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British Library launches *Sounds Familiar*, an online resource for English Language study

***Haps* you'd like to record yourself having a *blether* with a friend, *mebbe* get your *mam*, *grandfer* or *nana* reminiscing, or you'd like to talk about *somewhat* else entirely? Even if you think you have *naught* to say, the British Library insists that there's no need to keep the noise down.**

Celebrating the UK's many different accents, dialects and vocabularies, *Sounds Familiar* is a unique and groundbreaking new interactive website from the British Library supported by The Innovation Unit. 72 unedited recordings illustrate regional accents and dialects from every corner of the UK, some recorded in the 1950s and some almost half a century later, in 1998-1999. What makes this site unique, however, is the comprehensive set of audio resources, the depth of interpretation and the varied learning packages that explore the dual themes of language variation and language change within spoken English – both contemporary and historical. You can investigate 'new' trends in pronunciation, such as 'upspeak' or 'T-glottaling', find out where in the country speakers use the past tense *I were* or *we was* or discover how the English of British Asians is influenced by their bilingual status.

Sounds Familiar was developed with support from The Innovation Unit, which is funded by the DfES, and is launched at a time when study resources on the English language are desperately needed. English Language is currently the fastest growing area of A-Level study, and many university linguistics departments are undertaking important research into accents and dialects.

The site features a series of interactive sound maps and over 600 audio-clips that illustrate specific features of English. Aspects of regional vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar are explained and analysed and the site includes three case studies that give an in-depth look at three very different varieties of English: Received Pronunciation (RP), Geordie dialect and English as spoken by black and Asian communities in the UK. Children and young adults are also being asked to add their own recordings, making it possible for users to continue to monitor change and variety in spoken English.

The British Library's vision is to use the website and the new recordings submitted by young speakers to create a comprehensive 'sound map of the UK', which will showcase the varied accents and dialects that can be heard

nationwide. The voice recordings gathered through the website will be added to the British Library's Sound Archive for the benefit of future generations. "Taking part in the research and primary collection of data has already been very beneficial to our students" says Marjory Caine, a teacher at Oakwood Park Grammar School in Kent. "It has given them some ideas for the language investigations they have to carry out. Even our Year 7s are looking forward to accessing *THEIR* words!"

Jonnie Robinson, Curator of English Accents and Dialects at the British Library, explains, "We are delighted to present this new online resource for English Language study and would like to encourage students from all around the UK to add their voices to the website. We are very keen for schools to become involved with this groundbreaking education initiative and hope that they will also benefit from the many spoken English resources that are available on the website."

Anne Diack, Director of Media and Communications at The Innovation Unit said, "The British Library already has an incredibly rich sound archive. We're delighted to have supported this innovative website, as one of our early projects. It will enable students both to use the existing British Library recordings and to add their own voices to this wonderful interactive resource. The teachers and language experts who have been working on the project have done a fantastic job."

Petonelle Archer of Townley Grammar School in Kent is excited at the benefits of *Sounds Familiar*. "The site will bring to life a variety of subject areas across the syllabus and will allow students to carry out independent research. It will be a useful creative tool in the classroom and be invaluable assistance to those of us with a limited repertoire of accents."

For further information, contact Anna Arthur or Krista Tuchscherer at Arthur Leone PR on 020 7637 2994.

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

The British Library's spoken English website launches on Wednesday 28th March 2007 www.bl.uk/soundsfamiliar.

The British Library Learning programme aims to support formal and informal learning in the UK and make physical and virtual access to the British Library exciting and inspiring for students, educators and lifelong learners. A wide range of activities and resources are available for learners of all ages including free workshops, projects and online resources. The programme helps build skills in research, critical thinking and source-based learning and supports the curriculum in key subject areas. www.bl.uk/learning

The Innovation Unit is funded by the Department for Education and Skills and is one of the country's leading organisations for promoting innovation to improve education and related public services. The Unit acts as a catalyst for change, drawing on talent from both the public and private sectors and combining the insights and expertise of teachers, school leaders, parents and pupils with the ambitions of education policy-makers. Currently it is running a major Next Practice programme which is developing new approaches to some of the key challenges facing education including: system leadership, how to resource personalisation and how to exploit the full teaching and learning potential of everyone involved in schools as well as family/school connexions. www.innovation-unit.co.uk

