Transcription of Vowels in the Standard Southern British English Accent

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1. Introduction

To transcribe English phonemes in textbooks and dictionaries, the quantitative-qualitative approach has been used without major changes since the current system was created by A. C. Gimson in the 20th century. In this approach, twenty vowels in the Standard Southern British English accent are classified into four categories: short vowels, long vowels, diphthongs and a weak vowel named schwa:

- Short Vowels: /ɪ, ɛ, æ, ʌ, ʊ, ə/
- Long Vowels: /iː, ɜː, ɔː, ɔ, uː/
- Diphthongs: /eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ, aʊ, ɔʊ, əʊ, ʊə/
- Weak Vowel: /ə/

However, Lindsey (2019: 51) proposes an intellectually stimulating transcription system of these phonemes with a different method of classification:

- Short-Lax: /ɪ, ɛ, a, ʌ, ʊ, ə/
- Long-Tense, Diphthongs: /iː, eɪ, ɔɪ, ʊə, ɔʊ, əʊ, ʊə/
- Long-Tense, Linking-r Vowels: /ɑː, ɔː, ʌ, ʊ, ɛː, ɔː/
- Weak Vowel: /ə/

This paper explores the validity of Lindsey’s proposal by selecting eight groups of vowels which are transcribed differently from the conventional method.

2. FLEECE and GOOSE

Lindsey (2019: 23) explains FLEECE and GOOSE as follows:

Despite the familiar RP symbols /iː/ and /uː/, it’s long been known that these two vowels are diphthongs, behaving like the other closing diphthongs of English. Their diphthongal character is now rather more pronounced than it was in RP. More accurate symbols are [ɪj] and [uː].

Geoff Lindsey is a British phonetician who was trained in the British school of phonetics, where both FLEECE and GOOSE are classified as monophthongs, but he regards them as diphthongs. The square brackets are used here for the transcription of these vowels, but they should also mean phonemes, judging from the vowel chart in Lindsey (2019: 146). Phonetically, however, neither FLEECE nor GOOSE is completely a monophthong as explained in the following quotations:

Phonetically /iː/ is a relatively long close front vowel, often with some degree of diphthongization of the [ɪ] type, particularly in free syllables. (Wells 1982: 140)

The vowel (=/iː/) is often diphthongised, especially in final positions. A slight glide from a position nearer to [i] is common among GB speakers, being more usual than a pure vowel. (Cruttenden 2014: 111)

GB long /uː/ is a close back vowel with varying degrees of centralisation and unrounding. Two types occur within GB: (i) a more centralised monophthongal vowel [uː] or, with unrounding, [uː]; and (ii) a short diphthong [uʊ] or, with unrounding, [juː]. (Cruttenden 2014: 133)
FLEECE: Some slight gliding from the KIT-vowel position is usual, with [iɪ] being more usual than [ɪ]. (Upton 2008: 245)

GOOSE: In all forms this is a long high back vowel with lip rounding... A short diphthong, [uʊ], is often to be heard word-finally, in such words as sue, who. (Upton 2008: 245)

The phonemes i; and u; are usually classed as long vowels; it is worth noting that most English speakers pronounce them with something of a diphthongal glide, so that a possible alternative transcription could be iɪ and uʊ, respectively. This is not normally proposed, however. (Roach 2009: 20)

These statements support the reality that the diphthongisation of FLEECE and GOOSE is a phonetic, not phonemic, feature. The main reason for this diphthongisation is elucidated in Zsiga (2013: 60):

The tense vowels of English are diphthongized, with upward movement of the tongue body over the course of the vowel: [iɪ], [ɛɬ], [ou], [uw].

Both FLEECE and GOOSE increase the tenseness gradually over the course of each vowel. This gradual tenseness causes the upward movement of the tongue body for physiological reasons, and thereby the format values change. As a result, both FLEECE and GOOSE become diphthongised. What is important is that neither of them has a drastic change in the tongue and lip position. They hold a relatively steady state throughout, which means that this diphthongisation is not phonologically important. It is a matter of phonetics. It is more sensible to classify FLEECE and GOOSE as monophthongs, or more precisely, diphthongised monophthongs.

Crystal (2018: 24) also explains FLEECE as follows:

Pronounce /iɪ/, for example, and hold it for a few seconds: it is the same sound throughout.

