

# THE PHONETICS OF ENGLISH

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## PREFACE

THE aim of this book is to present the main facts of English pronunciation of to-day. The writer has had in mind the teacher who is expected to deal with indistinct or dialectal speech, and for this reason, she has made the book as practical as possible. It is hoped that the teacher or student may make his own observations on local and individual usages and develop for himself the hints given on correction. These suggestions are based on many years of practical experience in lecturing to teachers and teaching in school.

If dialectal speech is illustrated from Yorkshire and Cockney more than from other dialects, the writer's excuse is that she knows these dialects much better than any others; moreover, many of the peculiarities of Cockney speech which are discussed, can stand for those of other Southern dialects, and those of Yorkshire for many Northern dialects.

The writer wishes to acknowledge her indebtedness to Mr. A. K. Maxwell for the drawings of the open mouth and the vocal chords, and to Mr. T. L. Poulton for the remaining diagrams of tongue positions.

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LONDON.

*September, 1928*

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

A FEW pages of phonetic transcription have been added to this edition. Since Cockney and Yorkshire have been used considerably as examples of dialect speech, extracts have been chosen which illustrate these two dialects.

I am very much indebted to Mr. Bernard Shaw for his permission to use a passage from *Pygmalion*, and to Mr. J. B. Priestley for allowing me to take an extract from *The Good Companions* for this purpose.

I. C. W.

## PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

THE book has been entirely revised and additional chapters have been added on Broadcasting and Spoken English, on British and American English and on Recent Developments in English Pronunciation. Two new phonetic texts are also included, one of the Christmas message to the Empire of His late Majesty, King George V, in 1935, which has been transcribed from a gramophone record made by H.M.V. Gramophone Co., and the other of President Roosevelt's broadcast speech on the occasion of the special convocation of Congress on October 13th, 1937, which has been transcribed from a recording made by the B.B.C.

I have to acknowledge with gratitude the gracious permission accorded by His Majesty the King to make use of the record of King George V's 1935 Christmas Broadcast, and to H.M.V. Gramophone Company for their consent.

I. C. W.

December, 1938.

## PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

THIS edition comes out in war-time. Corrections and slight additions only have been made, many of these in response to friendly suggestions and questions from readers of the book.

*October, 1944.*

## LIST OF SYMBOLS

THE alphabet used is that of the International Phonetic Association in its "narrow" form. For the benefit of those students who are used to the "broad" form, the differences between the two are here set out.

### *Narrow.*

i

ɪ

u

ʊ

ɑ

ɔ

ɒ

ə

### *Broad.*

ix

i

ux

u

ax

ox

ɔ

əx

: placed after a vowel indicates full length.

˘ " " " " half " "

ˑ placed underneath a symbol indicates that the sound is syllabic: e.g. pɑˑspɪdʒ—three syllables (parsonage).

ˈ placed before a symbol shows that the syllable is stressed: e.g. təˈmɒrəʊ.

Secondary stress is marked thus ˌ, e.g. pɪˌkjʊlɪˈærɪtɪ (peculiarity).

◌ placed underneath or over a symbol indicates that the sound is pronounced without voice: e.g. ŋ̥, ŋ̤.

### *English Vowels.*

i	as in	see
ɪ	„ „	sit
ɛ	„ „	set
æ	„ „	sat
ɑ	„ „	calm

### *English Diphthongs.*

eɪ	as in	play
oʊ	„ „	go
aɪ	„ „	my
aʊ	„ „	now
ɔɪ	„ „	boy

*English Vowels.*

ɒ	as in	not
ɔ	„ „	bought
ʊ	„ „	put
u	„ „	soon
ʌ	„ „	but
ɜ	„ „	bird
ə	„ „	about

*English Diphthongs.*

ɪə	as in	here
ɛə	„ „	there
ɔə	„ „	more
ʊə	„ „	poor

*English Consonants.*

p	as in	put	f	as in	full
b	„ „	but	v	„ „	very
t	„ „	ten	θ	„ „	thin
d	„ „	den	ð	„ „	then
k	„ „	come	s	„ „	some
g	„ „	go	z	„ „	zeal
tʃ	„ „	church	ʃ	„ „	ship
dʒ	„ „	judge	ʒ	„ „	pleasure
m	„ „	make	r (or ɹ)	„ „	run
n	„ „	not	h	„ „	hat
ŋ	„ „	long	w	„ „	went
l	„ „	like	ʍ	„ „	white
ɹ	„ „	well	j	„ „	yet

## OTHER SYMBOLS.

*Vowels.*

- y Front close rounded vowel, similar to the French vowel in *rue* (see § 83).
- ø Half-close front rounded vowel, similar to the French vowel in *peu* (see § 83).
- œ Half-open front rounded vowel, similar to the French vowel in *sœur* (see § 83).

