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READINGS IN ENGLISH PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY

Rafael Monroy-Casas
Inmaculada Arboleda-Guirao (eds.)

UNIVERSITAT DE VALÈNCIA
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CONTRIBUTORS

Inmaculada de J. Arboleda Guirao holds a BA and MA in English Studies as well as a MA in Legal Translation English-Spanish. She obtained the First Rank Outstanding Student Achievement Award at the Spanish National Level (2009). After holding a PhD Research Scholarship, she joined the Univ. of Murcia and the National University of Distance Education as a lecturer (2011). She has co-authored *Systems for the Phonetic Transcription of English: Theory and Texts* (Peter Lang, 2011) and done research with Prof. Clive Upton (Univ. of Leeds). She is currently completing her PhD thesis on phonostylistics.

Silvia Barreiro Bilbao is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Modern Languages and Foreign Languages in UNED (Madrid, Spain). She has a degree and a PhD in English Philology (University of León, Spain), and an MSc in Speech and Hearing Sciences (University College London). Since 1994 she has been teaching English Phonetics, first in the University of León and then in UNED. Her teaching and research interests have always been related to Phonetics, mainly on the acoustic sides of speech, with important publications in national and international journals. She is also the author of different phonetic materials published by the UNED.

Jean-Louis Duchet is Professor emeritus of English Phonetics and Linguistics and Dean emeritus of the Faculty of arts & languages at the University of Poitiers (France). He is the author of several books about phonology and the phonetics of English (*La Phonologie*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France; *Code de l'anglais oral*, Paris: Ophrys. Italian translation by Fiona Aglietti, *Codice della Pronuncia Inglese*, Firenze: Festina Lente; and co-author with Alain Deschamps, Michael O'Neil & Jean-Michel Fournier of *English Phonology and Graphophonemics*, Paris:

Ophrys). His research interests concentrate on the historical development of English pronunciation and stress-patterns since 1700, as evidenced by orthoepic treatises and pronouncing dictionaries. He also supervises research on large multilingual corpora of English for legal purposes.

Eva Estebas Vilaplana currently lectures English Phonetics at the UNED (Spain). She obtained her *PhD in Phonetics* at University College London (UCL) where she taught phonetics and phonology and worked as a research assistant for more than six years. She holds an *MA in Phonetics* (UCL) and an *AM in English Philology* (UAB). She has a degree in *English Philology* and another one in *Spanish Philology* (UAB). Her research, mainly on prosody, focus and intonation, has been published in a variety of national and international journals such as *Journal of Phonetics*, *Onomázein* or *RESLA*. She is the author of the book and self-learning materials *Teach Yourself English Pronunciation*.

Robert Fuchs is a PhD student at the University of Münster (Germany). In his PhD thesis, submitted in 2013, he compares the speech rhythm of educated Indian English and British English. He studied English linguistics, computer science and law at the Universities of Dresden (Germany), Hyderabad (India) und Cracow (Poland), and has published on various post-colonial varieties of English.

Luisa Granato is doctor in Linguistics and consultant academic at the University of La Plata, Argentina. Her teaching activities both at graduate and post-graduate levels, as well as her research interests have always been centred around the field of spoken discourse, both in English and Spanish. She was senior lecturer in English Phonetics, Diction and Language, and is at the moment the head of a research program on casual conversation in Spanish. The result of her work has been published in a book, in chapters of books and national and international journals. She has been invited to lectures and give plenary presentations at different universities in Argentina, México, Venezuela, Uruguay, Chile, Brasil, Sweden and Spain and has participated with lectures in over sixty national and international conferences.

Sylvie Hanote is a professor at the University of Poitiers where she teaches English linguistics. Her fields of research are English phonetics, morpho-phonology and oral discourse analysis. She is particularly interested in the questions of prominence and reported speech in an oral corpus. She recently co-edited a book in French entitled *Focalisation(s). Saillance dans les langues: lexique, syntaxe, prosodie* published by the Presses Universitaires de Rennes (2013).

Erika Larsen has an MA degree in Interpretation and Translation and also a European Master's degree in Conference Interpreting, both awarded by Copenhagen Business School. She has worked for a Scandinavian translation company in Southampton, UK, and is currently a translator in the Danish Language Department of the European Commission in Luxembourg.

David Levey lectures at the University of Cádiz (Spain) on Phonetics and Phonology and Sociolinguistics. His main research interests include accents and language variation, bilingualism and second language acquisition. In addition to publications on various aspects of pronunciation and language teaching, he has written extensively on the sociolinguistics and language situation of Gibraltar.

