argument concerning the education of females, Uncle Matthew exclaims: “I was always led to suppose that no educated person ever spoke of notepaper, and yet I hear poor Fanny asking Sadie for notepaper. What is this education? Fanny talks about mirrors and mantelpieces, handbags and perfume [...]” Mitford, Nancy, *The Pursuit of Love* (London: Penguin, 1945, 2015), p. 29.
3. In *A Dictionary of Phonetics and Phonology*, R.L. Trask defines the drawl as “an impressionistic label for any style of speech which is perceived by the person making the judgement as involving an unusual degree of lengthening the vowels, syllables or words, or as merely being unusually slow in tempo (Trask 2004, 67). “The Mitford voice was often said to be affected, because of its drawl and exaggerated emphasis” (Dalley 2014, 260).
4. See: Hinton, Martin, “Changes in Received Pronunciation: Diachronic Case Studies”, *Research in Language*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Łódź: Łódź University Press, 2015), pp. 21-37.
5. Many studies have focussed on the Queen’s vowel quality over time, such as the aforementioned Harrington, Jonathan, Palethorpe, Sallyanne, Watson, Catherine, “Monophthongal vowel changes in Received Pronunciation: an acoustic analysis of the Queen’s Christmas broadcasts”, *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*, vol. 30, no. 1-2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 63-78. These Australian researchers have observed how “changes in the Queen’s vowels between the 1950’s and 1980’s have been in the direction of a more mainstream RP. If this theory is correct, and if the vowel positions have continued to change beyond the 1980’s, then the present-day Queen’s vowel positions might have shifted even further in the direction of a vertical

- expansion and horizontal compression. On the other hand, the Queen's vowel positions may well have stabilized by the 1980's; our results show very clearly that there has been a fairly dramatic change from the 1950's to the late 1960's/early 1970's with very little change thereafter to the mid-late 1980's" (74).
6. "One of the most specific peculiarities of this "prestige" accent is that it is 'accentless' in the sense that it is not bound to any particular territory – it can be found anywhere in the country. It does not tell the listener where the speaker is from – it tells him only about the speaker's position in society as well as his educational background." Maguidova, Irina, "Speech Modelling as the Subject of Functional Stylistics", *Folia Anglistica*, vol. 1 (Moscow: AO "Dialog-MGU", 1997), pp. 11-38, p. 15.
 7. The definition of "standard" English leads to a series of ambiguities and problems, which are widely treated in Kerswill, Paul, "RP, Standard English and the standard/non-standard relationship", in David Britain (ed.), *Language in the British Isles* (2nd ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 1-18.
 8. See Wells, John C., *Accents of English 1: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 234-37.
 9. In his BBC documentary *Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters* (1980) Julian Jebb asks Diana Mosley if she has suffered from having the Mitford voice, to which she replies: "No, never. You see, I've never been a public speaker and I've never been in public life, no doubt that if I had, I should have suffered. But it's just been my private sorrow to have the Mitford voice." Jebb then asks Deborah (Mitford) Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, the same question: "We are saddled with it, aren't we?", she answers. "It's awful. Living in the North of England it's even sillier than it is living anywhere else. [...] I'm afraid I do [mind it much], but I can't change it, I'm too old. [...] It sounds ridiculous to other people, and you can see them thinking it" (from *Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters*, 1980). The full documentary can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP9sjKl3HMQ&t=1423s>
 10. I decided to focus only on seven categories of features characterising conservative or upper RP among the ones listed in the introduction, since they are those which occur more often and which are more instantly recognisable in the speech of the three Mitford sisters. The instances of each category ranged from 2 to 10.
 11. "On 1 September 1939, Defence Regulation 18b had come into effect, enabling the arrest and internment of anyone who might engage in acts prejudicial to the public safety or the defence of the realm. [...] The purpose of 18b was to remove the threat posed by a potential fifth column in Britain and her colonies in the event of a German invasion. This was particularly critical on mainland Britain where, following Dunkirk, invasion seemed inevitable [...]" Sonabend, Daniel, *We Fight Fascists: The 43 Group and Their Forgotten Battle for Post-War Britain* (London and New York: Verso, 2019), pp. 11 e 16.
 12. The pronunciation of the word *loss* as [lɔ:s] is common to other elderly conservative RP speakers, such as Sir Oswald Mosley and HM The Queen. In an interview filmed in 1975 for the Thames Television *Today* show, Mosley clearly pronounces *loss* in the old-fashioned way: "I do not think that a minority in this country should pursue a policy contrary to the national interest which can and, in fact, which did result in the *loss* of fifty million lives [...]" The full interview can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNhF28fzN9I&t=570s> The same pronunciation of this word can be heard in The Queen's Christmas Broadcast 1953: "[...] I want to say something to my

