

Developing Access to the Evolving English VoiceBank

Reference: 2017-5-ROB

Supervisor	Jonnie Robinson, Lead Curator, Spoken English
Department, Location	Sound & Vision, St Pancras, London
Start date/timeframe	Anytime in the period from April 2017 to March 2018
Duration	3 months (or part-time equivalent – see below) <i>For a part-time placement, the student would be required to spend a minimum of 2.5 days/week on site at the Library</i>
Remote-working	This project does not offer scope for remote working – the placement must be conducted on site at the British Library.

Context for placement

Spoken English sits within the British Library's Sound & Vision team and consists of two staff members. The Lead Curator is responsible for the Library's extensive collections of sound recordings that document varieties of English, with a particular emphasis on British accents and dialects. Duties include managing the collections (e.g. cataloguing, developing new content, selecting items for digitisation/preservation), responding to enquiries from researchers, developing access to the collections, engaging with researchers in Higher Education and elsewhere, promoting the collections (e.g. onsite workshops, presenting at conferences, posting blogs, exhibitions, press and media appearances). The placement student will have opportunity to experience/contribute to some of these activities according to interest/expertise, but will be principally responsible for cataloguing a subset of an important collection of digital audio files created by the public: the *Evolving English VoiceBank*.

The *Evolving English VoiceBank* is a substantial audio archive of c. 15,000 voices created by visitors to the Library's Evolving English exhibition in 2010/11. It is currently only partially catalogued, so this placement presents an ideal opportunity to address this by accessioning a substantial additional subset. Ultimately, this will help the Library to enhance its Sound and Moving Image catalogue, provide onsite access to the content in the Reading Rooms and, selectively, make new content available to a worldwide audience via the British Library Sounds website.

Expected tasks and outcomes

The placement student will audit *Evolving English VoiceBank* audio files and prepare cataloguing metadata for migration to the Sound and Moving Image catalogue. A target of c.500-750 catalogue records is envisaged in three months (or part-time equivalent) and the student will be expected to select audio files and prepare accompanying metadata for upload to the Sounds website. The student will be trained in using audio editing software (where applicable) and in preparing cataloguing metadata records according to British Library conventions for digital audio files.

In addition, the student will be encouraged to participate fully in the department's core activities – e.g. observing and potentially contributing to workshops/conference presentations, posting blogs, selecting/preparing content for online resources. The student may wish, for instance, to post blogs relating to the content they select for upload to the Sounds website. This part of the placement can be tailored to suit the student's own interests and expertise: possibilities include a description of selected lexical submissions (the [WordBank](#)), a comparison of accents contributed (the [VoiceBank](#)) or an analysis of participants' [reflections on their own linguistic identity](#).

Training and experience expected to be gained by student through the placement

In completing the principal task of auditing and cataloguing c.500 to 750 contributions to the *Evolving English Voicebank*, the student will have privileged access to this unique and hitherto unexploited collection for engaging in original research and/or supporting their own current research. They will be encouraged to disseminate that research via academic channels and/or social media. The content will be particularly relevant for students with research interests in e.g. dialectology, sociolinguistics, phonetics and/or language variation and change.

This is an opportunity to engage in the work of a world-class research Library and to develop understanding of its content, its structure and its remit. In addition to the 'hands on' training in audio editing and cataloguing

conventions, the placement project will support the development of transferrable skills in areas such as public engagement, using different communication methods and media, team-working and collaboration, and project planning and delivery. Contributing to the Library's blogs will develop expertise in writing for a general public audience.

Required knowledge and skills

As well as strong IT skills, including familiarity with MS Word and Excel, it is **essential** that the student has some familiarity with identifying and describing varieties of English.

It is also **desirable** (but not essential) that the student has the ability to distinguish between English accents, knowledge of research methods in dialectology, and experience of using audio editing software.

This placement is suitable for a student with research interests in and/or advanced knowledge of linguistics or the English language. Although there is no requirement to transcribe the sound recordings (either orthographically or phonetically), it is essential that the student is able to evaluate the linguistic content and classify it according to established criteria – e.g. by cross-referencing a lexical item to a relevant dictionary or glossary or categorising an accent geographically/socially. A good grounding in dialectology, sociolinguistics and/or phonetics is essential and familiarity with British accents is desirable.