

For immediate release

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BBC PRONUNCIATION HEAD SPEAKS AT HKUST

Leading British phonetician Graham Pointon will explore the controversial issue of English pronunciation at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology next Tuesday.

As the Head of the Pronunciation Unit of the British Broadcasting Corporation since 1979, Mr Pointon is well known for his expertise in the pronunciation of personal and place names in virtually all English accents. He is also the writer of the "BBC Pronouncing Dictionary" and adviser to major language publications.

The phrase "BBC English", first adopted by the "Times" newspaper in 1928, has come to represent standard English grammar and pronunciation for decades. The BBC's Pronunciation Unit, apart from giving pronunciation advice to all its broadcasters, also provides advisory services to broadcasting companies all over the world.

However, language is not static, and nor is its pronunciation. As Mr Pointon said, "The phrase 'BBC English' implies standard English and RP (Received Pronunciation) accent, but is no longer—even if it ever was—a reflexion of the accents used by BBC broadcasters."

"With the internationalization of English, even BBC, long considered to be the guardian of English, has changed its policy by adopting lots of regional accents. It will be illuminating to see how BBC is keeping up with the changes in English pronunciation as well as policy," said Dr Gregory James, Director of the Language Centre.

"Teachers of English are constantly facing a dilemma--what pronunciation to teach students? Should it be RP which is in fact used by only a minority of English speakers? Should we teach them standard English which no longer exists? We hope that Mr Pointon will shed light on the many perspectives in teaching English pronunciation," continued Dr James.

Mr Pointon was among the first batch of British master's degree-holders in linguistics at the University of Edinburgh in 1970. He later received a higher degree in linguistics at the same university. Before he joined the Pronunciation Unit of BBC, he was a lecturer in phonetics at the University of Trondheim in Norway.

All interested are welcome.

Topic: The BBC and the English language

Date: 24 October 1995, 6:30 p.m.

Venue: Lecture Theatre E, HKUST

(Please direct enquiries to the Office of Public Affairs at 2358 6306 or pager 71163388 call 2651.)