SPOKEN ENGLISH

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PREFACE

THIS book is accompanied by a gramophone record, on which sounds and qualities of sounds are illustrated.

The record, entitled "Spoken English" (No. PRX-3966, Columbia, Sydney), may be obtained from The Secretary, Department of English, University of Sydney.

When a need arises for the oral illustration of a sound, the illustration on the gramophone record is described in the text. The description is distinguished by a heavy black line in the margin.

The record consists of eight tracks which may easily be distinguished by the eye. Each of these tracks contains a convenient group of the sounds referred to in the text, e.g. Track 1 contains all the items mentioned in the chapter on the organs of speech. The reader may thus relate the illustrations on the gramophone record to the references in the text.

CONTENTS

LIST OF PHONETIC SYMBOLS

1. *Vowels*

1.	i	as in	*seat*	si·t
2.	ɪ	,, ,,	*sit*	sɪt
3.	ɛ	,, ,,	*head*	hɛd
4.	æ	,, ,,	*had*	hæd
5.	a	,, ,,	*father*	ˈfa·ðə
6.	ʌ	,, ,,	*hut*	bʌt
7.	ɒ	,, ,,	*hot*	hɒt
8.	ɔ	,, ,,	*sort*	sɔ·t
9.	ʊ	,, ,,	*put*	pʊt
10.	u	,, ,,	*boot*	bu·t
11.	ɜ	,, ,,	*bird*	bɜ:d
12.	ə	,, ,,	*alone*	əˈloun

2. *Diphthongs*

1.	eɪ	as in	*day*	deɪ
2.	oʊ	,, ,,	*so*	soʊ
3.	aɪ	,, ,,	*try*	traɪ
4.	aʊ	,, ,,	*down*	daun
5.	ɔɪ	,, ,,	*boy*	bɔɪ
6.	ɪə	,, ,,	*clear*	klɪə
7.	ɛə	,, ,,	*dare*	dɛə
8.	ɔə	,, ,,	*sore*	sɔə
9.	ʊə	,, ,,	*tour*	tʊə

3. *Consonants*

1.	p	as in	*pet*	pɛt

2.	**b**	as in	*bet*	**bɛt**
3.	**t**	,, ,,	*tale*	**teɪl**
4.	**d**	,, ,,	*dale*	**deɪl**
5.	**k**	,, ,,	*came*	**keɪm**
6.	**g**	,, ,,	*game*	**geɪm**
7.	**f**	,, ,,	*fine*	**faɪn**
8.	**v**	,, ,,	*vine*	**vaɪn**
9.	**θ**	,, ,,	*thin*	**θɪn**
10.	**ð**	,, ,,	*then*	**ðɛn**
11.	**s**	,, ,,	*seal*	**si:l**
12.	**z**	,, ,,	*zeal*	**zi:l**
13.	**ʃ**	,, ,,	*show*	**ʃou**
14.	**ʒ**	,, ,,	*measure*	**ˈmɛʒə**
15.	**r**	,, ,,	*red*	**rɛd**
16.	**h**	,, ,,	*help*	**hɛlp**
17.	**tʃ**	,, ,,	*choke*	**tʃouk**
18.	**dʒ**	,, ,,	*joke*	**dʒouk**
19.	**tr**	,, ,,	*train*	**treɪn**
20.	**dr**	,, ,,	*drain*	**dreɪn**
21.	**l**	,, ,,	*long*	**lɒŋ**
22.	**m**	,, ,,	*mail*	**meɪl**
23.	**n**	,, ,,	*nail*	**neɪl**
24.	**ŋ**	,, ,,	*sing*	**sɪŋ**
25.	**j**	,, ,,	*you*	**ju:**
26.	**w**	,, ,,	*way*	**weɪ**

: indicates a long vowel, as in *seed* **si:d**.

· indicates a half-long vowel, as in *seat* **si·t**.

ˈ indicates that the following syllable is stressed.

Methods of representing diphthongs characteristic of Broad Australian Speech

əɪ	as in	*beat*	**bəɪt**
əu	,, ,,	*boot*	**bəut**

AI	as in	*say*	SAI
AU	,, ,,	*so*	SAU
DI	,, ,,	*high*	hDI
æU	,, ,,	*how*	hæU

Non-English Sounds Referred to in the Text

y	front rounded vowel
ɯ	back unrounded vowel
ɸ	voiceless bi-labial fricative consonant
β	voiced bi-labial fricative consonant
ç	voiceless palatal fricative consonant
j	voiced palatal fricative consonant
x	voiceless velar fricative consonant
ɣ	voiced velar fricative consonant
q	voiceless uvular plosive consonant
χ	voiceless uvular fricative consonant
ʁ	voiced uvular fricative consonant
r	voiced alveolar rolled consonant
ʀ	voiced uvular rolled consonant
ɽ	retroflex voiced continuant
ʈ	retroflex post-alveolar plosive

Sounds of rare occurrence in Australian pronunciation, referred to in the text

ʔ	the glottal stop
ɾ	flapped alveolar consonant

CHAPTER I

AIMS AND METHODS

THE aim of the study of Phonetics is to observe, describe, and classify accurately the sounds that we make when we speak. The purpose is simple and common-sense, but achieving it is not as easy as we may think.

