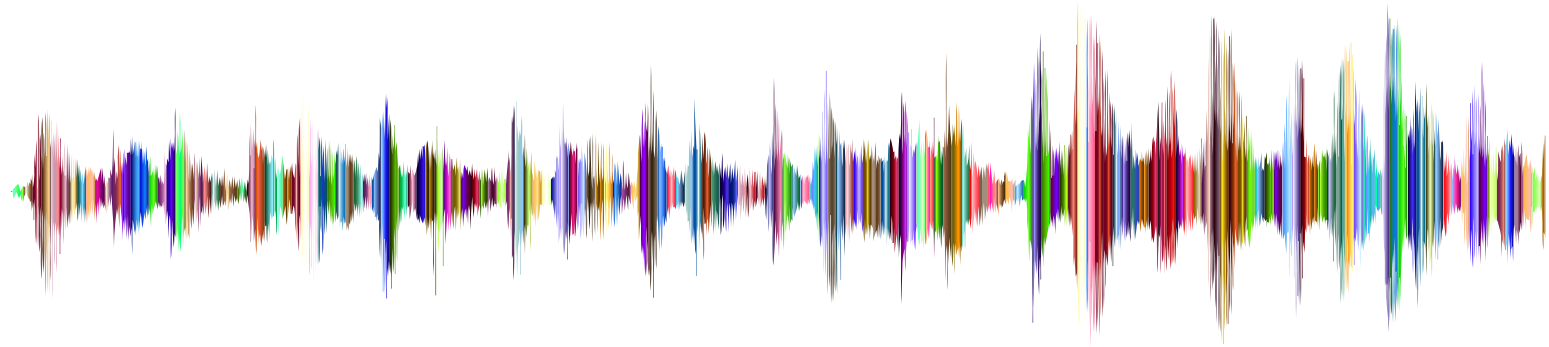


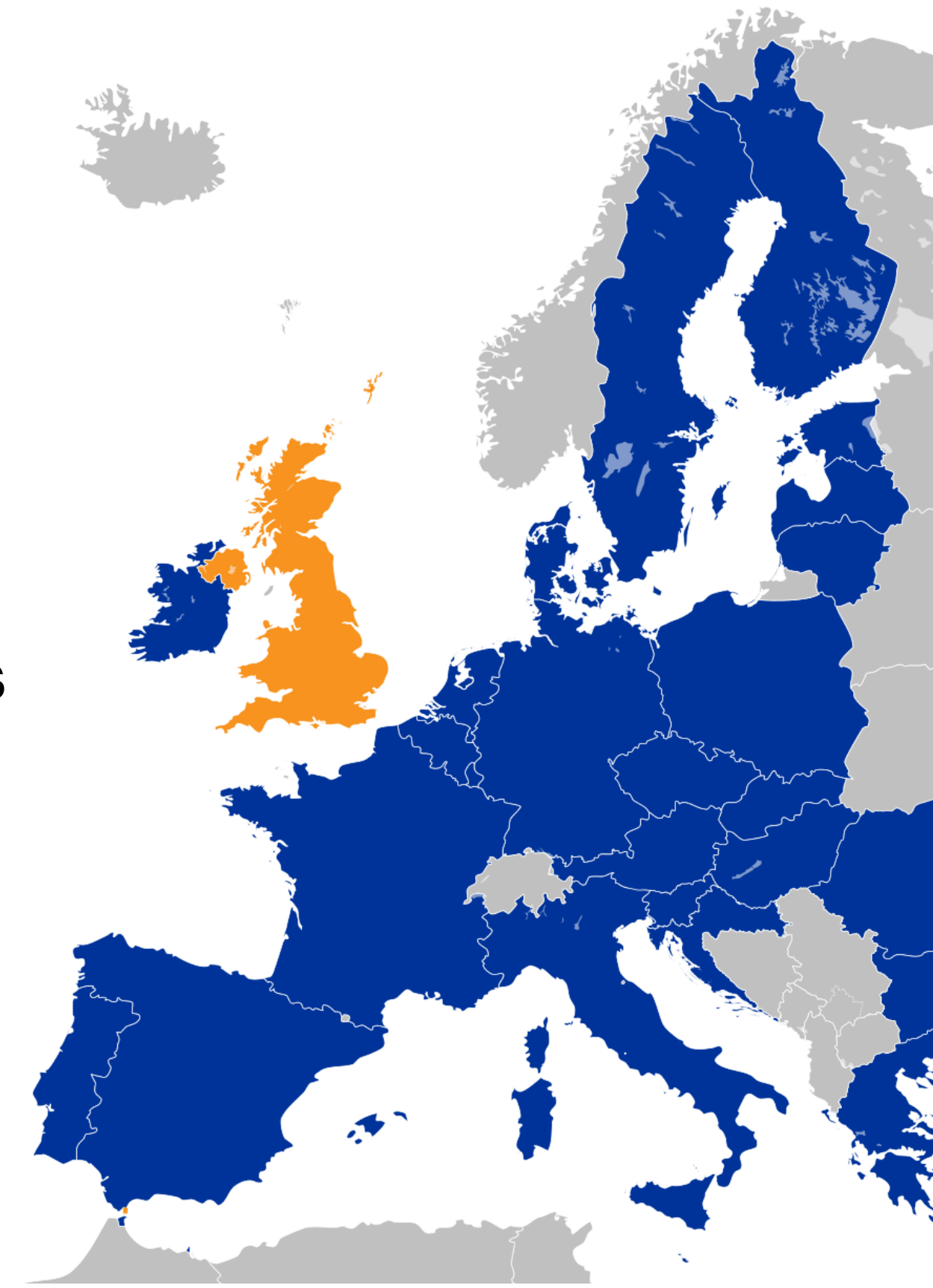
November 19, 2020

THE IMPACT OF CURRENT TRENDS IN BRITISH SOCIETY ON THE PHONOSTYLISTICAL PECULIARITIES OF THE MEDIA DISCOURSE

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In the light of the current sociopolitical situation in Great Britain, the state on the edge of BREXIT, led by the Conservative Party, there is a noticeable change in the common perception of Received Pronunciation (RP)* and its contemporary varieties



***RP – the accent commonly used in public schools and universities like Oxford and Cambridge, in the South of England: RP studies revolve predominantly around phonetic peculiarities of the Standard British English**

Plan

1

The Essence of Sociolinguistics

2

**Sociolinguistic Analysis of a
Contemporary British Society**

3

Media Discourse

4

Methods and Results

i.

In a broad sense, *sociolinguistics* is concerned with language in terms of its social significance, language patterns development within the society; how the latter influences the former, consequently.