- ʊ Close back unrounded vowel (see § 361 (v)).  
 ʏ Half-close back unrounded vowel (see §§ 167, 175c).  
 ĭ Centralised i (see § 171).  
 ü „ u „ § 171, 172).  
 ě „ e „ § 200).  
 ö „ o „ § 200).

The symbols i, e, ε, a, ɑ, ɔ, o, u are used to denote the eight primary cardinal vowels (see § 99).

### *Consonants.*

- ɸ Bi-labial fricative, voiceless (see § 84 c).  
 β „ „ voiced „ § 84 c)  
 ɹ Fricative ʀ (see § 271 iii).  
 ɾ One-tap ʀ (see § 271 ii).  
 ʀ Uvular rolled ʀ (see § 271 v).  
 ʁ „ fricative ʀ (see § 271 v).  
 ɕ Palatal fricative, voiceless (see §§ 282 c 334).  
 x Velar fricative, voiceless (see § 242).  
 ɭ Voiceless l (see §§ 77 d, 266 c, 334).  
 ɱ, ɳ, ɲ Voiceless m, n, ŋ respectively (see §§ 77d, 334).  
 ɱ Labio-dental nasal (see § 353).  
 ɦ Voiced h (see § 278 vi).  
 ʔ Glottal stop (see §§ 75d 250e, 250 (e) (f), 251).

### *Note to reprint of the Fourth Edition.*

A simplified phonetic transcription is used in N. C. Scott's "English Conversations" and Peter MacCarthy's "English Phonetics for Foreign Students." The difference between this and the broad transcription is that

a	is used instead of æ	eə	is used instead of ɛə
ɑː	„ „ „	oə	„ „ „
o	„ „ „	oi	„ „ „
oː	„ „ „	ɔi	„ „ „

(See example on p. 35.)

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## CHAPTER I.

### STANDARD PRONUNCIATION.

1. It is necessary at the outset of a book such as this to discuss the vexed question of "standard pronunciation," since teachers are being told—in the daily press and elsewhere—that the English language is degenerating into mere unintelligible jargon, and that it is their responsibility to preserve a standard, and turn out their pupils able to express themselves in correct and vigorous English, spoken in a clear and pleasing manner.

✓2. (What is Standard Pronunciation? No one can adequately define it, because such a thing does not exist; yet every one knows what is meant when one speaks of Standard English, and the Committee on the Teaching of English in England, without entering into the question in any detail, describes it as one free from vulgarisms and provincialisms.<sup>1</sup> The term "Standard English" implies one type of speech which is used by the educated population of the country, and which has received the approval of some authoritative body. But an examination of facts proves that no two people, even of the same district and upbringing, speak exactly alike. Different generations have not the same habits in speech sounds or in vocabulary. Nor is there at present any body of experts which has the authority to state what standard pronunciation is and to insist ✓ on its introduction into the schools. >

3. There are many divergencies in the speech of educated people of different districts. The educated Northerner may use the sound *a* or *æ* in words like *dance*, *grass*, etc., where a Southerner would use *ɑ*; an

<sup>1</sup> See *Report on the Teaching of English in England*, 1921, p. 66.

educated Westerner may pronounce what is called a retroflex "r" in words like *farm*, *port* (*farm*, *pɔrt*), where other people would use no r at all; not all educated Londoners use the same diphthong in words like *go* and *cold*; and the speech of educated Australians, Canadians, South Africans, and Americans differs in many respects from that of Englishmen. (It may be argued, however, that although these divergencies among educated people exist, they are comparatively small, and can be ignored. This is, to a certain extent, true; but before any pronouncement is made on the subject, the state of English pronunciation at the present day should be thoroughly examined and understood, and all the arguments for and against the establishment of a standard speech in the country, and for the teaching of such a pronunciation in the schools, should be plainly stated.)

✓ 4. (The type of speech used by an individual depends chiefly on the region in which he is brought up and the social class to which he belongs. These two factors give rise to what may be called Local and Class Dialects, dialects which have a long and interesting history. Is there any argument to be used for the replacing of these dialects by a standard pronunciation (which means, in time, abolishing the dialects), or, while not discouraging the use of the dialect, for advocating the acquirement of a standard pronunciation as an auxiliary language?

