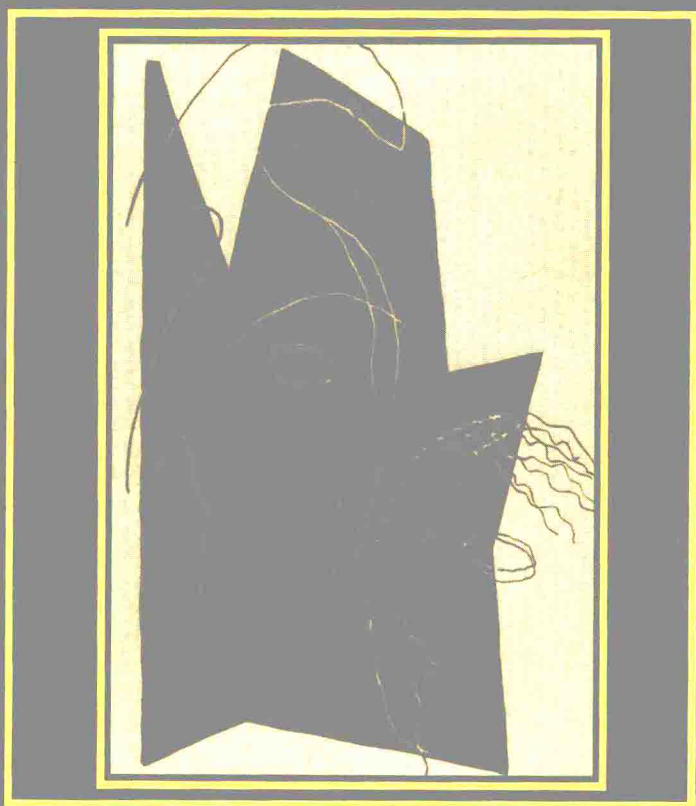


The PRONUNCIATION of ENGLISH

A Course Book in Phonology



Charles W Kreidler

The Pronunciation of English

A Course Book in Phonology

Charles W. Kreidler

Basil Blackwell

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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.

Contents

PREFACE

1	LANGUAGE AND SPEECH	1
1.1	Language variation	1
1.2	Speech and language	5
1.3	Phonological analysis	10
1.4	Summary	13
2	SOUND . . . AND VOICE	15
2.1	Hearing	15
2.2	Energy, vibration, and medium	15
2.3	The measurement of vibrations	17
	2A Exercises	17
2.4	Resonance	19
2.5	Air in motion	19
2.6	The human voice	20
2.7	The vocal cords	21
2.8	The vocal tract	23
2.9	Kinds of speech sounds	24
	2B Exercises	28
2.10	Summary	29
2.11	Addendum: A note on redundancy	30
	2C Exercise	31
	2A Feedback	31
	2B Feedback	31
	2C Feedback	32
3	CONSONANTS	33
	3A Preliminary exercise: Identifying consonants by matching	33

3.1	The feature [consonantal]	34
3.2	Lip consonants	37
3.3	Tongue-tip consonants	38
	3B <i>Exercise</i>	38
3.4	Tongue-front consonants	39
3.5	Tongue-back consonants	39
3.6	Summary chart	39
	3C <i>Exercises</i>	40
3.7	Articulators or points of articulation?	41
3.8	The feature [lateral]	42
3.9	Summary	43
	3D <i>Exercise: Practice with symbols</i>	44
	3A <i>Feedback</i>	45
	3B <i>Feedback</i>	46
	3C <i>Feedback</i>	46
	3D <i>Feedback</i>	46
4	VOWELS AND GLIDES	47
	4A <i>Preliminary exercise</i>	47
4.1	Analyses of vowels	48
4.2	Dialect differences	49
4.3	A general inventory and particular inventories	50
4.4	The phonetic descriptions	56
4.5	The incidence of vowels	61
4.6	Adding to the general inventory	62
	4B <i>Exercises</i>	63
4.7	Binary features for vowels	65
4.8	The glides	68
	4C <i>Exercise with phoneme classes</i>	68
	4D <i>Exercise on vowel incidence</i>	69
4.9	Summary	69
	4A <i>Feedback</i>	70
	4B <i>Feedback</i>	71
	4C <i>Feedback</i>	72
	4D <i>Feedback</i>	73
5	SYLLABLES AND STRESS	74
5.1	Syllables	74
5.2	Syllable structure	77
	5A <i>Exercise</i>	78
	5A <i>Feedback and comment</i>	78
	5B <i>Exercise</i>	79
	5B <i>Feedback and comment</i>	79