This supports the phonological status of FLEECE as a monophthong. This idea is also applicable to GOOSE. When people produce language sounds, they use living vocal organs which are flexible and have a capability of being reasonably expanded or contracted. It is not possible to maintain the position of such organs in a strictly steady state even when they produce a single continuous sound. Such instability of human vocal organs in the production is more noticeable in close vowels, which have a narrow distance between the surface of the tongue body and the palate. This diphthongisation is physiologically natural and predictable, like declination in intonation.

The knowledge of this diphthongisation is useful to foreign learners, but they should not pay too much attention to it. They may end up learning English accents they did not expect to learn, as Cruttenden (2014) states:

Their (= foreign learners’) own vowel may not have the diphthongisation which is typical of GB, but they should attempt to imitate this glide only with caution, since any exaggeration will sound dialectal. (p. 112)

The typical GB centralisation or diphthongisation should be imitated only with caution, since any exaggeration of the movement will produce an effect which may be judged dialectal, nor need the centralisation of /uʊ/ following /j/ be consciously aimed at. (p. 134)

The term ‘(relatively) pure vowels’, which Cruttenden (2014: 111) uses for the description of the so-called monophthongs, is worth noting to understand the phonetic/phonological reality of the vowels of this kind, including FLEECE and GOOSE.

When Lindsey (2019) transcribes GOOSE as /uw/, he chooses the close central rounded vowel [u] to transcribe its first element. This reflects the fronting of the point of articulation, which is known as ‘GOOSE
Transcription of Vowels in the Standard Southern British English Accent

1.75

fronting’. Cruttenden (2014: 133) explains two types of its realisation, as quoted above: (i) a more centralised monophthongal vowel [ʊi] or, with unrounding, [ʊiː]; and (ii) a short diphthong [uu] or, with unrounding, [juː]. Lindsey’s /uu/ best corresponds to Cruttenden’s [uu]. The difference is theoretically tolerable. The [u] symbol is phonetically appropriate, but this is an unfamiliar symbol to general learners. Moreover, less centralised pronunciation is still heard, including recordings used in electronic dictionaries. Out of such different realisations, it is not easy to choose the most appropriate symbol. Changing a well-known phonemic symbol to a new less familiar one is challenging and demanding. In the case of DRESS, /e/ is phonetically more appropriate than /ɛ/ because DRESS is nearer to cardinal vowel no. 3 in the mainstream English English accent. However, the symbol /ɛ/ is more often selected because it is one of the alphabet letters.

In addition to familiarity, there is an issue of agreed standard, as Wells (2001) states:

I concede that the logic of this argument would lead also to the avoidance of the schwa symbol in the goat diphthong [əʊ]. It might well have been better if Gimson had chosen to write it [ɔʊ]. I was tempted to innovate in LPD by using that symbol. But I decided, rightly I believe, that it was not worth upsetting an agreed standard for.

For the same reasons, /uː/ is more appropriate than /ʊw/. When the initial consonant of a GOOSE word includes /w/, the transcription with /uːw/ becomes complicated. ‘Womb’, for example, is transcribed as /wuːm/. This looks more complicated than /wuːm/. This also applies to words whose initial consonant is /j/, as in ‘yeast’. /jɪst/ is more easily understandable than /jɪst/.

Lindsey’s (2019) proposal about the transcription of FLEECE and GOOSE as [ij] and [uw] is phonetically correct, but this presents unnecessary complication. It is not applicable for reference books and dictionaries. His proposal is too phonetic. Both FLEECE and GOOSE are phonemically monophthongs with a diphthongal glide. They should continue to be transcribed as /iː/ and /uː/, respectively.

3. FACE, PRICE, CHOICE, GOAT and MOUTH

Lindsey (2019: 24) explains FACE, PRICE, CHOICE, GOAT and MOUTH as follows:

Another fashion among many RP speakers was to pronounce the end point of the FACE, PRICE and CHOICE diphthongs with a decidedly lax [ɪ], and the end point of MOUTH and GOAT with a lax [u]. But in modern SSB we can hear, especially pre-pausally, that the end points of the glides are tenser. They can be transcribed as non-syllabic [j] and [ʊ], or more simply as [j] or [w]: FACE as [ɛj] or [eɪ], PRICE as [æj] or [æj], MOUTH as [æʊ] or [æw], etc.

