MANUAL OF AMERICAN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

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BETTY WALLACE ROBINETT

THIRD EDITION

Manual of
American English Pronunciation
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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Prator and Robinett
Accent Inventory

Preface to the Third Edition

The third edition of the *Manual of American English Pronunciation* is still the solidly based text which Clifford H. Prator so skillfully put together. A lesson on consonant clusters has been added, and more exercises have been provided for some lessons. An over-differentiated transcription, based on a combination of the Trager-Smith notation and the Fries-Pike modification of the traditional International Phonetic Alphabet, has been introduced. In the main, the format has not been greatly altered. Although most of the changes and additions have been discussed with the author, their inclusion does not necessarily signify his endorsement.

I would like to express appreciation for suggestions made by Professors Peter Ladefoged and Lois McIntosh at the University of California, Los Angeles, and for those made by my own staff at the University of Minnesota.

A revision such as this carries with it both an honor and a responsibility: the honor of being thought capable of tampering with an author's creation, and the responsibility of justifying the faith so bestowed. I trust the new edition of the *Manual* warrants this faith.

University of Minnesota B.W.R.
May 1971

Acknowledgments

Second Edition

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Los Angeles, California C.H.P., Jr.

INTRODUCTION

To the Teacher

I. What the *Manual* Is

As the international activities and responsibilities of the United States increase, so does the concern of our government and our educators for the teaching of English as a second language. Since World War II the number of students from abroad in American institutions of higher learning has risen from 6,000 to nearly 120,000.[1] Each year more institutions, even the smaller ones, find it advisable to set up special courses in English as a second language. The influx of new citizens under legislation favoring displaced persons has made it necessary for our city school systems to create new Americanization and language classes. In many countries, the U. S. Department of State has opened cultural institutes and libraries to which students flock in great numbers to learn English. Each effort of our government to give technological aid to backward regions means that a new group of foreign technicians must be trained, either in this country or abroad, in a language which will make the exchange of information possible. The Agency for International Development, for instance, is offering

[1] *Fact Book on Higher Education* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1968).

English classes to increasing numbers of people. Owing to the increased prestige of the United States as a center of scientific, industrial, and even cultural progress, educational institutions throughout much of the world are showing an unaccustomed interest in American English.

Unfortunately, the production of adequate teaching materials for use in this type of instruction has fallen far behind the demand, and materials for teaching pronunciation are no exception to the general rule. Some instructors have been forced to adopt the very fine British texts which were a by-product of the Empire's long career as the world's leading international power, though in no respect do American and British vary so widely as in pronunciation. Others are attempting to use speech-correction manuals prepared for the typical American undergraduate. These, with their literary readings, their emphasis on isolated sounds, their treatment of all sounds and combinations as of equal importance, their preoccupation with clarity of articulation, bear little relationship to the special problems of the foreign student. The latter must learn new speech rhythms and intonation patterns, acquire a more natural and less bookish delivery, form the habit of weakening unstressed vowels, concentrate on unfamiliar sounds, and the like.

The great majority of the classes in English for foreign students taught in the United States are and must continue to be composed of individuals from many different countries with many different first languages. The need in such courses is for materials adapted to the use of students with a wide variety of non-English linguistic backgrounds. Even in our cultural institutes abroad, texts with general applicability will certainly be needed for many years to come. It will be a long, long time before materials at all levels, dealing with all phases of instruction, for all major language groups, can be made available—if indeed we are ever to be so fortunate as to have them.

This *Manual of American English Pronunciation*, it is hoped, will go at least a little way toward filling the need. The text is definitely not for beginners. It is best suited to reasonably adult and literate students who have studied English several years back home or who have had some practical experience with the language in this country—the typical foreign student in an American college or university, the educated new immigrant, or the advanced student in a cultural institute.

It is based on the type of American English which may be heard, with slight variations, from Ohio through the Middle West and on to the Pacific Coast. Living as they do in the region where the process of dialect mixing has gone farthest and where the language has achieved most uniformity, the people who speak this language undeniably constitute the present linguistic center of gravity of the English-

speaking world, both because of their numbers and their cultural importance.