It would seem simple to think only in terms of the sounds that we make when we speak, to avoid imagining that we produce sounds when we do not and to avoid denying that we use certain pronunciations when clearly we do use them.

One of the commonest illusions about the way we speak is that in careful speech we pronounce every letter. A Scotsman once stated to me very emphatically that he did this and said that he made his children do it too. I told him I was dubious about the claim and said that I did not think, for example, that he would pronounce the *d* in ***handkerchief***. He thought for a minute to make sure what he was committing himself to and then said: "Aye. But I do." When I challenged him he said clearly and unmistakably **ˈhændkətʃif**. There was little I could say against that. But later in the evening when someone asked him what was the gaily coloured cloth hanging from his pocket he said: "Why, mon, that's a hanky." There was not the slightest trace of a **d**.

If you tell a person that you doubt whether he uses a

certain pronunciation and then challenge him to say the word, he usually has time to make the sounds that will support his contention. But if you wait until he utters the word spontaneously and without working out an artificial pronunciation, you will usually win the argument. It is necessary, however, to have a witness. If you say, "Ah, but you left out the **d** that time", the speaker will indignantly deny the charge.

The Scotsman was more clearly aware of the fact that there was a *d* in the spelling of the word than he was of the sounds that he made when he said it. This is the common situation. Speech is so intimately part of ourselves, it is so much a set of habitual movements that we perform without thinking, that we find it very hard to look at ourselves from the outside and say what are the sounds that we produce when we utter certain words.

Not only that, but our education is so much concerned with the written or the printed form of the language that we are more used to thinking about and analysing this form of the language. The spoken form of the language is one that we are not trained much to think about. When we think of a word it is likely to be the shape of it on a printed page or its spelling that we think of, and not its sounds.

People make the most extraordinary statements about what they say and do not say. You may hear people use a pronunciation in the very act of denying that they use it. For example, when *that* is used as a conjunction it is usually pronounced **ðət**. Some people like to think that they always say **ðæt** and never what they consider the somewhat vulgar **ðət**. I have heard such people say: **aɪm kwaɪt ʃʊə ðət aɪ dount seɪ ðæt**. The people who assert that they never drop an **h** are in fact constantly dropping them. Many words like *has, he, his*, drop the **h** when they are

in unstressed positions. The natural, easy pronunciation of the sentence *He put his hat on his head* is **hi pʊt ɪz ˈhæt ɒn ɪz ˈhɛd**. To pronounce it with every **h** clearly sounded is to be artificial. The dropping of **h** in this sort of position is not mere carelessness or caprice. The **h** is dropped because English is a strongly rhythmical language and one of the principles of its rhythm is that unstressed words are uttered with reduced energy. In this weaker utterance the **h** goes.

How do you pronounce the word *sandwich*? Do you think that you pronounce the *d*? Do you think that you pronounce the *ch* as in *which*? If you just look at the word and think how you would pronounce it you will probably answer that you pronounce the *d* and sound the *ch* as **tʃ**. But if you write down the word in a phrase, for example *ham sandwich*, and ask a friend how he pronounces it, you will probably hear him say **ˈsænwɪdʒ**. If you then say **ˈsændwɪtʃ** you will realize that it is a rather awkward pronunciation. But if someone said to you that in pronouncing the word *sandwich* you probably did not sound the *d* and pronounced the *wich* to rhyme with *bridge*, you would probably deny it strenuously.

The habit, then, of thinking only in terms of sound is not easily acquired. People are given to the belief that sound must follow spelling. They imagine that because there is a letter in the spelling there must be a sound in the pronunciation to correspond. They are usually not deceived by the silent letters that are known to be silent as in *know*, *gnaw*, *psyche*, but they are easily deceived into thinking that the *w* in *answer* and the *t* in *soften* represent a sound in the pronunciation. We may fail to see that *write* and *right* begin with the same sound. We may fail to observe that in some words a letter is silent that is

sounded in related words, e.g., *sign* **saɪn** and *signal* **ˈsɪgnəl**; *condemn* **kənˈdɛm** and *condemnation* **kɒndɛmˈneɪʃn**; *resign* **riːˈzaɪn** and *resignation* **rɛzɪgˈneɪʃn**.