The point in his claim is that the end points of the glides in FACE, PRICE, CHOICE, MOUTH and GOAT are tenser. However, Wikipedia explains the second element of these vowels differently in the section ‘Transcription’ of the headword ‘Diphthong’:

Transcribing the English diphthongs in high and cow as /æj aw/ or /æj əʊ/ is a less precise or broader transcription, since these diphthongs usually end in a vowel sound that is more open than the semivowels [j w] or the close vowels [i u]. Transcribing the diphthongs as /æj əʊ/ is a more precise or narrower transcription, since the English diphthongs usually end in the near-close vowels [i ʊ].

This web page was last edited on 20 October 2019, at 03:29 (UTC), as of 23 October 2019. It is possible to say, from the date of the last correction and the total number of corrections – 1252, that the description here reflects the current status of British English pronunciation. What is stated here is, like the conventional view, that the second element of FACE, PRICE, CHOICE, GOAT and MOUTH is not as close as Lindsey (2019) proposes. Crystal (2018: 24-25)
agrees with the convention:

Pronounce /aː/ slowly – as in an emphatic why – and you’ll hear the sound change from an /a/ quality similar to that in man to an /i/ quality similar to that in sit.

Crystal does not say that ‘… to an /iː/ quality similar to that in seat.’ Cruttenden (2014) also does not say that the second element reaches [i] (or [j]) or [u] (or [w]), as follows:

The glide begins from slightly below the close-mid front position and moves in the direction of GB /u/, there being a slight closing movement of the lower jaw. (FACE p.141)

The most frequent glide of GB /aː/ begins at a point slightly behind the front open position, i.e. [a], and moves in the direction of the position associated with GB /iː/, although the tongue is not usually raised to a level closer than [ê]. (PRICE p.143)

For GB /ɔː/ the tongue glide begins at a point between the open-mid and open back positions and moves in the direction of /u/, generally not reaching a level closer than [ɵ]. (CHOICE p.144)

The glide of GB /ɔu/ begins at a central position, between close-mid and open-mid, and moves in the direction of GB /u/, there being a slight closing movement of the lower jaw. (GOAT p.146)

The glide of GB /au/ begins at a point between the back and front open positions, more fronted than the position for GB /aː/, and moves in the direction of GB /u/, though the tongue may not be raised higher than the close-mid level, i.e. [œ]. (MOUTH p.149)

Carr (2013: 24) also states:

In the RP and GA pronunciations of words such as sigh, rye, bayed, etc., the vowel begins with an [a]-like quality (in the region of cardinal vowel 4) and ends in [i]-like quality… There are two diphthongs in RP and GA which ends in an [u]-like quality.

Zsiga’s (2013: 60) transcription of FLEECE, FACE, GOAT and GOOSE as [ɪj], [ɛ], [ou], [uw] is worth noting here. Two different types of symbols are used for the transcription of the second element: [j] and [w] for FLEECE and GOOSE, respectively; and [ɪ] and [u] for FACE and GOAT, respectively. This shows that the second element of FLEECE, which is regarded as a phonetically diphthongal glide in this paper, is qualitatively different from that of FACE, and that the second element of GOOSE, which is interpreted in the same way here, is also qualitatively different from that of GOAT. This is a view different from Lindsey’s, where both FLEECE and FACE end in [j], and both GOOSE and GOAT end in [w]. No qualitative difference is shown in his transcription of the end point of FLEECE/FACE and GOOSE/GOAT.

On the other hand, Zsiga’s transcription shows that the second element of FACE and GOAT is more open than that of FLEECE and GOOSE. This also supports the conventional view of the quality of the second element of FACE and GOAT. It is natural that this view should also be applied to PRICE, CHOICE and MOUTH.

What is necessary in this argument is the data showing how people actually pronounce words in relation to different age groups. One good example is Wells (1999), in which nearly 2000 ‘speech-conscious’ respondents, who were divided into four different age groups, answered a hundred questions about words of uncertain or controversial pronunciation. For example, the letter ‘s’ in ‘Asia’ can be pronounced either as the voiceless post-alveolar fricative or as the voiced post-alveolar fricative, and his result is that its rate is 49% to 51%, showing almost no difference in preference. However, the result of the preference by age difference reveals that young people (born since 1973) prefer
the voiced fricative (67%) while older people (born up to 1933) prefer the voiceless fricative (77%). Such a survey is highly necessary to prove the reality of pronunciation changes, especially to those who live outside the area in focus.