The British Library Sound Archive is one of the largest in the world. It holds over a million discs, 200,000 tapes, and many other sound and video recordings. The collections come from all over the world and cover the entire range of recorded sound from music, drama and literature, to oral history and wildlife sounds. They range from cylinders made in the late 19th century to the latest CD, DVD and minidisc recordings. The archive holds copies of commercial recordings issued in the United Kingdom, together with selected commercial recordings from overseas, radio broadcasts and many privately-made recordings. It also offers public access to a wide range of specialist publications, books, magazines and journals covering every aspect of recorded sound. For more information visit the website at: <http://www.bl.uk/collections/sound-archive/nsa.html>

Audio content on the website has been transferred from two sources in the British Library Sound Archive:

1. The SED (Survey of English Dialects), carried out by researchers at the University of Leeds from 1951 onwards, remains the only systematic nationwide study of our native English dialects.
2. The MMB (Millennium Memory Bank) is an archive of oral history interviews recorded by the BBC in 1998 and 1999.

**Haps* means perhaps (Great Bradley, Suffolk), *wee blether* means a chat (Uig, Scotland), *mebbe* means maybe (New Cumnock, Scotland), *mam* means mother (Carlisle, England), *grandfer* means grandfather (Selworthy, Somerset), *nana* means grandmother (Sale, Greater Manchester), *somewhat* means something (Bedale, North Yorkshire), *naught* means nothing (Burnley).

*'Upspeak' refers to the use of a rising intonation on a statement that is not necessarily a question. 'T-glottaling' describes the use of a glottal stop in place of a <t> sound in words like *better* or phrases like *it is*.

Existing recordings on the *Sounds Familiar* website:

Traditional Dialect

11 locations in England

Wearhead, County Durham

Read, Lancashire

Welwick, East Riding of Yorkshire

Kniveton, Derbyshire

North Elmham, Norfolk

Hilton, Shropshire

Warmington, Northamptonshire

Hackney, London

East Harting, West Sussex

Peter Tavy, Devon

Portesham, Dorset

Contemporary Dialect

23 locations in England

Stannington, Northumberland

Byker, Tyneside

Middlesbrough

Whitehaven, Cumbria

Burnley, Lancashire

Withernsea, East Riding of Yorkshire
Leeds
Salford, Greater Manchester
Birkenhead
Boston, Lincolnshire
Nottingham
Norwich
Castle Bromwich
Danesford, Shropshire
Banbury, Oxfordshire
Gloucester
Bristol
Hackney, London
Peckham, London
Canterbury, Kent
Melksham, Wiltshire
Plymouth
Milland, West Sussex
6 locations in Wales
Bangor, Gwynedd
Bethesda, Gwynedd
Aberhosan, Powys
Resolven, Neath Port Talbot
Maerdy, Rhondda Cynon Taff
Cardiff
10 locations in Scotland
Lerwick, Shetland Islands
Uig, Isle of Skye
Portsoy, Aberdeenshire
Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire
Morningside, Edinburgh
Glasgow
Kilmarnock, East Ayrshire
New Cumnock, East Ayrshire
Dalmellington, East Ayrshire
Selkirk, Scottish Borders
6 locations in Northern Ireland
Ballymoney
Londonderry
Belfast
Downpatrick, County Down
Lissummon, Newry & Mourne
Bleanish Island, County Fermanagh

Received Pronunciation

7 locations in England

Blagdon Hall, Northumberland
Hexham, Northumberland
Burnham Thorpe, Norfolk
Newport, Pembrokeshire
London
Harrow School
Teddington

Minority Ethnic English

9 locations in England

Bradford - second generation British Asian

Sheffield - first generation British Jamaican

Leicester - third generation British Asian

Sheldon - first generation British Chinese

Moseley - first generation British Asian

Coventry - first generation British Asian

Slough - first generation British Asian

Southall - first generation British Asian

Stoke Newington - second generation British Barbadian