People are apt to think, again, that where there is a difference in spelling there must be a difference in pronunciation. They imagine that *alms* and *arms*, *threw* and *through*, *pear* and *pair*, must be differently pronounced. Sometimes they wonder whether the evidence of the ear that they are identically sounded can legitimately be accepted.

Many argue that the *er* in *sailer*, the *or* in *sailor* and the *ar* in *mortar* are differently pronounced, and go to the lengths of quite artificial speech to make them sound different. Some are so firmly convinced of this that they will not believe the evidence of their own ears.

It is commonly thought that the primary form of the language is the printed, literary form and that the spoken form is a somewhat careless and inferior derived form. It is certainly the common view that the written form is the only one deserving serious attention, study and cultivation.

The reverse of this is true. It is the spoken language that is the primary form and the written language that is secondary. It is as something spoken and heard that language begins and develops. It is as something spoken and heard that language performs most of its work. If we could work out as percentages the amount of spoken language that is actually used and the amount of writing and printing that is done, the spoken word would far outweigh the written.

Before the technological developments of the twentieth century the spoken language was defeated by distance and time. A spoken word is merely sound, disturbances in the

air, which can carry only a certain distance and which vanishes as soon as it is uttered. If messages were to travel long distances and be preserved these could be achieved only by a visible record on some solid substance. But with the development of the gramophone record and of broadcasting both these disabilities of the spoken word have been removed. Speech has been enabled to conquer time and space. For the first time in the history of language the same voice may be heard by millions and in many parts of the world.

The printed visual language is an attempt to represent the spoken language and it is often an imperfect and clumsy representation. Apart from punctuation and a few devices such as underlining and italicizing, printing is incapable of representing the fine shades of emphasis and feeling that speech conveys by patterns of loudness, pace, pause, rhythm, length and intonation. In speech there are at least twenty-five ways of uttering the sentence: *I can't do it.* How many would it be possible to represent in print?

We must think, then, not of letters but of sounds. In English the sound represents meaning and the visible letter represents the sound. So the letter is a symbol of a symbol.

The relationship between letter and sound in the spelling of English is hopelessly confused and inconsistent. We shall get an idea how confused this relationship is if we test English spelling by the criteria of an ideal system. In a perfect system for representing sound by visual symbol the following conditions would be satisfied:

(*a*) the same symbol would always represent the same sound;

(*b*) the same sound would always be represented by the same symbol;
(*c*) a single sound would be represented by one symbol;
(*d*) there would never be a symbol in the spelling that did not correspond to a sound.

Let us see how the spelling of English stands up to these requirements.

(*a*) Same symbol, same sound. The letter *a* in English may spell at least seven different sounds: æ in *hat* **hæt**; ɒ in *quality* **ˈkwɒlətɪ**; ɔ in *water* **ˈwɔ·tə**; ə in *away* **əˈweɪ**; ɪ in *manage* **ˈmænɪdʒ**; a in *sabotage* **ˈsæbətaˑʒ**; eɪ in *fate* **feɪt**.

(*b*) Same sound, same symbol. The sound ɔ in English may be represented in at least twelve different ways: *or* in *or* **ɔː**; *ore* in *ore* **ɔː**; *awe* in *awe* **ɔː**; *aw* in *paw* **pɔː**; *au* in *launch* **lɔ·ntʃ**; *our* in *course* **kɔ·s**; *oar* in *coarse* **kɔ·s**; *ough* in *thought* **θɔ·t**; *augh* in *caught* **kɔ·t**; *a* in *water* **ˈwɔ·tə**; *al* in *walk* **wɔ·k**; *ar* in *quart* **kwɔ·t**; *oa* in *broad* **brɔːd**.

(*c*) One sound, one symbol. In the following words the italicized groups of letters represent only one sound: *col*onel **ˈkɜ·nəl**; manœ*u*vre **məˈnuːvə**; thor*ough* **ˈθʌrə**; d*augh*ter **ˈdɔ·tə**; harb*our* **ˈhaˑbə**; lo*dge* **lɒdʒ**.

(*d*) No symbol without a sound. In English there are numerous "silent letters", letters that correspond to no sound at all. Examples: *gnaw* **nɔː**; *know* **nəʊ**; *pneumatic* **njuˑˈmætɪk**; *write* **raɪt**; *benign* **bəˈnaɪn**; *island* **ˈaɪlənd**; *doubt* **daʊt**; *walk* **wɔ·k**; *hymn* **hɪm**; *condemn* **kənˈdɛm**.