5.3	Strong and weak syllables	80
	5C <i>Exercise</i>	82
5.4	Syllable division	84
5.5	Suffixes and stress	86
	5D <i>Exercise</i>	87
5.6	Compounds and some other words	87
	5E <i>Exercise</i>	88
5.7	Identifying weak-syllable vowels	89
	5F <i>Exercise and comment</i>	91
	5G <i>Exercise and comment</i>	91
	5H <i>Exercise and comment</i>	92
5.8	Syllabic consonants	93
5.9	Exercise with syllabic consonants	93
5.10	Summary	95
	5C <i>Feedback</i>	96
	5D <i>Feedback</i>	96
	5E <i>Feedback</i>	96
6	CONSONANT AND VOWEL VARIATION	98
6.1	Variation in point of articulation	99
	6A <i>Exercises</i>	100
	6B <i>Exercises</i>	101
	6C <i>Exercises</i>	101
6.2	An example of mutual assimilation	102
6.3	Variation in lip shape	103
6.4	Variation in nasality	103
	6D <i>Exercise</i>	104
6.5	Variations in onset and release	104
	6E <i>Exercise</i>	104
	6F <i>Exercise</i>	105
	6G <i>Exercise</i>	105
	6H <i>Exercise</i>	105
	6I <i>Exercise</i>	106
6.6	Variation in length	107
	6J <i>Exercise</i>	107
	6K <i>Exercise</i>	108
6.7	Multiple variation for /t/	108
6.8	Some questions of perception	112
6.9	Summary	113
	6A <i>Feedback</i>	114
	6B <i>Feedback</i>	114
	6C <i>Feedback</i>	114
	6D <i>Feedback</i>	114
	6E <i>Feedback</i>	115

6F	<i>Feedback</i>	115
6G	<i>Feedback</i>	115
6H	<i>Feedback</i>	115
6I	<i>Feedback</i>	116
6J	<i>Feedback</i>	116
6K	<i>Feedback</i>	116
7	PHONOTACTICS	117
7.1	Word-initial position	117
7A	<i>Exercise</i>	118
7A	<i>Feedback and discussion</i>	119
7.2	A note regarding /j/	121
7.3	Contrast and variation	121
7.4	Word-final position	122
7B	<i>Exercise</i>	122
7B	<i>Feedback and discussion</i>	124
7C	<i>Clusters of three consonants</i>	125
7.5	Word-medial position	125
7D	<i>Exercise</i>	129
7E	<i>Exercise</i>	129
7F	<i>Exercise</i>	129
7.6	Borrowed words	130
7.7	Omission and insertion of a consonant	130
7.8	Limits on vowel occurrences	132
7.9	Free vowels and checked vowels	134
7G	<i>Exercise</i>	134
7.10	Functional loads	136
7.11	Summary	136
7C	<i>Feedback</i>	137
7D	<i>Feedback</i>	137
7E	<i>Feedback</i>	137
7F	<i>Feedback</i>	138
7G	<i>Feedback</i>	138
8	SOME CONSEQUENCES OF PHONOTACTICS	139
8.1	Consonant clusters and some grammatical suffixes	139
8A	<i>Exercise</i>	139
8B	<i>Exercise</i>	140
8C	<i>Exercise</i>	141
8D	<i>Exercise</i>	141
8E	<i>Exercise</i>	141
8E	<i>Feedback and discussion</i>	141
8F	<i>Exercise</i>	143
8G	<i>Exercise</i>	144

8.2	Morpheme variation	144
8H	<i>Exercise</i>	146
8I	<i>Exercise</i>	147
8J	<i>Exercises</i>	148
8.3	Differences in morpheme division	149
8.4	Summary	153
8A	<i>Feedback</i>	154
8B	<i>Feedback</i>	154
8C	<i>Feedback</i>	154
8D	<i>Feedback</i>	154
8F	<i>Feedback</i>	154
8G	<i>Feedback</i>	155
8H	<i>Feedback</i>	155
8I	<i>Feedback</i>	155
8J	<i>Feedback</i>	155
9	THE RHYTHM OF ENGLISH SPEECH	156
9.1	Prosody	156
9.2	Tone units	159
9A	<i>Exercise</i>	159
9.3	Stress timing	160
9.4	Marked accent: Paradigmatic focus	162
9B	<i>Exercise</i>	164
9.5	Marked accent: Syntagmatic focus	164
9C	<i>Exercise</i>	165
9C	<i>Feedback and discussion</i>	166
9.6	A note on 'too' and 'either'	167
9.7	De-accenting: Anaphoric words	168
9.8	Lexical anaphora	170
9.9	De-accenting to embed an additional message	172
9D	<i>Exercise</i>	172
9E	<i>Exercise</i>	173
9.10	Accent on operators	173
9.11	Summary	175
9A	<i>Feedback</i>	177
9B	<i>Feedback</i>	177
9D	<i>Feedback</i>	178
9E	<i>Feedback</i>	178
10	INTONATION	180
10.1	Intonation and perception	180
10.2	The falling tunes	183
10.3	The rising tunes	184

