



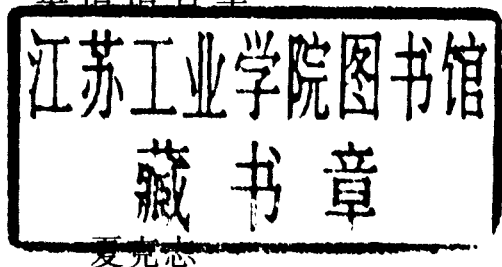
**PHONETICS OF THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE
英语语音学**

夏克志 编

河南人民出版社

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PREFACE

The English language is widely used in almost every corner of the world, and more and more people are learning the language for the purpose either of study or of work. In China, the English language is a compulsive course for students both at middle school and at college; this emphasizes the importance of the language.

This book serves as a discussion in one aspect of the English language — pronunciation. There have been books on English pronunciation published either home or abroad. This book is compiled for college students as well as other learners who are interested in English pronunciation. It may also serve as a reference book for English teachers in middle schools.

The pronunciation discussed in the book is the pronunciation of the British English language, commonly known as Receiving Pronunciation (RP), which is traditionally used in the teaching of English in countries of Europe and Asia. However, for one reason or another, the pronunciation of the American English language has been introduced into our country during the past 15 years, resulted in two pronunciations going side by side. They are different from each other, though the difference is not so great as to hinder understanding in communication. The final chapter in the book is, therefore, a brief introduction to the American English pronunciation.

This book is written in accordance with my experience of

learning and teaching this course in the past ten years. Personal experience, however, may not always prove correct, and, therefore, corrections from readers will be highly appreciated.

January, 1996

Xia Kezhi

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I

INTRODUCTION

1. Language

Language is a purely human and noninstinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. This definition of language by Sapir shows that language belongs to human beings only; it distinguishes human beings from other animals. It also shows that human beings are not born to know a language, instead, they know it through learning. They know it so well that they produce its sounds with their own accord or by free will.

Accordingly, the English language is a system of conventional signal used for communication by English – speaking people. English today is spoken by several hundred million people in the world. It is used in different kinds of societies as a mother tongue, a second language, a vehicle of officialdom, a medium of education, and as a language for science, business, and commerce. English, with its wide use, has become one of the most important languages in the world and is being learned by more and more people.

A complete description of the English language, or any language, must provide information on several interrelated levels, such as sounds, words, and grammar. They are the three principal elements of a language.

2. Speech and Writing

Most languages have two forms: spoken form and written form, or, speech and writing; they are two different things. Writing consists of marks on paper which make no noise and are taken in by the eye. It develops from speech and is originally used to record speech sounds. Writing is permanent, it can be kept for a long time and carried far and wide.

Speech consists of organized sounds which are taken in by the ear. It comes first and is used by human beings for talking. Speech is transitory and, in the past, there was no means of receiving it.

Speech is the primary means of using language both for the individual and for the community, while writing is both secondary to and dependent on it. It is part of man's biological nature that he should speak, just as it is that he should walk. Every individual learns to speak several years before he learns to write. He learns to speak whether he is "taught" or not. It would be much difficult to learn to write without help. A child learns to write words either taught by his parents at home, or by the teachers at school.

Language is under constant change, and the most patent force for change is speech; where change has occurred in speech, writing may eventually be changed to accommodate it.

Speech is far more frequently used than writing in our daily lives, and it remains so even in highly developed societies. For example, you may talk on the phone with a friend next door, or far away in the other part of the world. You may just listen to the news over the radio broadcast by the announcer, or watch a film or a TV program listening to the dialogue or conversation among the characters.

3. Phonetic Alphabet

Language is under constant change, and the change of sounds is much faster than that of writing, as a result, the writing, which was originally used to represent speech sounds, can no longer represent speech sounds as they were. Something else is, therefore, needed to represent the speech sounds — a method which will assure us that both the writer and the reader will have the same sound in mind when any letter or symbol is used. This is as important to the language students as it is for the students of chemistry to agree that the letter H stands for hydrogen and O for oxygen.

An alphabet or symbol is used to assign one and the only sound value to each letter. This alphabet is known as phonetic alphabet.

The phonetic alphabet we now use is called International Phonetic Alphabet devised by The International Phonetic Association (IPA). As far as the English sounds are concerned, the letters of the Roman alphabet are used (with the exception of the letters c, q, x, and y) for the transcription. They are not adequate to transcribe all the English sounds, thus, other letters are adopted or devised for the purpose. For example, ɑ (cursive form of the letter a), æ (combination of letters a and e), ə, ɔ, ʌ (reversed forms of the letters e, c, v), ʃ, ʒ, ŋ (the extended forms of the letters, s, z, n), θ (a Greek letter), and ð (a letter of Old English).