Inger M. Mees was educated at the universities of Leiden and Edinburgh. She then moved to Copenhagen Business School, where she is now Associate Professor teaching English phonetics. She has written on contrastive phonetics and pronunciation training for Danish and Dutch students, and has also published on sociolinguistics, historiography of phonetics, English-medium instruction, and translation processes. Together with Beverley Collins, she has co-authored several books and numerous articles on English pronunciation, accent varieties, and historiography of phonetics. Their most recent publication is *Practical Phonetics and Phonology*, now in its third edition (Routledge, 2013).

Jose Antonio Mompeán obtained his B.A. and Ph.D in English studies from the University of Murcia in 1997 and 2002 respectively. He also obtained an MA in Phonetics from University College London in 2006. He has published

extensively on English phonetics and phonology, with special emphasis on phonology from a Cognitive Linguistics perspective, variation in English pronunciation, and pronunciation teaching.

Brian Mott teaches Phonetics and Phonology, Semantics and Translation in the English Department of the University of Barcelona, where he was Linguistics Coordinator from 1984 to 1990 and from 2007 to 2010. He was also a teacher in the “Escola d’Idiomes Moderns” at UB for thirty years (English coordinator 1976-1980). From 2004 to 2010 he tutored on the Summer Course in English Phonetics at University College London directed by Professor John Wells. He has an MA in Spanish Studies (Aberdeen, 1969) and a PhD in Aragonese Dialectology (Barcelona, 1978). He has also studied the Mirandese dialect spoken in North East Portugal, and has published some twenty books.

María Riera is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of English and German Studies at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain, where she also teaches English language and phonetics/phonology courses. Her research interests are acoustic phonetics, speech production and perception, the phonetics-phonology interface, sound change and the teaching of English pronunciation to speakers of Spanish/Catalan.

Luis Fernando Rodríguez Romero (Sevilla, 1977) has a degree in English Philology from the University of Seville. In 2005 he was awarded an M.Phil and is currently working on his Ph.D. dissertation on Pronunciation Teaching. He has lectured on English Phonetics and Phonology at the Universities of Seville and Greenwich (London), and has also presented several papers at both national and international conferences held in Spain for the last twelve years. His fields of interest include phonotactics, English & Spanish contrastive phonetics, prosody and pronunciation teaching.

Joaquín Romero. Master of Arts (1992) and Ph.D. (1995) in Linguistics, University of Connecticut. Associate Professor at Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain (1996 to present). Research interests include articulatory

phonetics and phonology, the phonetics-phonology interface, sound change and English pronunciation teaching methodology.

Paul Tench is an Associate Researcher at Cardiff University, Wales, UK. He has now retired from full time academic work after working for 40 years at Cardiff and in Nigeria. His main teaching responsibilities and research interests focussed on phonetics and phonology, systemic-functional linguistics, linguistics applied to language teaching and learning. His most well known works include *Pronunciation Skills* (Macmillan, 1981), *The Roles of Intonation in English Discourse* (Peter Lang, 1990), *Intonation Systems of English* (Cassell, 1996) and *Transcribing the Sound of English* (Cambridge UP, 2011).

INTRODUCTION

Rafael Monroy-Casas

Murcia University

Introduction

The teaching of the phonetics and phonology of English to a Spanish university audience –I wonder whether this may be extrapolated to other contexts– has more often than not characterized itself by a bare, uncritical presentation of facts as they are usually portrayed in classic publications such as Gimson-Cruttenden, Collins & Mees, Roach, etc. These textbooks, while being systematic and even comprehensive in their coverage, present a ‘canonical’ view of language in the sense that they do not usually take account of contrasting views of the phonetics and phonology of English. On the other hand, it is not always easy for learners to find relevant research where well-established views may be called into question; as a result, students end up having a quasi-dogmatic opinion of the phonology of English, hardly being aware of other views and approaches.