10.4	Comparisons	185
10.5	Compound tunes	189
	10A <i>Exercise</i>	191
10.6	Summary	192
	10B <i>Additional exercise</i>	193
	10A <i>Feedback</i>	195
11	PREDICTING WORD STRESS	197
11.1	Is stress predictable?	197
11.2	Stress rules	198
11.3	Neutral suffixes	200
11.4	Tonic endings	200
11.5	The basic stress rule for verbs	200
	11A <i>Exercise</i>	202
11.6	The basic stress rule for nouns	202
	11B <i>Exercise</i>	203
11.7	Rules for adjectives	204
	11C <i>Exercise</i>	204
	11D <i>Exercise</i>	205
11.8	Extending the basic stress rules	206
	11E <i>Discovery exercise</i>	206
	11F <i>Exercise</i>	207
11.9	Some variations in stress	207
	11G <i>Exercise</i>	207
	11H <i>Exercise</i>	208
11.10	Mixed endings	208
11.11	Some 'special' endings	209
	11I <i>Exercise</i>	210
	11J <i>Exercise</i>	211
	11K <i>Exercise</i>	212
	11L <i>Exercise</i>	213
11.12	Summary	214
	11A <i>Feedback</i>	215
	11B <i>Feedback</i>	215
	11C <i>Feedback</i>	215
	11D <i>Feedback</i>	216
	11E <i>Feedback</i>	216
	11F <i>Feedback</i>	216
	11G <i>Feedback</i>	216
	11H <i>Feedback</i>	216
	11I <i>Feedback</i>	217
	11J <i>Feedback</i>	217
	11K <i>Feedback</i>	217
	11L <i>Feedback</i>	218

12	PREFIXES, COMPOUND WORDS, AND PHRASES	219
12.1	Compounds	219
	12A <i>Exercise</i>	219
	12B <i>Exercise</i>	220
12.2	Compounds and phrases	221
	12C <i>Exercise</i>	222
	12D <i>Exercise</i>	222
12.3	Compound verbs	224
12.4	Prefixes	227
	12E <i>Exercises</i>	230
	12F <i>Exercises</i>	232
12.5	Greek-type compounds	233
	12G <i>Exercise</i>	235
12.6	A rhythm rule	236
12.7	Summary	238
	12A <i>Feedback</i>	238
	12B <i>Feedback</i>	239
	12C <i>Feedback</i>	239
	12D <i>Feedback</i>	239
	12E <i>Feedback</i>	240
	12F <i>Feedback</i>	240
	12G <i>Feedback</i>	241
13	PHONOLOGICAL PROCESSES IN SPEECH	242
13.1	Different ways of speaking	242
13.2	Full forms and reduced forms	242
	13A <i>Exercise</i>	247
	13B <i>Exercises</i>	248
	13C <i>Exercises</i>	252
13.3	More about phonological processes	253
	13D <i>Exercise</i>	254
	13E <i>Exercise</i>	258
13.4	Summary	258
	13A <i>Feedback</i>	259
	13B <i>Feedback</i>	259
	13C <i>Feedback</i>	259
	13D <i>Feedback</i>	260
	13E <i>Feedback</i>	261
14	PHONOLOGICAL PROCESSES AND THE LEXICON	262
14.1	Words and morphemes that change	262
14.2	Underlying forms and lexical processes	264
14.3	Checked vowel reduction	265

14.4	Palatalization	266
	14A <i>Exercises</i>	268
14.5	Alternation with zero	269
	14B <i>Exercise</i>	271
14.6	Spirantization	271
	14C <i>Exercises</i>	273
14.7	Velar softening	273
	14D <i>Exercises</i>	273
14.8	The sequence of rules	274
	14E <i>Exercises</i>	275
14.9	Change in voicing	276
	14F <i>Exercises</i>	276
14.10	The vowel shift rule	278
	14G <i>Exercise</i>	280
14.11	Free and checked vowels	281
	14H <i>Exercise</i>	282
14.12	More about augments	284
	14I <i>Exercise</i>	285
14.13	Applications	286
14.14	Summary	287
	14A <i>Feedback</i>	288
	14B <i>Feedback</i>	288
	14C <i>Feedback</i>	289
	14D <i>Feedback</i>	289
	14E <i>Feedback</i>	290
	14F <i>Feedback</i>	290
	14G <i>Feedback</i>	292
	14I <i>Feedback</i>	292
APPENDIX I Some Different Analyses of English Vowels		293
I.1	Why are there different analyses?	293
I.2	Daniel Jones	294
I.3	Two adaptations of Jones's system	296
I.4	Kenyon and Knott	298
I.5	Variations of the Kenyon-Knott system	300
I.6	The Trager-Smith 'overall analysis'	300
APPENDIX II A List of Word-Endings and their Effects on Stress		305
II.1	Neutral suffixes	305
II.2	Tonic endings	307
II.3	Strong endings	307
II.4	Weak endings	309
II.5	Post-tonic suffixes	311
II.6	Some special suffixes	312

NOTES	317
BIBLIOGRAPHY	322
INDEX	329

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 in 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