4. FOOT

Lindsey (2019: 27) states:

The FOOT vowel now sounds very like the vowel of French je, le, que, etc.: an appropriate IPA symbol for it is the ‘barred’ o, [o].

This may be phonetically right, but, like the use of the symbol [u] for the first element of GOOSE in his transcription, the use of the symbol /u/ causes unnecessary complication. This avoidance of unnecessary complication can also be seen in the continuous use of the symbol /ʌ/. Though this symbol means the unrounded mid-open vowel (the cardinal vowel no. 14) in general phonetics, STRUT has been transcribed as /ʌ/, not as /u/ (the symbol for the unrounded central vowel). Lindsey (2019: 20) also states ‘a more back quality is now more common’. If this is the case, the continuous use of /ʌ/ has become appropriate now.

5. TRAP

Lindsey (2019: 19) states ‘the vowel of TRAP is [a] rather than [æ].’ This feature is also explained in Cruttenden (2014: 120), which states ‘this vowel has become more open recently, previously being nearer to C.[ɛ] where it is now close to C.[a].’ This is the reason why both transcribe TRAP as /a/.

In English, however, /a/ is used as the first element of PRICE and CHOICE, which basically starts at the open central position. There should be a clear difference in the transcription to show the qualitative difference between the open front vowel and the open central vowel. /æ/ should continue to be used for TRAP. There is no symbol for the open central vowel in general phonetics for unknown reasons. This should be added in the next revision. Also, a sound that is transcribed with a certain phonemic symbol in general phonetics does not always correspond to the sound that is transcribed with the same symbol in a specific language like English. As shown above, STRUT in the mainstream English English has not always been the same as the unrounded back vowel [ʌ] in general phonetics.

If /a/ is used for TRAP, there is a symbolic similarity between this and /æ/ for START. To avoid misreading symbols, clearly different symbols should be chosen for these two vowels. Also, in the mainstream American English accent, TRAP changes in the direction of cardinal vowel no. 3, while in the mainstream English English accent, it changes in the direction of cardinal vowel no. 4. The conventional symbol can encompass both types of TRAP which change in the opposite directions. It is not necessary to change the symbol for TRAP to the one proposed by Lindsey.

6. LOT and THOUGHT

Lindsey (2019: 20) states:

The opener back vowels are higher in the vowel space than they were in RP. The long vowel of THOUGHT is near [ɔ] than [o], and the short vowel of LOT is nearer [ɔ] than [ɒ].

The latest 5th edition of Genius English-Japanese Dictionary, one of the most widely used learner dictionaries in Japan, has adopted /ɔ/ for the symbol of LOT for the first time, but this is not timely. The quality of LOT is not as low as the quality of the cardinal vowel no. 13 [ɒ]. Judging from the present quality of LOT and THOUGHT, the use of /ɔ/ for LOT and of /oː/ for THOUGHT is more appropriate. The symbol /ɔ/ has been in use worldwide to transcribe LOT for a long time. /oː/ is a new symbol for many people, but once it is used, it will be accepted favourably because of its familiar shape as one of the alphabet letters. Cruttenden (2014) agrees with Lindsey as follows:
This short vowel is articulated with open jaws and slight open lip-rounding; the back of the tongue is nowadays nearer to C.[ɔ] than C.[o]. (LOT p.126)

This relatively long vowel is articulated with medium lip-rounding; the back of the tongue is raised between the open-mid and close-mid positions... The quality lies between C.[ɔ] and C.[o], i.e. [ɔ] or [o]. (THOUGHT p.128)

There is good news for Japanese learners of English when they practice pronouncing THOUGHT. They can use the Japanese vowel /o/ though more lip-rounding is required. Lindsey (2019: 30) states on this point:

Although LOT has raised, it has not become the mid ‘o’ vowel of very many languages, such as Spanish and Japanese. Speakers of these languages still need to make LOT more open than their ‘o’. This means that Japanese speakers can use their ‘o’ for THOUGHT by lengthening it. Also, they should keep in mind that this vowel requires more lip-rounding than their ‘o’.