An attempt has been made to incorporate in the *Manual* many of the concepts and techniques developed by those who have applied the principles of linguistic science to English teaching. The British phoneticians have not been neglected as a source of ideas. We have also drawn heavily upon the literature and practical classroom experience of our American modern foreign language teachers and speech correctionists. Throughout the text laboratory exercises are included, and suggestions are made as to how the instructor can strengthen his course by the use of various types of recording and playback equipment.

It has been our conviction that, even though these pronunciation materials could not be based on a comparative study of the phonetics of English and one foreign language, they need not for that reason be completely unscientific. We felt that there were large categories of speech difficulties which all or many of our students had in common, and we have found this in fact to be the case. Our first task was to discover as accurately and objectively as we could what these areas of common weakness were. A check list of categories was set up in accordance with the phonetic systems of several languages which have been more or less adequately described by scholars and which were known to us. We included, in so far as we could, all previously noted departures from the norms of the conversational pronunciation of educated native speakers of American English. We then recorded the speech, and analyzed and counted the "errors" of students at the University of California, Los Angeles, for three years. The result was a sort of frequency count of the pronunciation difficulties of a group of several hundred average students from abroad. The *Manual* was built around this count.

Those enrolled in the classes came from all parts of the world, a cross section of our foreign student population. The chief linguistic groups represented were, in order, Spanish, Northern Chinese, Iranian, Arabic, Germanic, French, and Scandinavian. But there have been individuals from all the major language areas of the globe.

We believe we have thus avoided two undesirable extremes: (1) a text organized solely in accordance with the subjective intuition of the author, and (2) one which logically and with equal emphasis treats all the elements of the English sound system without taking into consideration the special needs of the student group.

As the results of the frequency count became available, our next concern was to determine the order in which the various types of speech difficulty found to be prevalent in our mixed classes should be dealt with, and the relative amount of attention which should be devoted to each type. Our aim was to make the students' speech as

completely intelligible as possible. Could this be best achieved by treating first and in most detail those difficulties which the count showed to be most common, by an arrangement based on simple numerical frequency? Or were there certain kinds of difficulty which were more serious than others, which affected intelligibility to a greater extent, and which consequently must be given greater emphasis?

We examined with considerable care the widely accepted assumption that "errors" involving the substitution of one phoneme[2] for another—pronouncing *that* as /θæt/ rather than /ðæt/, or *bit* as /biyt/ instead of /bɪt/—are necessarily those which most affect intelligibility, and are consequently those which must always be attacked first. As we gained experience, we were more and more forced to the conclusion that, while this theory might have some validity with reference to beginning students, it was of little value as a guide in our advanced classes. Our count revealed that the substitution of one phoneme for another was relatively infrequent in the speech of our students. Only a few such substitutions—/iy/ for /ɪ/, /ɪ/ for /iy/, /ɔ/ for /ow/, /a/ for /ɔ/, /s/ for /z/, /t/ for /d/, /d/ for /ð/, etc.—accounted for the great majority of cases. Most others, while theoretically possible or even likely, were actually quite uncommon and certainly could not be regarded as a problem of major importance. We found our students having no trouble with /m/ or the diphthongs /ay/, /aw/, and /ɔy/.

We were also impressed by the fact that in almost all cases of phonemic substitution, even in those where the mispronunciation should have resulted in giving the word a different meaning—*bit* as /biyt/ (beat) instead of /bɪt/—, the context made the intended meaning quite clear. In other words, the substitution seldom seemed to result in a misunderstanding. This impression was strengthened by the extreme difficulty we experienced in preparing drills made up of sentences in which either word of a minimal pair—*made, mate; time, dime; save, safe*—would be equally appropriate. Our students appeared simply to fail to understand a word much more often than they mistook it for some other word. We did not understand them a great deal more frequently than we misunderstood them.