English spelling is one of the most inefficient systems that exist. The explanation of its confusion and inconsistency is historical. The rule of the printed language has been fixity and conservatism; the law of the spoken language has been constant change. Scribes and printers are

tidy people. They like uniformity and certainty in the form of the language that they set down on paper. Once they have decided upon a convention of spelling they do not like to alter it. On the other hand, nothing can prevent the gradual small variations in the spoken language that after a certain lapse of time amount to considerable changes. We can keep spelling constant by deciding upon and observing a convention. Nothing can prevent sounds from changing.

English spelling became fixed in its conventions with the coming of printing in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. It has changed only in details since that time. But the pronunciation of the language has changed a great deal. So we have a spelling system which became stereotyped in the fifteenth century being used to represent a twentieth century pronunciation. Even if it had been an efficient spelling of fifteenth century English (and this would be difficult to maintain) we should hardly expect it to represent twentieth century pronunciation at all efficiently.

In fourteenth century English there existed an old velar fricative consonant **x**. It is the sound that occurs in the Scottish word *loch* **lɒx** and in the German word *Achtung* **ˈaxtuŋ**. In the history of the language three things could happen to this sound. It could remain, as it has in many Scottish words, e.g., *loch*. It could change into another consonant that it somewhat resembled, namely **f**. This is what happened in words like *rough, laugh, cough*. It could disappear altogether, and this is what happened in words like *though, daughter*. In the word *sough* we may see all three possibilities. The Scottish pronunciation is **sux**, and Southern English (and Australian) speakers hesitate between **saf** and **sau**.

This old sound was usually spelt *gh*. But in the later development of the language, whether the sound became **f** or disappeared, the spelling remained *gh*.

The clearest example of this failure of the spelling and pronunciation to keep in step is the "silent letters" of modern English. The initial consonants of *gnaw*, *know* and *write* were pronounced in Shakespeare's English. So were the *l*'s of *should*, *would*, *talk*. But when the sounds ceased to be heard the letters continued in the spelling.

There are instances where at first two related words had the same main vowel spelt the same way. Later on the vowels developed into different sounds but the spellings remained the same. For example, in the English of King Alfred's time the words *sūð* (=*south*) **su:θ** and *sūðerne* (=*southern*) **ˈsu:ðɛrnə** had the same main vowel, **u:**, which was spelt *u*. After the Norman conquest the sound was spelt *ou* according to French conventions of spelling. A law governing the length of sounds in English began to operate, as it still operates (see p. 140). This is the law that says that a vowel in a stressed syllable becomes shorter if an unstressed syllable follows in the same word. So the words became *south* **su·θ** and *southern* **ˈsuðərn**. After Shakespeare's time the **u** of *south* became **au** and the **u** of *southern* became **ʌ**. But while all this was happening there was no change in the spelling. So in modern English we have *ou* spelling both the sounds **au** and **ʌ**.

If we imagine this sort of process multiplied many times in the development of the language we may understand to some extent why there is such inconsistency in modern English spelling.

Again, when we borrow a word from a foreign language we take over the spelling just as it is but make a rough imitation of the sound. We borrow the French word

entrée, for example, pronouncing it ˈɒntreɪ, and so add to the oddities of English spelling the convention that *en* spells ɒn.

We do not propose to enter upon the controversial matter of the reform of English spelling. But if in our description and discussion of speech sounds we are to have some accurate way of representing them visually, then our conventional spelling will not do, and no attempt to reduce its inconsistencies will really help. We need a system that will satisfy the four criteria of accuracy and consistency that we have mentioned (p. 9).

To satisfy this need the International Phonetic Alphabet was devised.

We must not imagine that each symbol in the International Phonetic Alphabet represents a single unvarying sound that does not change from language to language. The symbol ɛ, for example, may mean quite different sounds when used for French and for English. The symbol p stands for a strongly aspirated sound in English and for an unaspirated sound in French. The phonetic alphabet is used in the context of the language that we are describing. The exact value of the symbol is known only when the sound is described. But the various sounds in different languages that we denote by the symbols ɛ and p are sufficiently alike to justify their representation by the same symbol.

Even within one language the same symbol may represent different sounds, or, to put it another way, different varieties of the same sound. Take for example the sound t. There are at least five varieties of it:

(i) the alveolar plosive t, in the formation of which the blade of the tongue is pressed against the teeth-ridge and then quickly withdrawn (see p. 92).