The degree of this lip-rounding is important to distinguish LOT from THOUGHT. As to lip-rounding, Cruttenden (2014) uses moderate expressions as shown above – ‘slight open’ for LOT and ‘medium’ for THOUGHT, but Roach (2009) uses more straightforward expressions – ‘slightly rounded’ for LOT and ‘quite strong’ for THOUGHT. For those whose L1 does not have a significant role in lip-rounding, Roach’s explanation is more educationally practical.

7. NEAR, CURE and SQUARE

NEAR, CURE and SQUARE are known as centring diphthongs in the mainstream English English, and they have been transcribed as /iə/ , /ɒə/ and /eə/, respectively. However, Lindsey (2019: 19-20) states that all of them have undergone a process of monophthongisation since RP and have now changed to /i:/ (e.g. ‘appearance’ /ˈpɹɛən(t)s/) , /ɒ:/ (e.g. ‘security’ /ˈsɪkjɔːrəti/) and /ɛ:/ (e.g. ‘shared’ /ʃɛ:d/) , respectively. He also says that NEAR has also changed to /iə/ (e.g. ‘career’ /ˈkærəriə/).

Concerning these vowels, Cruttenden (2014) states:

The glide of GB /iə/ begins with a tongue position approximately that used for /i/, i.e. close-mid and centralised from front, and moves in the direction of the more open variety of /ə/ when /iə/ is final in the word... Interestingly pronunciations with a monophthong [i:] can be heard within GB. (p.154)

GB /ʊə/ glides from a tongue position similar to that used for /u/ towards the more open type of /ʊ/ which forms the end point of both centring diphthongs with, again, a somewhat closer variety /ə/ when the diphthong occurs in word-medial position... A monophthongal variant [ɪ] is increasingly common... Many words which can have /ʊə/ have an alternative pronunciation with /ʊ/, e.g. in moor, poor, sure, tour. (pp.155-156)

For GB /ɛ/ the tongue is in the open-mid front position, i.e. approximately C.[ɛ]... Older speakers of GB may have a diphthong [ɛə]. (p.118)

Upton (2008: 246) also states:

In RP this (= SQUARE) is a long monophthong at a front half-open position, articulated with lips spread: there might or might not be some slight off-gliding present, giving [ɛː] ~ [ɛː].

When the accompanying recordings of EPD and LPD are checked, ‘square’ sounds more like [ɛː] in LPD, and ‘air’ sounds more like [ɛː] in EPD. However, many SQUARE words in the recordings are pronounced as a diphthong. Wells (2001) states:
People do increasingly use a long monophthong for this vowel (= SQUARE), rather than the schwa-tending diphthong implied by the standard symbol... There are millions of English people, however, who still use a diphthong.

Like SQUARE, the status of CURE as a monophthong or a diphthong is controversial. When it is pronounced as a monophthong, it is said that it is /ɜ:/ in many cases. Roach (2009: 20) states ‘many English speakers use ə: in words like ‘more’, ‘mourn’, ‘tour.’ Upton (2008: 247) agrees with this view, by saying ‘increasingly occurring as a feature of RP, however, is long monophthongal [əː].’ In deciding on the phonological status of this vowel, the following statement made by Roach (2009: 20) is worth noting:

I feel that it is important for foreign learners to be aware of this diphthong (= CURE) because of the distinctiveness of words in pairs like ‘moor’ and ‘more’, ‘poor’ and ‘paw’ for many speakers.

Lindsey’s (2012) website ‘the demise of ʌə as in CURE’ explains this vowel in detail. There are three fates for this vowel. Fate 1 (merger) is explained as above. Fate 2 (varisyllabicity) changes it to a disyllabic sequence of GOOSE + schwa and a smoothed monosyllable, where GOOSE is analysed as /ʌw/ (not /uːw/ for unknown reasons), which is followed by schwa, this being smoothed to /ə/. Fate 3 (monophthonging) changes it to a monophthong, which often sounds like the second type of Fate 2. Among the sound clips that he gives, ‘security’ (the online Macmillan dictionary and the Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary) is heard as [ˌsɪkˈjuərɪti]. Note that as explained in Section 4 Lindsey’s [ə] is replaced by [u]. ‘Insecure’ is pronounced in the same way as two syllables by Gavin Hewitt, BBC News’s Europe Editor. Other examples are Stephen Fry saying ‘insecure’, then Prime Minister David Cameron saying ‘secure supplies’, then Shadow Business Secretary Chuka Umunna saying ‘so long as these stories endure’, then BBC reporter Elise Wicker saying ‘cure seekers’ and ‘cure a variety’, a TV interviewee saying to ‘cure my heart condition’ and then singer Frank Turner, performing the folk song Barbara Allen with the line ‘one kiss from you would cure me’. All these examples display the change of CURE to a disyllabic sequence of [uː] + [ə].