On the other hand, certain nonphonemic "errors" proved in practice to be serious barriers to intelligibility, and were shown by our count to be extremely common. An Italian student had great difficulty in making himself understood because of his tendency to pronounce all final stops with a strong "finishing sound." For him and many others, the improper release and aspiration of stops was

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[2]Sound which may be the sole feature whereby one word is distinguished in meaning from another: for example, *time* /taym/ and *dime* /daym/ are alike except for their initial sounds; therefore /t/ and /d/ are phonemes in English.

obviously a much more important problem than the substitution of, say, /š/ for /ž/.

We found that a knowledge of voicing alone did not enable our students to make a clear distinction between words like *plays* /pleyz̲/ and *place* /ples̲/. Better results were obtained when we also pointed out and drilled the so-called secondary differences between /eyz/ and /eys/: vowel length and consonant release. These latter are not usually classified among the phonemic qualities of English sounds.

The author was at one time struck by two very fine examples of how nonphonemic differences in sounds may even cause misunderstanding. With another American professor and several Filipino educational officials he was traveling by car near Manila to visit a school in the village of P̲olo, province of Bulak̲an. The other American asked one of the officials to repeat the name of our destination, and understood the answer to be B̲olo, Bulah̲an. In Tagalog, the native language of this particular Filipino, /p/ and /b/, /k/ and /h/ all exist as separate phonemes. Initial /p/ is unaspirated as well as unvoiced. In English, on the other hand, initial /p/ is strongly aspirated, and initial /b/ is not aspirated though it is voiced. The American, listening to a sentence in which the context gave him no clue, mistook the Filipino's unaspirated /p/ for a /b/. We have traditionally regarded voicing or the lack of it as the feature which distinguishes the phoneme /p/ from the phoneme /b/. But in this case aspiration was certainly the distinctive characteristic. The official had pronounced *Bulakan* with a perfectly normal Tagalog /k/, formed far back in the throat and with a very incomplete closure. In English this /k/ would have been made farther toward the front of the mouth and with a strong closure. Though these latter qualities are not usually thought of as essential to the /k/-phoneme, their absence clearly made the American mistake /k/ for /h/.

When an individual begins the study of a foreign language, the new phonemes are often immediately obvious to him, and he therefore tends to learn them rather quickly. The American who takes up Tagalog cannot fail to become aware of the glottal stop /ʔ/ which distinguishes a word like *batà* /báta?/ (child) from *bata* /báta/ (dressing gown). He will also, of necessity, learn very soon to use the phoneme /ŋ/ at the beginning of a word, as in *ngalan* /ŋálan/ (name), where it does not occur in English. But he may never notice or reproduce certain other features of the new sound system, such as the incomplete closure of /k/ or the lack of aspiration of initial /p/, unless these are pointed out to him. These latter are not obvious, though they may profoundly affect the ability of native speakers to understand the American's Tagalog.

We believe that any pronunciation text which devotes its attention almost exclusively to phonemic differences concentrates on what

is most obvious and most easily acquired through simple imitation. It neglects precisely those phases of the phonetics of the language in which imitation is most likely to fail, and analytical knowledge and systematic drill are of greatest value.

Our own solution has been to regard unintelligibility not as the result of phonemic substitution, but as *the cumulative effect of many little departures from the phonetic norms of the language.* A great many of these departures may be phonemic; many others are not. Under certain circumstances, *any* abnormality of speech can contribute to unintelligibility.

This does not, of course, mean that we felt that we could dispense with the phoneme in the preparation of the *Manual.* The system of transcription adopted is almost entirely phonemic.[3] We consistently refer to the transcription as phonetic, however, for two reasons: students are more accustomed to this term, and several pedagogical devices employed in the *Manual* are phonetic in character.

We make no attempt to treat such nonphonemic variants of sounds as would be natural in the language of a native speaker of English: e.g., the various regional and personal differences in the way the stressed vowel of *Mary* is pronounced. However, we do devote more attention than is usual to unnatural "foreign-sounding" variants, even though these may be nonphonemic.