With this in mind, we decided to contact a group of experts in English phonetics and phonology and invite them to participate in this project. We made it clear to them that our intention was to produce a book of readings with a balanced combination of theory and praxis, leaving out everything related to models of English, theories of pronunciation, pronunciation teaching or teaching in the classroom. The theoretical component from them was to be a state-of-the-art survey of a given topic, while the gist of the contribution was to be empirical research on a specific aspect of it within the

broad thematic range of English phonology. For methodological reasons as well as for reasons of space, we decided to stick to the most fully described variety of British English: RP. The result is this book of readings, which contains a collection of contributions with a fundamentally pedagogical aim and which, hopefully, will provide students with reliable and up-to-date information on key issues of English. There are indeed texts on the market that cover different aspects of the phonetics and phonology of English, but they are either too broad in scope for our purposes, such as Ramsaran's (ed. 1990), *Studies in the Pronunciation of English, a Commemorative Volume in Honour of A.C. Gimson*, Windsow Lewis' (ed. 1995) *Studies in General and English Phonetics. Essays in Honour of Professor J.D. O'Connor*, or Dziubalska & Przedlacka (eds. 2005) *English Pronunciation Models: A Changing Scene*, or they have a specific, narrower orientation, which is the case of Romero-Trillo's (ed., 2012) *Pragmatics and Prosody in English Language Teaching*, where the focus is on the interaction of pragmatics meaning and prosodic features.

Those who have contributed to this volume are all experts in the English language. Their knowledge of and sensitivity to the problems of English pronunciation make their contributions important, since they not only offer an up-to-date view of specific phonological topics, but provide original inroads into the topic under analysis.

The volume is organized into three distinct parts: papers that focus on the phonetics and phonology of English segmentals, suprasegmental aspects of English with special emphasis on intonation and, finally, new developments in English, where some of the changes observed in current British English are reported on and assessed.

The first part consists of five chapters. In the opening chapter (Chapter 1), Luis Fernando Rodríguez studies the status of yod in pre-syllabic position. As the title suggests, this is a study of the behaviour of the semi-vowel /j/ in English, a controversial topic among phonologists (Giegerich, 1992) because, although it can act as a single head in a syllable followed by any vowel, this phoneme only clusters with preceding sonorants. This peculiar

behaviour of /j/ leads the author to consider that there is a unique relationship between the onset and the syllabic nucleus, so that one could say that /j/ is part of both, the onset and the syllabic peak. The author argues that, if /j/ belonged only to the peak, there would not be any problem with a word like *crew* being pronounced as */krju:/, another consonant being eligible as part of the onset (it is well known that English phonotactics supports up to three consonants in syllable-initial position, initial /s/ being mandatory). The fact that /j/ cannot be inserted into the above-mentioned word and other phonotactically similar forms, favours the view that the onset consists of only two consonants, a third one being disallowed unless the first one is /s/.

In her contribution, 'Syllabic consonants vs. Schwa in English. A descriptive study' (Chapter 2), Inmaculada Arboleda raises the problem of the occurrence of syllabic consonants in English and their alternation with schwa plus //l/. This is a descriptive study which has as its starting-point the disagreement between British phoneticians as regards the use of one variant or the other. Samples of the speech of 80 informants, 40 men and 40 women –all of them speakers of a non-rhotic variety of English (RP)– were taken from the BBC Learning English website in order to see how natives (three people acted as referees) perceived potentially syllabic consonants, and the degree of agreement/disagreement among them. Monroy's pedagogical rules (2008) were used as a point of reference. These are context-dependent rules which predict whether in a given context we can have schwa or a syllabic consonant or both realizations. The author concludes that while English syllabic consonants appear to follow a pattern in line with Monroy's proposal, their behaviour is not as obvious as one might infer from these rules.

In 'Fricatives Revisited' (Chapter 3), Silvia Barreiro carries out a meticulous analysis of English fricatives from a perceptual standpoint. She focuses on the acoustic cues listeners use to perceive specific traits of a speech sound. After a thorough review of those studies that have centered on the acoustic characterization of English fricatives in an oral context, she pays special

attention to the perceptual weight such acoustic cues play in fricative contrasts. Thus, categories such as place of articulation, manner of articulation and voicing are explained regardless of changes they may undergo due to speaker variation or in certain phonetic contexts. Specific acoustic features are also interpreted as a function of their articulatory correlates.

In 'English plosives: beyond the [\pm voice] distinction' (Chapter 4), Joaquin Romero and Maria Riera deal with the voicing parameter in English plosives. They consider that the voiced/voiceless opposition is not convincingly dealt with in current textbooks on the phonetics and phonology of English, since sounds are ascribed to either one category or the other. Although they deem this classification satisfactory at an introductory level, it is not considered adequate at a higher level, as it does not take into account the degree of variation sounds undergo according to context. They contend that other parameters such as voice onset time (VOT) allow a more rigorous description of the true nature of plosives. Factors such as aspiration or devoicing are better explained when related to VOT. Further characteristics of English plosives, such as glottalization, lateralization, flapping or deletion, are analysed on account of the fact that the study of such phenomena serves to give a more complete and realistic view than the simple voiceless/voiced dichotomy. They acknowledge that this may mean introducing greater phonetic complexity, but it is their conviction that this should not be a serious stumbling block within a university context.