There is no printed reference at hand about the monophthongisation of NEAR as /ɪə/, but Lindsey’s (2012) website ‘the demise of ɪə as in NEAR’ is informative. Sounds other than [ɪə] are also recorded. One type is [iː] + [ə] in ‘beer’ (the online Cambridge Dictionary) and ‘here’ (UCL’s Professor Mark Miodownik). Another is [iː] + [ə] in ‘here’ (BBC presenter Andrew Plant) and ‘nearly’ (the online Cambridge Dictionary). In the following discussion, attention is paid to the latter type because of an underlying similarity with CURE.

It is understood from Lindsey’s two websites that both CURE and NEAR change to, if his term is used, a disyllabic sequence of [uː] + [ə] and [ɪː] + [ə], respectively. Interestingly, the sound quality is basically unaffected from the traditional diphthongs /ʌə/ and /ɪə/. To explain this sound change, it could be said that the first element of CURE and NEAR has simply become longer. A term Centring Diphthong Lengthening can be coined to explain this feature. What Lindsey explains as a disyllabic sequence is simply a lengthened centring diphthong. In English, duration does not always play a major role in distinguishing vowels. It is changeable, depending on phonological environment. A good example is the pre-fortis clipping. Also, in the American tradition, vowels are classified into tense and lax vowels, without resorting to duration. This also implies the minor role of duration in the classification of (American) English vowels. There is still a valid reason for transcribing NEAR and CURE as /ɪə/ and /ʌə/, respectively.

SQUARE may lead this series of change, but monophthongisation has not been completed yet.

It is said these days that BBC has been generous about allowing its broadcasters to use local accents. The loss of authority in the standard accent may
encourage even professionals to speak English more freely – without worrying too much about the constant use of the traditionally prestigious accent. Pronunciation changes in any age for many reasons. It is not yet certain, however, whether what is described in Lindsey (2019) shows a newly established phonological system of SSB. At present, it is more appropriate to transcribe NEAR, CURE and SQUARE as the traditional diphthongs.

8. NURSE

Lindsey (2019: 20) uses /ɔ:/ for the transcription of NURSE and states:

In fact, the symbol [ɔ] violated a guiding principle of phonetic transcription, ‘one symbol, one sound’, since it seems not have been intended to indicate any significant difference in quality compared with schwa.

Upton (2008: 244) also adopts /ɔ:/ for NURSE because it can ‘reflect the considerable variation apparent amongst speakers’. Wells (2001) agrees with this similarity in quality between schwa and NURSE. However, he is against the use of /ɔ:/ for two reasons:

(i) all other long-short pairs use distinct letter shapes alongside presence/absence of length marks; (ii) schwa is a weak vowel, restricted to unstressed syllables, and subject to very considerable variability depending on its position. This is not true of the nurse vowel.

The long-short pairs, when the conventional transcription is used, mean the following five pairs: /iː, ɪː, uː, ʊː, ɔː, ɔ/ (in this paper) and /ɜː, ɜ/. English is a stress-timed language, where stressed-related prominence plays an important role in the production and perception of utterances. There should be a clear distinction in transcription between strong vowels and weak vowels, especially for the benefit of foreign learners of English. Pedagogically, this distinction is particularly significant for learners whose L1 lacks such a distinction.