The fact that any phonetic abnormality can contribute to unintelligibility does not mean, either, that all departures from the norm should be treated as though they were of equal importance. We have adopted an order of arrangement based primarily on simple numerical frequency, considering first and at greatest length those difficulties most prevalent in our classes. It was necessary at times, of course, to modify this arrangement, in the interests of logic and good pedagogy, by grouping similar problems together. We also considered

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[3]The symbols used for transcription in this text are a modification of the systems set forth by George L. Trager and Henry Lee Smith, Jr. in *An Outline of English Structure* (Norman, Oklahoma: Battenberg Press, 1951) and by Charles C. Fries and Kenneth L. Pike in the University of Michigan English Language Institute materials. The symbolization is used solely as a pedagogical device, and although based upon phonemic principles it is not meant to be a "pure" symbolization. Thus the diphthongal vowel symbols /iy/, /ow/, etc. will appear, but not /i/. We have used /ə/ and /ər/ in such words as *alone* /əlówn/, *after* /ǽfter/, *cut* /kət/, and *bird* /bərd/. The /ər/ sound is treated as a variant of /ə/ in the *Manual,* and separate exercises are provided for the two sounds. The "centering" diphthongs /iə/, /ɪə/, /eə/, /ɛə/, /æə/ were included among our symbols as a graphic means of representing the peculiar quality possessed by a front vowel when it stands before /l/ or /r/; we have found the transcription of *will* as /wɪəl/ instead of /wɪl/ a very definite aid in combating the tendency of students to pronounce such words with a pure vowel and with the tongue held unnaturally high. Some means of calling attention in writing to this type of pronunciation seems to be essential.

that an "error" which involved an entire sentence, such as a faulty intonation pattern, was obviously of more importance than one which affected only a single sound.

Problems such as improper voicing, aspiration, and vowel length, which recur in connection with a series of different consonants or vowels, we have treated as a whole rather than as matters to be taken up over and over again in connection with each individual sound. In other words, we felt that the substitution of /k/ for its voiced counterpart /g/ in a word like *big* /bɪg/ reflected not so much an imperfect control of these two sounds as it did a general inability to voice final consonants. We noted that students who substituted /bɪk̲/ for *big* /bɪg̲/ also almost invariably substituted /eytš̲/ for *age* /eydž̲/ and /ɪs̲/ for *is* /ɪz̲/. We consequently did not prepare a separate section and drills on /k/ and /g/, but included these sounds in a lesson on voicing. For the same reason we did not attempt to drill all difficult consonant clusters separately, but treated the problem they represent in a general lesson on consonant clusters and combinations. In a sense, then, our approach has been synthetic rather than analytical.

In its final form the *Manual* has a cyclic arrangement. After an initial lesson which introduces the student to the phonetic symbols, it proceeds at once to the problem of the weakening of unstressed vowels, explaining only enough about vowel classification to make clear the significance of weakening and the identity of the vowel sounds. It then moves on to the closely related and crucially important subject of rhythm and stress in words and sentences. The elements of intonation and the connection between intonation patterns and stress are next treated in two lessons. Until some control of rhythm and intonation has been achieved, drills involving connected discourse may do more harm than good, and it is futile to hope to achieve mastery of the individual sounds which make up the larger patterns. If the pattern is wrong, the sounds cannot be entirely correct. If the pattern is right, correct sounds are much easier to produce.

In Lessons 7 and 8 the principles of consonant classification, voicing, and aspiration are explained and applied, with particular emphasis on the pronunciation of the endings -s̲ and -ed̲, and the effect of an initial or final position on articulation. Lesson 9 deals with the glides /l/ and /r/ and their influence on preceding vowel sounds, and also with the group of syllabic consonants.

Attention is then shifted back to vowels. Detailed analyses of the formation of the individual sounds are given, and the problem of tonic vowel substitutions is attacked. Lessons 12 and 13 deal with prevalent consonant substitutions which are the effect, not of improper voicing or aspiration, but of a formation of the individual sounds which is faulty in some other respect. Lesson 14 attacks the problems produced by consonant clusters in both initial and final position as well as those produced medially in words and phrases.

