

Harry Potter's English

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This message has also been posted on my revived blog Gyre&Gimble at <http://gyregimble.blogspot.com/> That blog has other posts about language that might interest members of this group.

Last night I saw the latest Harry Potter movie, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix. As with the previous one (Goblet of Fire), which I watched on DVD, I had a lot of trouble understanding much of the dialog. Because of that previous experience I paid more attention to my problem this time and discovered that it was primarily the young people that I had trouble understanding. I don't remember having this problem with the first four films.

Relevant background: I am a retired professor and have known and spoken with British academics for 40 years, and have spent several months living in Britain as well (Oxford and London). I am also hard of hearing.

Evidently, British young people, even educated ones, speak quite differently from their parents and grandparents. This is not just my experience: linguists have noticed it, for example the phonetician John Wells here

<http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/wells/blog0608.htm>

(for 29 August). That site provides a clip of a young member of the aristocracy speaking. I can't understand her either.

I had no problem understanding the actors who played the adults in the HP movies; I have had a lot of experience with that sort of accent (Scottish as well as southern English).

The American audience in the movie theater (in rural northern Wisconsin) had no problem with the kids' accents. They laughed several times at verbal interactions between them that I didn't understand.

I had less trouble understanding Daniel Radcliffe and Emma Watson in the interviews here:

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http://media.movies.ign.com/media/035/035558/vids_1.html

Is it possible that in the movie they deliberately spoke like British teenagers and during their interview they used their usual speaking-to-adults dialect?

I expect to watch these movies a second time on a DVD player with the subtitles turned on!

Charles Wells

blog: <http://www.gyregimble.blogspot.com/>

abstract math website: <http://www.abstractmath.org/MM/MMIntro.htm>

professional website: <http://www.cwru.edu/artsci/math/wells/home.html>

personal website: <http://www.abstractmath.org/Personal/index.html>

NE Ohio Sacred Harp website: <http://www.abstractmath.org/fasola/index.html>

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