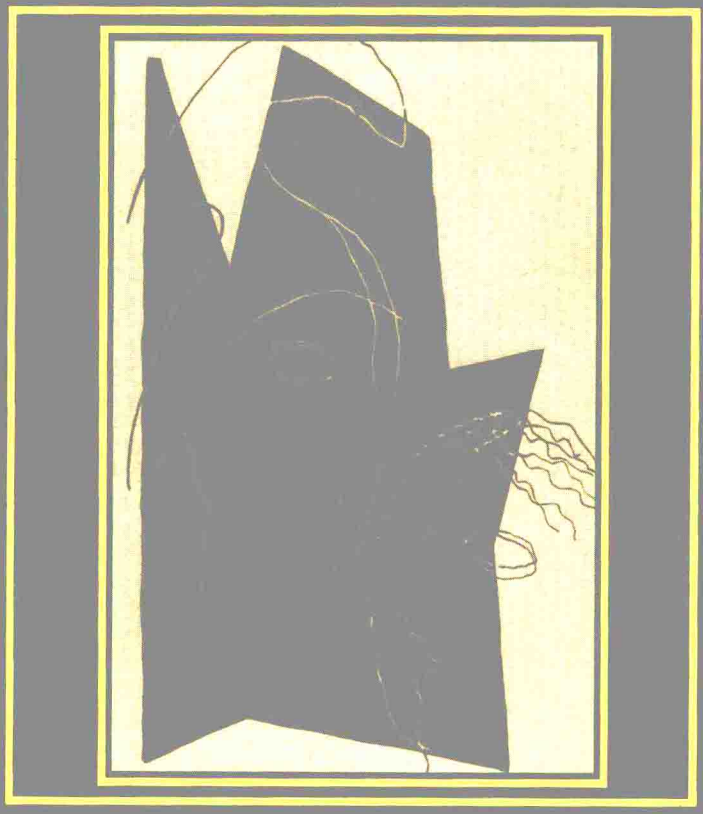
The PRONUNCIATION of ENGLISH

A Course Book in Phonology



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The Pronunciation of English

For Carol

Preface

Scholarly interest in English is especially strong in two areas today: the varieties of the language which are spoken around the world, and the advances which linguists have made in providing a greater understanding of the nature of language, generally, and of this specific language. I hope that both areas of research are reflected in this book, which began as a series of exercises for a course in English phonology. It is intended as a text for students being introduced to linguistics and to the sound system of English.

One part of studying linguistics is the acquisition of a conscious knowledge of one's native language. All of us know how to use our language in everyday life, but our knowledge is largely intuitive. In speaking we produce utterances which are amazingly complex in the manipulations of vocal organs, the patterns of melody and emphasis, the selection and arrangement of meaningful items, and in listening we grasp meanings from the utterances of others. Yet speakers of the language do all this with very little ability to describe what they do.

I believe that learning linguistics requires a heavy involvement with data. The student needs to *do* analysis, going from observed facts to general statements and then testing these with more observations. While it is obviously inadequate only to know facts and not see how they are interrelated, it is equally wrong – and more common in my experience – to accept a generalization, along with an example or two, and take it as an article of faith.

I have not included discussion of certain recent theoretical developments which, though interesting in themselves, seem to me to do little to illuminate the facts of the language.

I am grateful to colleagues and students at Georgetown University who commented on earlier drafts of this work, especially William Cressey, Robert Hemmer, Arlene Puryear, Shaligram Shukla, and Thomas Walsh. I have a special debt of gratitude to Max Wheeler, who struggled through two versions and made numerous valuable suggestions. None of these is to blame for the final result. I am indebted to Ralph Fasold, Carolyn Nocella, and Tom Sison for other kinds of assistance and, for constant encouragement, to my wife, son, and daughter.

C. W. K.

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Language and Speech

This book is an attempt to answer a question: How is English pronounced? The question is deceptively simple, of course, and it cannot have a simple answer. English today is the native language of nearly 400 million people and the second language of many others scattered all over the world. A language so widespread is bound to be different in different places. We are all aware that the Scots and the Australians, Londoners and New Yorkers, Irish, New Zealanders, South Africans, Jamaicans, Welsh, and Canadians do not sound the same when they speak. How can anyone describe the pronunciation of so many different people?

The diversity is real and must be treated in an account of how English is pronounced, but the commonality is greater. There is much more to be said about what is common to all speakers of English than there is regarding what is different. Furthermore, although to describe pronunciation obviously requires us to say what people do with their voices, we will be, in a sense, more concerned with the language they possess in common.

1.1 Language variation

In every language there is variety. A language varies from one place to another, from one era to another, from one occasion to another. The differences may be in the choice of words to express a meaning, as with *petrol* versus *gas(oline)* or *dual carriageway* versus *divided highway*. Differences exist in word formation: for the past tense of the verb *dive* does one say *dived* or *dove*? There are possible differences in the ways that words are put together to form phrases and sentences: would you say, for instance, *They gave it me* or *They gave me it* or *They gave it to me*? In this book we are of course concerned with differences in pronunciation. Some words are spoken differently by different speakers of English, for instance *either*, *garage*, and *tomato*. We are more concerned, however, with SYSTEMATIC differences; for example, some speakers of English pronounce an R is such words as *car* and *horn* and other speakers do not; for the former *spa* and *spar* sound

different, for the latter group the two words are homophones. There are interesting differences in the vowel systems of different dialects: how different are *stock* and *stalk* (and *stork*), for instance.

We can discuss language variation under two headings: differences among people, the USERS of language, and differences in the USES of language, the ways in which people employ language on different occasions.

First, we are all aware of the differences of the kind mentioned in the first paragraph, above. People who live in different areas speak different REGIONAL, or GEOGRAPHIC, DIALECTS. The geographic differences in English reflect the different times in which speakers of English settled in an area, how diverse they were in their origins, how much contact they have had with other speakers of the language and what influence there has been from speakers of other languages.

Geographic dialects are not the only kind of difference among speakers of a language. In any locality different people grow up with different advantages and opportunities for education; the forms of language used by the more educated are generally considered more prestigious than the forms used by the less educated (but that doesn't mean that the less educated want to speak differently). Such differences are social dialects. We may also speak of age dialects – nobody expects teenagers to talk like their grandparents, or vice versa – and sex dialects – men and women use language differently. Differences of these kinds are mostly in vocabulary, however, and are not of great concern in a book on pronunciation. The geographic differences are important for this book. The next paragraphs briefly trace the expansion of the English language to account for the major varieties of the language in our times. Chapter 4 contains a more technical account of what these differences are.

When Angles, Saxons, and Jutes migrated from the continent of Europe to the island of Britain in the fifth century AD, they spoke a language which was to become English. Within two centuries they had subjugated, intermarried with, or pushed back the people who were there before them, until varieties of English were being spoken in most of what is now England and in the Lowlands of Scotland (though some have maintained that Scots is a language related to English rather than a dialect of it). The Celtic languages of the original inhabitants were confined to Cornwall, Wales, and the highlands of Scotland. In the centuries that followed regional varieties of English developed in a feudal society that had no ruling class nor dominant center.

With the Norman Conquest French became the language of the ruling class, the language of government, just as Latin was the language of religion. Varieties of English developed a grammar quite different from pre-Norman English and a double-barreled vocabulary with numerous synonyms of the type *deep/profound*, *ring/circle*, *last/endure*. When London grew in importance as the political capital and later as the commercial capital, English displaced French in official functions and the variety spoken in