9. happY

Lindsey (2019: 31) states that there are three contexts in which RP used [i]:

1. immediately before a vowel (e.g. ‘associate’, ‘oriental’, ‘polyester’)
2. word-finally (e.g. ‘city’, ‘coffee’, ‘happy’)
3. at the end point of FACE, PRICE and CHOICE (e.g. ‘day’, ‘high’, ‘employ’)

The third context was already discussed in Section 3. According to Lindsey (2019: 31-32), ‘SSB speakers today use the FLEECE vowel’ in the first and second contexts. The happY vowel was traditionally identified with KIT, but it has become tense in the late twentieth century (Wells 1997), without any contrast between KIT and FLEECE. The non-phonemic symbol [i] has been introduced to denote this variable quality. This symbol is used among many current publications including EPD and LPD. As an important feature of a stress-timed language, English still has a clear difference between strong and weak in vowels and syllables. If the second syllable of ‘happy’ is identified with FLEECE, this alternate strength in the word is destroyed. This syllable should be identified with a weak vowel and continue to be transcribed as the [i].

Lindsey (2019: 32) states for the word-final happy:

Some speakers use /i/ when a suffix consonant is added. Such speakers have ‘movie’ /ˈmuːvɪ/, but ‘movies’ /ˈmuːvɪz/.

This causes unnecessary complication. Also, if there are such variations in pronunciation between the singular form and the plural form, the conventional non-phonemic symbol (i.e. /ˈmuːvɪ/ and /ˈmuːvɪz/) is theoretically simpler and more straightforward. This can include both variations that Lindsey claims with the use of the single symbol [i].

Likewise, unlike Lindsey’s proposal that ‘studying’ and ‘happy enough’ should be transcribed as /ˈstʌdɪŋ/
and /hæpi t’næf/, the conventional transcription of /stædiŋ/ and /hæpi t’næf/ is more appropriate. It is true that /j/ is heard as a linking [j] between ‘study’ and ‘ing’, and between ‘happy’ and ‘enough’, but this sound is pronounced softly. This soft pronunciation is entirely different from the clear pronunciation used in the linking [r]. As a sound with little significance in phonological load, it is not always necessary to transcribe the linking [j] with a normal size. When it needs to be transcribed, a superscript can be used to show this lesser significance: ‘studying’ [stæd’iŋ] and ‘happy enough’ [hæpi’nt’æf]. When the linking [j] is included in the transcription, there is no need to make a space between words in order to clearly show its function of a glide. In addition, the use of [i] for happy makes it possible to avoid the use of double [i] in ‘studying’ and ‘happy enough’. This double [i] is not problematic in the case of ‘my experience’ because the first [i] is the second element of a single phoneme PRICE, not an independent sound, such as the underlined non-phonemic [i] of ‘studying’ and ‘happy enough’.

This argument applies to the non-phonemic [u]. Lindsey (2019: 36) lists the three contexts with the traditional use of [u]:

1. immediately before a vowel (e.g. ‘genuine’, ‘graduate’, ‘influence’)
2. word-finally (e.g. ‘continue’, ‘into’, ‘thank you’)
3. at the end point of GOAT and MOUTH (e.g. ‘below’, ‘no’, ‘how’, ‘plough’)

The third context was discussed in Section 3. As for the first and second contexts, the non-phonemic [u], not [u], has been used for nearly half a century, unlike what Lindsey states. Although he proposes that ‘influence’, ‘go ahead’ and ‘how wonderful’ should be transcribed as /ɪnfluən(t)s/, /gəʊə’hed/ and /həu’nju:zʊl/, they should be transcribed as /ɪnfluən(t)s/, /gəʊə’hed/ and /həu ən’ju:zʊl/ or, with a gliding [w], [ɪnfluən(t)s], [gəʊə’ə hed] and [həu’ən’juːzʊl]. The word-final consonant /l/ of ‘unusual’ tends to become syllabic, so this should be transcribed with the superscript schwa (i.e. [ən’jʊːzʊl]) or schwa with a normal font in parentheses (i.e. [ən’jʊːzʊ(ə)l]). This possibility of schwa deletion is missing in Lindsey’s transcription, which makes it impossible to transcribe this syllabic /l/.

10. Conclusion

This paper has explored the validity of Lindsey’s (2019) new proposal of the transcription of the Standard Southern British English accent by selecting eight groups of vowels: (1) FLEECE and GOOSE; (2) FACE, PRICE, CHOICE, GOAT and MOUTH; (3) FOOT; (4) TRAP; (5) LOT and THOUGHT; (6) NEAR, CURE and SQUARE; (7) NURSE; and (8) happy. The conclusion that has been reached here is that the traditional convention should continue to be used, except for the proposal about LOT and THOUGHT.