5. The student should, first of all, disabuse his mind of the idea, which is very common, that one dialect—class or local—is intrinsically better, or more beautiful, or more "historically correct" than another. (All the dialects are developments of English in different directions, or at different rates and from different

starting points.) Cockney is one form of English, as Yorkshire and Devonshire are other forms. (One may have more sonorous sounds, a more varied intonation than another, and in this way, may strike the ear as more musical. But the general principle upon which people unconsciously judge a pronunciation is that of the associations which it calls up.) If we are accustomed to hearing one type of pronunciation used by people of vulgar and uncouth habits, with harsh and discordant voices, we consider that dialect ugly. One often hears it said that the Cockney pronunciation of the word *paint* (paint) is ugly because *ai* is an ugly diphthong; whereas the same diphthong is used in *pint* (paint) by non-Cockney speakers, and is considered beautiful. In the same way a Northerner's pronunciation of *but* as *but* is called "broad," while there is no question of criticising the same vowel in *put* (put). Moreover the dialect of a distant part of the country may be thought "quaint" and romantic, while that nearest is looked on as a debased form of English. Country dialects are said to be good and pure, while town dialects are considered bad and slipshod English. Again, these judgments depend largely on association: the simpler country life appeals to the aesthetic sense, and the country speech is included in this appeal; while the speech of the town receives part of the condemnation which is directed against the rush and bustle of a more complex life. There is, however, one reason which has some justification behind it for considering town dialects bad and country dialects good. Owing to the influx into the towns of people from different parts of the country, the original local dialect

has come under many and varying influences, and is, in consequence, not so pure as the country dialect. The kind of person, too, who uses a dialect is likely to influence our judgment of his speech; if he is slipshod in appearance and impolite in manners, we are inclined to think his speech is bad. In so far as any speech is the result of continued lazy habits of articulation, it is to be deplored and condemned. A slovenly pronunciation, however, which is lacking in precision and difficult to understand, is not confined to any one part of the country, nor to one class of people, but may be heard often enough from lecturers and preachers, as well as from loungers at the street corners of any town or of any country village. There is, indeed, a refinement of voice and manner and a precision of speech associated with good breeding, and often accompanying a "standard" pronunciation, which, of course, should be encouraged, since speech is a form of social behaviour, and like other kinds of social behaviour, e.g. table manners, dress, general behaviour in public places, it has its rules and customs. The lack of this is often put down to "accent," under which general term all the factors which go to make up speech are judged.) In this book, however, (we are concerned mainly with actual speech sounds and their use, and not with voice production or manners, but it should be remembered that pronunciation alone is not enough; idiom, usage and the social behaviour accompanying "good speech" are part and parcel of the whole.)

6. The preceding paragraph is not intended to support any and all kinds of dialectal speech, nor does the writer wish to put on one side the aesthetic point of view in the judgment of speech. It is merely an appeal

to the reader to consider carefully, before he condemns one type of speech and praises another, the true reasons which lie behind his dislikes and his preferences. )

7. There are good reasons why it may be thought advisable to attempt to teach in the schools some kind of pronunciation which would be acceptable in any part of the country, and in any class of society. The chief argument is one of mutual intelligibility. It is obvious that in a country the size of the British Isles, any one speaker should be capable of understanding any other when he is talking English. At the present moment, such is not the case: a Cockney speaker would not be understood by a dialect speaker of Edinburgh or Leeds or Truro, and dialect speakers of much nearer districts than these would have difficulty in understanding each other. The following diagram, devised by Professor D. Jones, illustrates graphically the position of affairs as they actually are. The base of the cone represents a map of England, and the lines joining various points on its base to the apex, the different types of speech used at each place, the apex A representing a kind of pronunciation which bears no signs of any particular district. Thus the line joining L and A would represent all the different kinds of pronunciation used by London speakers, from the extreme Cockney at the base through varying degrees of Cockney, till the apex is reached, when all distinctive signs of a London dialect have been shed. The

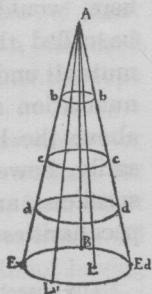


FIG. 1. Variant Pronunciations

line joining B and A would show the same for Bradford speakers, and so on for all parts of the country.<sup>1</sup>

8. If a section be taken across the cone at any point between the base and the apex, the differences at this point between the dialects of various places will be fewer than they are at the base, i.e. some of the most outstanding peculiarities will not be found: (at a section further towards the apex, the differences will be still less and the types of pronunciation of the different localities will more nearly resemble each other; and as we near the apex, the divergencies which still exist have become so small as to be noticed only by a finely trained ear.) These, for all practical purposes, may be neglected. Let us assume that at the section marked *d* such dissimilarities as would make for lack of understanding have dropped—i.e. a speaker from any part of the country using the type of speech represented here, would be understood by any other. This may be called the limit of intelligibility. For the sake of mutual understanding it can be argued that a pronunciation should be taught in the schools which lies above the line assumed at *d*. That would not necessarily, however, be a pronunciation used by educated speakers, and would contain many marked dialectal peculiarities; but it *would* be understandable, and thus

<sup>1</sup> The speech represented at the base of the cone is assumed to be that which would be used in reading English not containing dialect words and constructions, i.e. we are concerned with pronunciation, not grammar and vocabulary.

*Note to Third Edition.*—The cogency of this argument is greater now than when the book was first published. (See Chapter on Broadcasting.)