Description of the speech sounds with the phonetic alphabet is called phonetic transcription. [aɪ 'spi:k 'əʊnli ə 'lɪtl ð ɪŋɡlɪʃ], for example, is the phonetic transcription of the sentence "I speak only a little English." There are two basic types of phonetic

transcription: broad and narrow A broad transcription is a form of phonetic writing which uses the smallest possible number of different letters to represent the sound difference that are important to distinguish words from each other in a language. It is also called phonemic transcription. This kind of transcription is normally used in reading and teaching.

A narrow transcription is a form of phonetic writing which uses more letters together with specific symbols to indicate shades of difference between various sounds. Take, for example, the four English vowel sounds which are transcribed phonetically as follows:

broad:	i:,	i,	u:,	u	i,	u
narrow:	i	ɪ,	u,	ʊ	ɪ,	ɪ, u, ʊ

If the length mark is left out, as can be seen on the right side above, there are two letters of broad type but four of narrow type in the transcription of the four vowels.

Narrow transcription is also called allophonic transcription, and is used for the study and comparison of speech sounds.

Broad transcription is widely used in dictionaries and text books, as a result, learners are familiar with this kind of transcription. It is also used in this book.

4. Received Pronunciation

Strictly speaking, there is no standard pronunciation of any language. For the English language, for example, there is the British pronunciation, the American pronunciation..., each of which has its own characteristics. We can't say one kind of pronunciation is better than another; for, in America, the American pronunciation is right, in Australia, the Australian pronunciation is

correct, and so on.

Even within a country there are different ways of pronunciation of the same language in different regions and districts. In spite of this, as time goes on, one kind of pronunciation becomes socially preferable to others, for example, the British pronunciation of the Southeast of England. This pronunciation is heard among the Southern England people, the middle class Londoners, among the BBC announcers, students at universities and public schools. This form of pronunciation is known as Received Pronunciation (RP). It is readily and widely understood throughout England and the English-speaking countries and generally recommended where English is taught and learned as a foreign language, e.g. countries in Europe and Asia.

5. Phonemes and Allophones

When we speak, we constantly change the shape of the vocal tract producing a continuous stream of sounds. In the study of speech, this stream is divided or cut into small pieces known as segments; thus, any speech is like a chain with individual segments linked together. The word "man", for example, is pronounced with three segments or sounds: /m, æ, n/, and so is the word "tat": /t, æ, t/. Here, if the first sound in the word "man" is replaced by the first sound in the word "tat", or vice versa, the meaning of either word will be changed; in other words, a new word is made with different meaning. /m/ and /t/ are phonemes. Change of the phoneme will change the meaning of a word. A phoneme is a class of closely related speech sounds, regarded as a single sound and represented in phonetic transcription by the same symbol.

Of the three segments in the word "tat", the first [t] is different from the second [t] in that the first one is aspirated while the second one is not. In spite of the difference, there is no new word made and the word "tat" will not be changed in meaning if the first [t] is replaced by the second [t]. The first [t] and the second [t] are variants of the same phoneme /t/. They are allophones or phones. An allophone is the smallest unit of speech sound.

In phonetic transcription, phonemes are put in oblique bars / / while allophones in square brackets [].

6. Phonetics and Phonology

Phonetics is the scientific study of the characteristics of human speech sounds. It provides methods for the description, classification and transcription of speech sounds. Phonology is the science of speech sounds and sound patterns. By sound patterns is meant the set of sounds that occur in a given language, the permissible arrangements of these sounds, and the processes for adding, deleting, or changing sounds.

Phonetics and phonology are both concerned with the same subject matter or aspect of language, speech sounds as the audible result of articulation, but they are concerned with them from different points of view. Phonetics is the study and analysis of the sounds of languages or of a particular language, in respect of their articulation, transcription and perception. It is general, descriptive and classificatory. Phonology is the study and analysis of the sound systems of a language with the rules which can be written to show the types of phonetic relationships that relate and contrast words and other linguistic units. Phonology is particular and functional.

Exercises

1. What is language?
2. Which is more frequently used in our daily lives, speech or writing?
3. What is Received Pronunciation (RP)?
4. What is the difference between phonetics & phonology?

II

THE SPEECH ORGANS

1. General Introduction

Man had originally no special organs of speech. The primary function of various organs used for the production of speech sounds is biological: breathing, chewing and swallowing the food; the production of sounds is their secondary function which makes these organs known as speech organs.

When we speak, we are making sounds with the speech organs, from the lungs in the thoracic cavity in various ways before its passage through the lips or nostrils into the atmosphere. It is therefore necessary to list the speech organs and examine their roles in sound production.

2. The Lungs

In the thoracic cavity lie the lungs of which the biological function is breathing to supply the blood with oxygen and expire carbon dioxide. Air expelled from the lungs comes up along two bronchial tubes into the trachea (or wind pipe) until its upper end. The egressive air serves as the basic force or energy needed in the production of speech sounds.

3. The Vocal Cords

On top of the trachea is the larynx which functions as a valve between the lungs and the mouth. Its forward portion is prominent