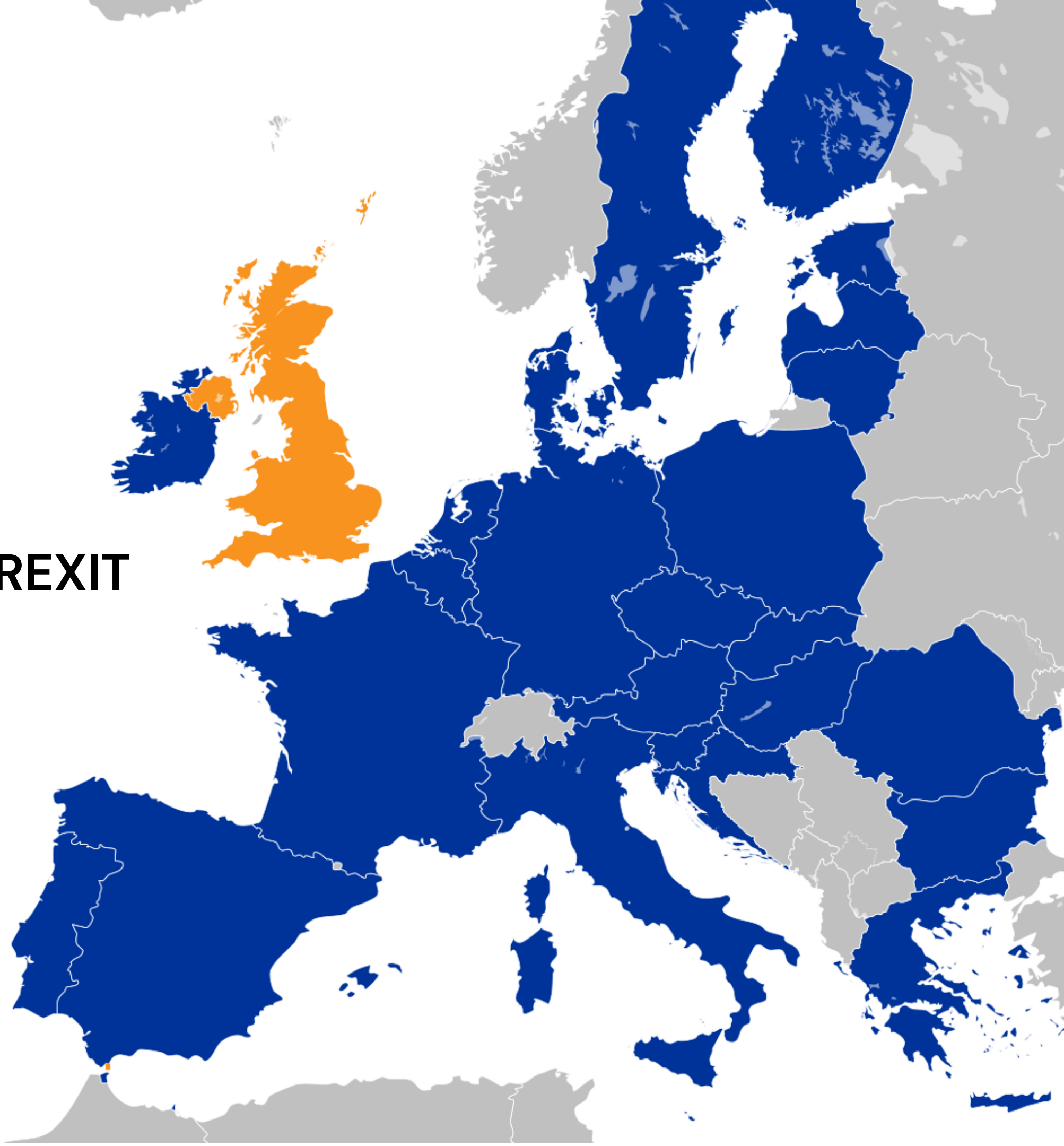


ii.

The current state of affairs in British politics can be straightforwardly defined by one significant event. The Conservatives (Tori) remain the leading political party, most significant when it comes to making decisions regarding the future of Great Britain.