The work of Jean-Louis Duchet on English lexical stress opens the second section of the book. In Chapter 5, the author examines both the English accentual phonological hierarchy and the role played by stress placement rules, highlighting the nature of English as a stress-timed language. Taking as a starting point the fact that English primary stress is a distinctive marker of any lexical unit, he goes on to explain its behaviour in simple as well as compound words taking into account the role played by prefixes and suffixes. In his analysis of stress placement, Duchet follows the English linguistic tradition of Kingdon (1958) and Fudge (1984), but also the French

contribution of Guierre in particular (1965, 1969). Questions raised by Chomsky and Halle's theory (1968) and some conflicting rules are also addressed. As regards secondary stress and stress shift at phrase level, the author holds the view that both are determined by rules based on the alternation of strong and weak syllables. The chapter ends with a succinct summary of the main accentual differences between British and American English.

In Chapter 6, José Antonio Mompeán discusses English accentual shifting. It is well known that the use of both lexical and sentence accent is language specific, there existing striking differences among languages. In English, for example, stress placement, although variable, can be influenced by phonology or morphology (avoidance of stress clash and the effect of affixes, respectively). This is an issue on which there is plenty of research at both theoretical and empirical level – suffice it to mention the contributions of Generative Phonology (Chomsky & Halle, 1968) and Metrical Phonology (Giegerich, 1985; Gussenhoven, 1991) or recent developments in Optimality Theory (Cho, 2002). In order to investigate the degree of stress shift in English, Mompeán discusses this phenomenon by using for this purpose the variation found in the pronunciation of the *-teen* numbers both in compounds and in an attributive function. A number of expressions from a corpus of news bulletins ranging from 1999 to 2009 –taken from the BBC World Service website– were analysed for the occurrence of stress shift. The conclusion reached by the author is that such shift seems to be the norm rather than the exception in the above-mentioned contexts.

Chapter 7 is devoted to the study of rhythm in English. Robert Fuchs addresses in 'You got the beat: Rhythm and timing in SSBE' different suprasegmental aspects of this phenomenon. After criticizing the simplistic view of rhythm that categorizes languages either as syllable-timed or stress-timed, the former having syllables of equal length, whereas in the latter feet would show a tendency to being isochronous, he analyses rhythm by focusing on differences in the length of adjacent syllables, a much more promising approach. He addresses the concept of rhythm as a set of

metrical units with a periodic recurrence, discussing some popular metrics that he applies to data taken from the database of SSBE (Nolan et al, 2009). The chapter ends with a brief consideration of some of the factors contributing to the phenomenon of rhythmic variation in a given speech community.

In 'Studies on the intonation of English: a critical review' (Chapter 8), Luisa Granato assesses the main theoretical and analytical approaches to English intonation throughout the 20th century and early twenty-first century. Her purpose is to present and discuss their contributions in the light of new linguistic theories, and to see how their principles are applicable to the analysis of texts. The author emphasizes how crucial these contributions have proved to be, especially in an EFL context. She describes thoroughly the School of London concern with both the grammatical and attitudinal function of intonation; the contribution of Systemic Functional Linguistics in the definition of linguistic and non-linguistic meanings of intonation, and the impact of a discourse pragmatic approach. She completes her review by referring not only to the work done on intonation in the United States and in England, but also to other academic circles in other parts of the world who have an interest in the interface between phonology and the semantic or the lexico-grammatical systems of language.

In Chapter 9, Eva Estebas Vilaplana deals with 'Phonological models of intonational description in English'. As the title shows, this is an introduction to the studies on English intonation focusing on the British and American contributions. Regarding the British school, she discusses the fundamental tenets on which it is based: the distinction between tonality, tonicity and tone (Halliday, 1967), and their idea of intonation as a configurational analysis of pitch contours, each of which consists of a nucleus as a mandatory element along with other optional components. As for the American School, the author reviews the evolution of intonation studies from their inception, with seminal contributions from Pike (1945), Trager and Smith (1951) and others, until now. In these pioneering studies, intonation was framed around four level tones which would account for the pitch movements at the end of an

intonation phrase. More recent proposals, such as Autosegmental-Metrical phonology (Pierrehumbert, 1980), or the ToBI system of prosodic notation (Beckman & Hirshberg, 1994), have reduced intonational analysis to two tonal levels associated with stressed syllables and the edges of prosodic domains. The chapter finishes with a comparison on how different approaches can describe some basic intonation patterns in declarative, interrogative and imperative sentences.