The last two lessons of the *Manual* deal with the orthographic representation of English vowels and should be particularly helpful in interpreting the inconsistencies of English spelling as they apply to reading and writing English.

II. Use of the *Manual*

Since the *Manual* is not intended for beginners, but for individuals who have already read a great deal of English and are familiar with the traditional orthography of common words, there seemed to be no advantage in writing all exercises in phonetic symbols in an attempt to guard the students against spelling pronunciations. A great deal of transcribed material with intonation and stress markings has been included, however, especially in the earlier lessons. The purpose of these transcriptions is to facilitate the breaking up of old speech habits by providing a new type of visual stimulus, to make it possible for the student's analytical faculties to intervene more effectively in the formation of sounds and patterns of sound. This effect is best achieved as he first becomes familiar with symbols, and the law of diminishing returns appears to make itself felt soon thereafter. Toward the end of the text special symbols and markings are used more and more sparingly, and the transition is thus made back to normal orthography, to the language situation in which the student has been finding himself all along in his other classes and in which he will continue to use English.

It was never intended that the *Manual* should teach students to make phonetic transcriptions and to mark intonation themselves. All that is aimed at is an ability to read symbols and to follow intonation lines. It is true that in several cases the class is asked to transcribe and mark the intonation patterns of a few carefully chosen sentences. The purpose of these exercises, however, is merely to achieve passive recognition more rapidly by means of a little active experience. The instructor is strongly warned against making the ability to write in phonetic symbols an end in itself.

The instructor should also be warned against teaching the analytical material directly to the students; it is rather to be used indirectly as a means of helping them with the specific problems introduced in each lesson. After the lesson has been presented and practiced in class, students can be directed to pertinent explanatory sections if the instructor feels they will be useful. For this reason, the text should not usually be assigned in advance.

Whenever possible, the exercises provided are made up of entire sentences and even connected paragraphs rather than of individual words. A simple vocabulary chosen from Thorndike's first few hundred words has been used, and the subject matter has been drawn

largely from the situations of everyday life most familiar to the students. There are no special review lessons, but every lesson contains review exercises; great care has been taken to ensure the recall of important principles at spaced intervals.

Even so, it is recognized that any course in English pronunciation which asked of its students no more than the completion of the work prescribed in the pages of this *Manual* would be woefully incomplete. Analytical explanations and controlled drills such as those of the text certainly are a necessary part of a pronunciation course; there seems to be no other way to break up deeply ingrained habits of faulty speech and to initiate the formation of new habits. But the best way to learn pronunciation is by pronouncing. There is no substitute for extensive imitation and practice under conditions approaching those of everyday life as nearly as possible. No textbook, no amount of analytical work, can fully supply this need.

It is therefore hoped that the instructor will supplement the work of the text in various ways. He should encourage his students to carry on, outside of class, the oral reading suggested at the end of almost every lesson, and he should make additional suggestions, urging that even more such reading be done. Better integration will be secured if the materials read are those used in other phases of the student's work in English, or in his classes in other subjects. That is why relatively few readings have been included in the *Manual* itself. During reading practice, the student's attention should be focused on one type of difficulty: for example, final -ed, or the stress of compound words. This will give purpose and direction to his reading, and perhaps enable him to progress from the point at which he can avoid a given "error" by conscious effort to the point where he makes the correct sound automatically when he is thinking only of the meaning of his words.

With the same end in view, we have done quite a bit of play-reading in our classes at the University of California. Using such props as the classroom can afford, and with books in hand, the students read the lines and walk through the actions. In selecting plays, we give preference to those which are written in a simple modern conversational language free from dialectal peculiarities. A large cast and well-distributed lines are also advantages, as they make it possible for more individuals to participate. We have found Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and Hart and Kaufman's *You Can't Take It with You* to be quite suitable. While the play is going on, coaching from the insructor is kept at an absolute minimum, but the attention of the participants is focused on some particular speech problem. Sometimes the text is prepared in advance by marking all words in which the particular problem occurs: for example, all final s's.

The supplementary practice may also take the form of reading by the instructor and direct imitation on the part of the students.