BREXIT

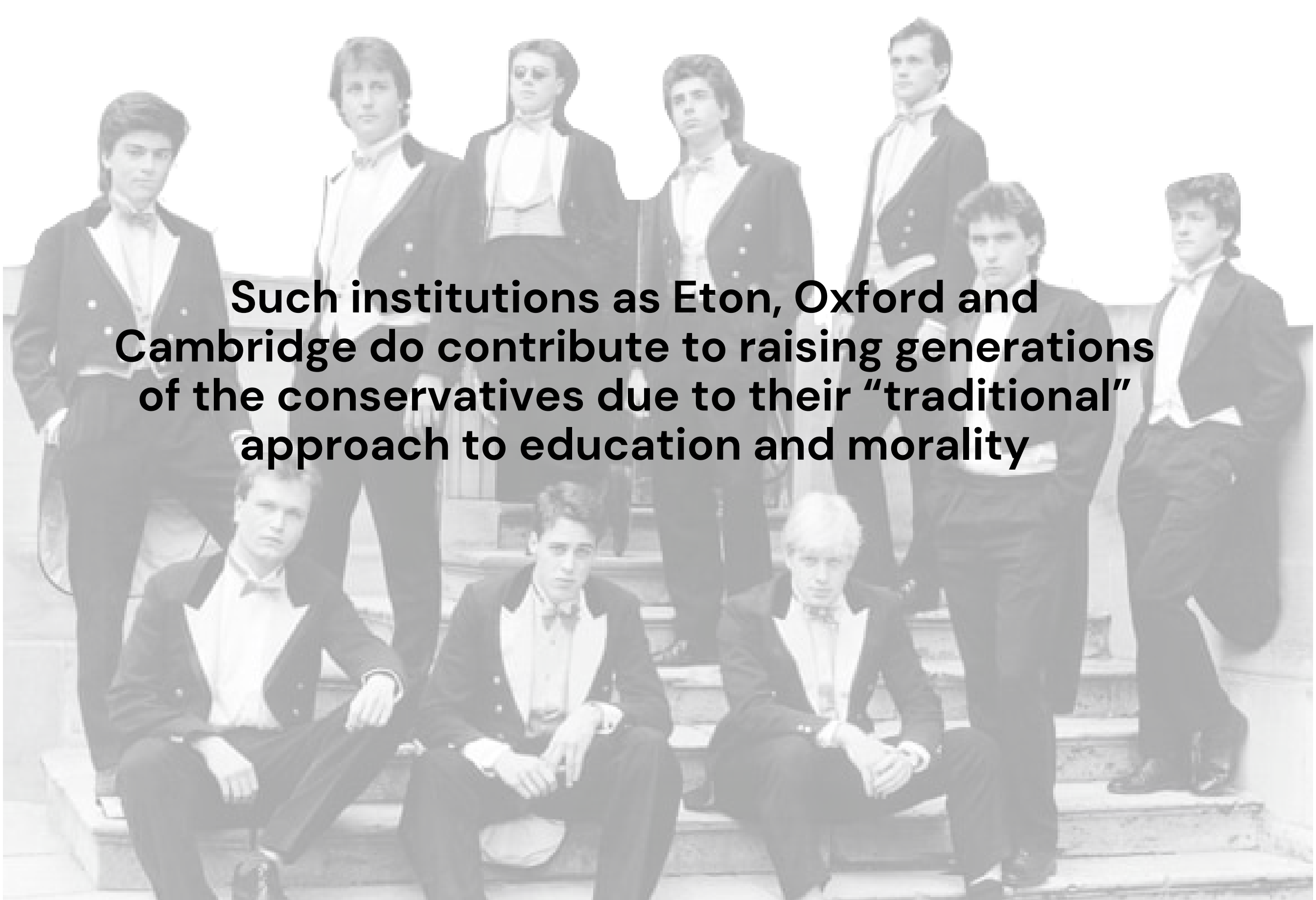


When it comes to defining the Conservatives, understanding who they are and how their opinions have been shaped through their endeavours, one of the most significant points lies within education.



**There was a direct link between the schools,
the government, and the Empire.**

– Robert Verkaik, *Posh boys: How the English Public Schools Ruin Britain* (2018)



Such institutions as Eton, Oxford and Cambridge do contribute to raising generations of the conservatives due to their “traditional” approach to education and morality

posh

to be or not to be?

Before democratisation

RP was frequently considered THE English language, the ultimate one, often making some English native-speakers seriously self-conscious by persuading them that they 'cannot speak English'.

"The social prestige which RP once enjoyed, and the scholarly prestige of the classic works describing it, have left a legacy of conservatism"

– Geoff Lindsey, English After RP: Standard British Pronunciation Today

After democratisation

People who speak with “Posh” accents are now expected to be discriminated on the language basis, and even restricted in certain social interactions

iii.

Media discourse

– British Broadcasting Corporation and 'BBC accent'



1– Are the regional accent-speaking newsreaders and reporters represented in contemporary media industry in Great Britain?

2– If so, how significant is the deviation from RP standards in their discourse?

3– Do the regional accent-speaking newsreaders and reporters tend to ‘soften’ their accents within the more conventional environment?

iv.

To prove the hypothesis, a phonetic analysis of the two transcribed speeches taken as examples of contemporary media discourse has been carried out. Both belong to the same speaker and were studied in terms of the speaker's accent peculiarities, including articulation of vowels and consonants. The results were then compared with the canons of Received Pronunciation to evaluate both similarities and differences.

BBC reporters who:

1– were more recently employed by BBC (not more than 20 years ago)

2– had a distinct strong accent, which could be easily recognised by viewers due to sounding ‘different’ from what conventional BBC broadcasting has been embodying for decades

3– did not represent a “posh” background

Stephanie Rose McGovern

(born 31 May 1982, from Middlesbrough, England) worked as the main business presenter for BBC Breakfast (2010–2019), BBC. Known for her “North-East twang”.