In Chapter 10, 'A systemic functional model of the intonation of clauses in English', Paul Tench has carried out a detailed description of all the possibilities inherent in sentence intonation in spoken English. Using a systemic functional model, based on the work of Halliday (1967, 1970), Wells (2006) and himself (Tench, 1990, 1996, 2005), he presents the three basic systems that underlie the English intonation system: tonality, tonicity and tone. The author illustrates each of these systems comprehensively with examples in which all possible intonation options at clause level are represented. This is a unique illustration of all the intonation systems at work.

'Connected speech: pronunciation of words in context' is the title of Chapter 11, in which the author, Sylvie Hanote, canvasses the phonetic phenomena observed in the phonic substance of lexical units at speech level. Using the work of linguists like Jones (1957), Cruttenden (2001) and Roach (2009) as a backdrop, she deals with the phonetic substance of such units, discussing phonotactic processes such as rhythm, assimilation, elision, linking and prominence. In the first, she addresses the phenomenon of stress shift and vowel reduction as well as the notion of prosodic contour. As for assimilation, she examines how progressive or regressive assimilation can affect point, mode of articulation and voicing. Elision is analysed contextually to show how it may affect consonant clusters. She discusses how linking is achieved either through a final consonant or by means of intruding elements such as [j] , [w] or [r]. Finally, she addresses the question of prominence by taking several of its acoustic correlates into account (variation of intensity and fundamental frequency, vowel duration, change of rhythm, or the

presence of a glottal stop). The phonetic description is illustrated by means of spectrographic representations of different sound sequences taken from the radio.

The third section, dedicated to New Developments in English, consists of three chapters. In the first (Chapter 12), Erika Larsen & Inger Mees study 'four phonological variables in Cliff Richard's songs and speech over a period of 50 years'. Based on the fact that British pop singers have shown from the 50s a tendency to use American English forms, motivated no doubt by the impact of the American popular music of the time, the authors have studied the music and the speech of Cliff Richard in a sample of 25 recordings taken from his musical repertoire and from interviews with the singer. The aim was to investigate three fundamental issues: to see whether there is any variation in pronunciation when Cliff Richard speaks or sings; to analyse whether the musical genre has exerted any kind of influence on his way of singing or speaking, and finally, to see to what extent the use of American speech habits have evolved over time in his pronunciation.

'Recent changes in English phonetics and phonology and their representation in phonetic notation' is the title of Chapter 13, in which Brian Mott describes and analyses those changes that have taken place over the last 50 years in the phonetics and phonology of British English. The author reviews different approaches followed by British scholars to represent such changes in the leading pronunciation dictionaries (*The Longman Pronunciation Dictionary, The Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary, and The Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation for Current English*). As regards the notation to use, the author opts to follow the established usage as it appears in such dictionaries, making only minor concessions when it is understood that the change represents a significant advantage in terms of higher phonetic accuracy with respect to traditional practice. At the phonological level, he discusses some recent changes such as those affecting the short vowels, the merging of some of them in certain contexts, the widespread use of schwa, the smoothing of some diphthongs, *happy* tensing, etc. As for the consonants, he deals with current phenomena such

as T-tapping and glottalling, L-vocalization, Yod- coalescence, and intrusive [r], etc.

The last chapter (Chapter 14) deals with 'Some recent changes and developments in British English'. In it, David Levey delves into the changes that are occurring in contemporary British English. He assumes that both the RP of Daniel Jones and the English used by the BBC in its early days are far from the English one can hear today. New attitudes, education, changes in social structure, mobility and, of course, the impact of the popular media have helped shape today's English. Based on recent research, like Brian Mott in the previous chapter, the author reviews the phonetic changes that are taking place in British English. He considers their place and status in the standard pronunciation models and analyzes to what extent one can bridge the gap between the type of pronunciation presented in textbooks and the English spoken today. Phenomena such as vowel shortening, H-dropping, TH-fronting, L-vocalization and other forms stigmatized until recently are now increasingly accepted. As perception and attitudes change over time, sometimes becoming the standard, Levey understands that the student has to be aware and recognize these developments, regardless of whether (s)he will finally adopt them or not.

In summary, this book of readings deals with the phonetics and phonology of British English providing an up-to-date and critical view of fundamental aspects of English that the student cannot ignore. We hope that the contributions collected in this volume will serve to give the student a less monolithic, less simplistic and more realistic view of the complex phenomena underlying the English language.