It is academically significant to present the accurate description of changes in pronunciation taking place at any age, but it is not easy to judge whether such changes will be temporary or will lead to a new phonological system in the end. This is one reason why the traditionally conventionalised phonemic system should continue to be used in reference books and dictionaries. Adding current information as notes would be all right and helpful, though. Secondly, once particular symbols are conventionalised, it is difficult to change them. Wells’ (2001) decision tells such a story well. Also, STRUT has been transcribed with the same symbol even when its quality changed and a more suitable symbol was available. Thirdly, in learning a foreign language, the model accent is the traditionally established educated accent in many cases. Many reference books and dictionaries describe that accent. It is also better for foreign learners to learn such an accent as their model, even though this educated accent may sound somewhat old-fashioned, rather than the accent that is newly emerging. Fourthly, current changes in pronunciation are a major issue for phoneticians. They may not be a matter for general
learners. Teachers of English, however, should be familiar with them and always be ready to teach them when necessary. Fifthly, the view of the model should be different depending on whether English is learned as a foreign language or if it is learned as a second language. Learning current pronunciation may be beneficial when learners have much access to it at the time of learning or for their immediate future. However, when they do not have such opportunities or when they are using English more often as a lingua franca basically with non-native speakers of English, then the established traditional accent is more appropriate as they sound more educated.

When the available audio data of the current accent in Southern England is limited for geographical reasons, it is not easy for those living outside the area to observe what is going on in pronunciation changes there. To compensate for this disadvantage, this paper referred to some trustworthy references and examined the validity of what Lindsey (2019) claims. Cruttenden (2014) was used extensively because it presents detailed and exhaustive information and its publication is relatively recent – five years earlier than the publication of Lindsey (2019). It is still considered to be up to date.

Due to space limitations, there are other aspects that could not be explored in this paper, such as weak vowel merger. They will be explored in the next study.

References


Lindsey, Geoff (2019) English After RP: Standard Wikipedia, but these days many people, including professionals, are editing it for improvement. This page was edited 1252 times as of 23 October 2019. The description of ‘diphthong’ here is professional.

Cruttenden (2014: 122) states ‘the quality is that of a centralised and slightly raised C.[a] = [ɔ]... CGB has a variety of /ə/ which is more of a back vowel (≈ [ʌ]) although this variety is increasingly heard in GB.’

In quoting dictionaries, this paper writes their names, not the first author as shown in References, for practical reasons.

1 There are other terms to describe the mainstream English English accent: RP (Received Pronunciation), GB (General British) and BBC pronunciation. They may not mean exactly the same accent. RP, though still widely in use, may be problematic as Roach (2009: 3) states that ‘this name is old-fashioned and misleading: the use of the word “received” to mean “accepted” or “approved” is nowadays very rare, and the word if used in that sense seems to imply that other accents would not be accepted or approved of.’ He proposes the term ‘BBC pronunciation’.

2 When the recording of ‘food’ is compared among EPD, LPD and Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary, the one in Oxford is much more centralised. Checking the recorded pronunciation of words in more than one electronic dictionary is necessary.

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diphthong. Some may be doubtful about the quality of information described in

4 /ˈhɔːnˈjʊəərəl/ probably should read /ˈhɔːnˈjʊəərəl/.
Transcription of Vowels in the Standard Southern British English Accent


イギリス英語の標準南部アクセントの母音表記

湯澤伸夫

イギリス英語の標準南部アクセントの母音音素は20あり、伝統的に6短母音、5長母音、8二重母音、1弱母音に分類されている。しかし、Lindsey (2019)では、これらを音声学的な観点から、6短弛緩母音、7長緊張母音、6長緊張r連結母音、1弱母音に分類し、16母音で新しい記号を使用している。本稿では、それらの母音とhappyにおけるこの新表記を8グループに分けて分析した結果、音声的特徴や音韻論特徴や視認性などの観点から、LOTやTHOUGHT以外は伝統的な表記法を維持すべきであるという立場を取る。1つの音素は複数の異音を含むばかりでなく、一般音声学で使用されている特定の音声記号が英語音声学では質的に異なる音素記号として使用されてきているものもある。長期的に定着している音素記号の変更には慎重を要する。ただし、それぞれの音素記号が表している具体的な音声実態に関しては特に英語を教える者は常に把握しておく必要はある。

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