“...I'm talking about what's going on in the financial world on national TV on the BBC. And, you know, as a Northern woman with an accent doing that... there was a lot of shock when I first went on TV...”



The two chosen media discourse examples were then transcribed;

the most phonetically significant and vivid parts (those which help to identify the Northern accent) were:

–extracted

– further analysed to define the most common similarities and differences when compared to Received Pronunciation (RP).

In **Table 1** similarities in terms of sounds are highlighted in pink, differences – in blue.

Table 1

Steph McGovern' s BBC Breakfast guest appearance fragment	RP variation for the same vowels/consonants
00:43	
typical things we all hear like eat five <i>(In such regions as Middlesbrough, the phoneme /aɪ/ before a voiced consonant is commonly substituted with a monophthong [a:] (Williams & Kerswill, 1999), which doesn't happen here due to accent softening)</i>	[faɪv]
00:51	
relieve pain <i>(pronounced with a monophthong [ɛ:])</i> so we go to <u>like</u> a garden	[peɪn]
02:52	
might have started <i>(glottal stop, /ʔ/)</i> noticing <i>(has a monophthong [ɔ:])</i> them in the	['stɑ:tɪd] <i>(no glottal stop)</i> ['nəʊtɪzɪŋ]

Steph McGovern' s monologue in "Steph McGovern: discovering her unique selling point" video	RP variation for the same vowels/consonants
00:00	
As a woman on TV [,teɪ'veɪ] doing what has	[,ti:'vi:]
00:06	
financial (takes [ɪ]) world on national TV [,teɪ'veɪ] on the	[faɪ'nænsəl] [,ti:'vi:]
00:13	
lot of shock when I first went on the TV [,teɪ'veɪ]	[,ti:'vi:]
00:17	
this woman doing on TV [,teɪ'veɪ] I felt a real	[,ti:'vi:]
00:19	
responsibility (takes a final [eɪ]) to do that job well and	[rɪs pɒnsə'bɪlɪti]
00:26	
when I first started (Commonly, there's no distinction between [a] and [ɑ:] in different varieties of Yorkshire accent (Petyt, 1985), though in the given example the speaker does pronounce the sound [ɑ:] + no glottal stop)	['stɑ:tɪd]

results

- 1. There is indeed a serious deviation from Received Pronunciation standards in terms of Steph McGovern's accent in both analysed examples.**
- 2. The deviation is much more significant in the second example – a less formal environment**
- 3. The speaker's accent goes through subtle changes so that the same word can be pronounced differently in different utterances.**

“When I first started, where I thought oh my god I need to be like how other people have done this job, so, you know, I need to be like a BBC person and do all that and be quite natural...”



Steph McGovern's case is indeed one vivid example of how the accent democratisation, affected by the liberal tendencies in the society, is reflected in media discourse.



It might take a long time for the climate within such media institutions as BBC to change completely as there is still a noticeable tendency for conservative preference when it comes to newsreaders' speech characteristics.

Still, the deviation from RP standards, which was unacceptable in the twentieth century media discourse in Great Britain is definitely becoming more and more common.



further development of the subject

- obtaining more qualitative data**
- an in-depth phonetic analysis of everyday communication in Great Britain**
- the future of teaching the English language phonetics ? (ESL)**

**“It is impossible for an
Englishman to open his
mouth without making some
other Englishman hate or
despise him.”**

***– George Bernard
Shaw***

discussion

thank you very much for your attention!

should you have any questions: aaprikhodina@edu.hse.ru

references:

- 1. Verkaik, R. (2018). Posh boys: How the English Public Schools Ruin Britain. New York: Oneworld Publications.**
- 2. Lindsey, G (2019). English After RP: Standard British Pronunciation Today (University College London, London, UK)**
- 3. Steph McGovern's post-leaving BBC Breakfast 'goodbye' appearance as a guest on a show (YouTube <https://youtu.be/TBeUBSyN920>) as an example of how a TV presenter with a Northern accent present themselves within the contemporary BBC environment.**
- 4. "Steph McGovern: discovering her unique selling point" (YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SaKE8HTeRY>) video as an example of a more 'relaxed' discourse, outside BBC environment.**