- people in New Zealand. Last night a most grievous railway accident took place at Tangiwai which will have brought tragedy into many homes and sorrow into all upon this Christmas day. I know there is no one in New Zealand, and indeed throughout the Commonwealth, who will not join with my husband and me in sending to those who mourn a message of sympathy in their *loss*” (from The Queen’s Christmas Broadcast 1953). The full broadcast can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZwH_TTrP-g
13. See: Mitford, Jessica, Sussman, Peter Y. (ed.), *Decca: The Letters of Jessica Mitford* (New York: Knopf Doubleday), 2010.
 14. Wells also points out that “the newly current [a] is perceptually very similar to the fronted realizations of /ʌ/ which have been around in RP for rather longer” (Wells 1992, 292).
 15. The Christmas story “draws attention to all those people who at the edge of society, people who feel cut off [ˈɔːf] and disadvantaged” (from The Queen’s Christmas Broadcast 2007). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IelUFNw1TI&t=225s>
 16. According to the BBC, the Queen was heard saying to her daughter, Princess Anne: “The Prime Minister [Gordon Brown] got *lost* [ˈlɒst]. He disappeared the wrong way [...] at the crucial moment.” The full article can be found at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7316401.stm
 17. “I’m not surprised that many people feel *lost* [ˈlɔːst] and unable to decide what to hold on to and what to discard” (The Queen’s Christmas Broadcast 1957).
 18. In the 1980 documentary, Pamela Mitford reads an excerpt from *Love in A Cold Climate*, one of her sister Nancy’s famous interwar novels, pronouncing the word *manure* as [məˈnjuə]: “The entire male population of the village, warned beforehand and armed with rakes and landing nets fell upon the fish, several wheelbarrows were filled and the content taken off to be used as *manure* for cottage gardens [...]” (from *Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters*, 1980). Although Pamela Mitford pronounces *sure* to rhyme with *shore* in other parts of the same documentary, the older pronunciation of *manure* proves that the CURE-FORCE merger has not affected all CURE words.

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Appendix

Part of the recordings has been taken from www.youtube.com, part from the Desert Island Discs Archives (www.bbc.co.uk), one from johnpilger.com (<http://johnpilger.com/videos/the-outsiders-jessica-mitford>).

Lady Diana Mosley (née Diana Freeman-Mitford)

Sample 1: 31 March 1977,	<i>Good Afternoon</i> , Thames TV interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzkbouKG83o
Sample 2: 26 May 1980,	<i>Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters</i> , BBC Two documentary by Julian Jebb: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP9sjKl3HMQ&t=2664s
Sample 3: 26 June 1980,	<i>All About Books</i> , BBC One series about books by Russell Harty: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVxbusoy8Mg&t=1307s
Sample 4: 27 November 1989,	<i>Desert Island Discs</i> , BBC Radio 4 interview: https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/po09mdck
Sample 5: 20 December 2007,	<i>Hitler's British Girl</i> , Channel 4 documentary. Lady Mosley's interview, which is contained in this documentary and used as a sample for this study, was recorded in 1999. Part One: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-IWnUBtMbU Part Two: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfFkG-5_PTI Part Three: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHCKJv1gf88 Part Four: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSKApLM4liY

Jessica Lucy Freeman-Mitford

Sample 1: 8 August 1977,	<i>Desert Island Discs</i> , BBC Radio 4 interview: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/po09mt1m
Sample 2: 26 May 1980,	<i>Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters</i> , BBC Two documentary by Julian Jebb: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP9sjKl3HMQ&t=2664s
Sample 3: 1983,	<i>The Outsiders: Jessica Mitford</i> , A John Pilger interview: http://johnpilger.com/videos/the-outsiders-jessica-mitford
Sample 4: 1988,	Interview by Christopher Hitchens at the New York Public Library: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fZj6ydaK7&t=2709s
Sample 5: 30 November 1991,	<i>Sex and the First Amendment: Jessica Mitford on How Society Deals with Sexual Matters</i> , talk given at the San Francisco Public Library: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cstUMAdlBzw&t=672s

Deborah Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire (née Deborah Vivien Freeman-Mitford)

Sample 1: 3 September 1982,	<i>Desert Island Discs</i> , BBC Radio 4 interview: https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p009mkf9
Sample 2: 26 May 1980,	<i>Nancy Mitford: A Portrait by Her Sisters</i> , BBC Two documentary by Julian Jebb: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP9sjKl3HMQ&t=2664s
Sample 3: 1991,	<i>Chatsworth House 1991: The Golden Wedding Event</i> , documentary interview by Andrew Cox: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lmDdLBvvgM&t=1091
Sample 4: 10 November 2010,	Interview part of “The Artists, Poets, and Writers Lecture Series” sponsored by <i>The Frick Collection</i> : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25IO32AxGq4&t=540s
Sample 5: 23 December 2010,	<i>Charlie Rose</i> : https://charlierose.com/videos/14602

HM Queen Elizabeth II

The Christmas Broadcast, 1957:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBRP-o6Q85s&t=114s>

The Christmas Broadcast, 2007:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IeIUFNw1TI&t=198s>

State Banquet at Windsor Castle, 2009:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bu_USCcvuEs

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