THE OXFORD CONCISE DICTIONARY OF PRONUNCIATION

by

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Oxford University Press soon will publish the *Concise Dictionary of Pronunciation* (CDP), a desk-size dictionary of British and American English pronunciation. Representation of RP is closer to what people actually use widely in Britain than to southeastern conservative RP; representation of American English selects forms without special associations with particular regions or classes. Every symbol in the IPA transcriptions in CDP retains its original IPA meaning, with a more or less expanded range of sounds. CDP transcriptions will be reprinted as needed in other Oxford dictionaries.

Oxford University Press soon will publish the *Concise Dictionary of Pronunciation* (CDP), a desk-size dictionary consisting of IPA transcriptions of British and American English pronunciations. Its compilers, Clive Upton for British English, and Rafal Konopka and me for American English, are specialists in language variation, but the goal of CDP is a general representation of these two national varieties, not a wide-ranging treatment of various regional and social accents in Britain and the US. Indeed, the current plan is to reprint CDP transcriptions as needed in other Oxford dictionaries, and to use them as the core for representation of pronunciation in the next edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Since CDP is an entirely new work, not merely embodying a revision of existing Oxford pronunciation policy, it seems worthwhile to provide an account of the origins of what will, we trust, become one of the principal sources worldwide of information about the pronunciation of English words.

Clive Upton, involved in the Survey of English Dialects and now at Sheffield, originally conceived of this dictionary in the mid 1980s. Upton observed that indication of British English pronunciation in dictionaries then on the market tended to be too narrow; as a good dialectologist, he wanted a representation of RP that was closer to what people actually used widely in Britain, rather than a more restricted transcription of what people said (or thought they ought to say) in the south-east. Upton also thought, from his experience in ESL, that the proper scope for such a reference was world-wide, and that it should therefore include consistent representation of

American English (by which term I refer only to the English of the US, no slight to Canada intended), with the possibility for later description of pronunciation in other national varieties. Both the British and the American varieties, he thought, could be described as 'general' entities, that is, in the negative sense of presentation of forms without special associations with particular regions or classes. For RP, this meant selection of a level at or near the mainstream, rather than the level at or above the mainstream chosen for other dictionaries. Finally, Upton wanted pronunciations transcribed in IPA, the most international of transcription systems, rather than with the in-house, rather limited symbol sets in use in learners' dictionaries. His ideas brought a publisher's commission, and he invited me to collaborate.

I think that when Upton wrote to me he got rather more than he bargained for. He had originally intended to prepare American English transcriptions himself, and then have me correct them; what I proposed was to employ an assistant, Rafal Konopka, who was already working with me on the American Linguistic Atlas Project, to help prepare American English transcriptions from scratch from the headwords that Upton would provide. What in fact happened was that Konopka became more collaborator than assistant, and while we respected Upton's role as general editor, we argued every point with him about the transcription system, suggested many new headwords, and even commented on his British English transcriptions! Out of it all I do think we achieved a genuine synthesis of ideas that resulted in a product faithful to his original intention. We all got rather more than we bargained for from the original publisher, which unilaterally canceled our contract after we had finished the dictionary, citing only a change in their marketing strategy. We were well pleased when Oxford took an interest.

The first problem we hashed out was our particular implementation of IPA. Faithful IPA transcriptions would have rendered each headword in a great number of phonetic shapes, or, alternatively, might have encouraged creation of a separate phonemic system for the project that would obscure significant allophonic variations between or within varieties. For example, accurate IPA transcription of *r* after vowels in American English, as in the pronunciation of the number *four*, would require several different levels: first, *r* as a consonant (transcribed as [r], as in [fɔr]); second, *r* as a vocalized consonantal form (transcribed as [ɚ], as in [foɚ]); third, *r*

as a vocalized realization without constriction (transcribed as [ə], as in [foə]); and finally, *r* as having been deleted (no transcription, as in [fo]). In as fine an IPA transcription as we employ on the American Linguistic Atlas Project, each of these levels can be modified by different diacritical marks. Six different transcriptions of the *r* segment were elicited just in New York State, ten different transcriptions of the *r* in South Carolina. If we then look at variation in the stressed vowel, we can count no fewer than 46 different pronunciations of the word *four* from the 182 Atlas speakers from New York State; 76 different pronunciations were collected from the 144 South Carolina speakers, a new pronunciation from every other speaker! It is clearly not possible to put that many pronunciations in any dictionary, even a 'dialect' dictionary. The opposite impulse, to render only phonemic and not phonetic transcriptions, would reduce all of this variation to a single pronunciation, perhaps /fɔr/, and leave no opportunity to record any variants at all.

We finally agreed on a compromise in accordance with the principles that Upton had laid out: we reduced the symbol set that we would use for our transcriptions. We excluded most diacritical marks and many less-common vowel and consonant symbols, but in so doing we can still represent phonetic segments, not phonemes. For American English we transcribe the word *butter* as [bədər], with a medial [-d-], because the diacritic for voicing a *t* [ɾ] is not included in our set. It is thus still distinguished from British English *butter* [bʌtə], with a medial [-t-] sound. The reduction in the symbol set made it so that we had to decide that voicing was the important thing to represent for such medial consonants, not other possible articulatory differences, and in consequence we show a d/t contrast. In the case of postvocalic -*r* in American English, in the reduced symbol set we still have three options – the consonantal *r*, vocalization without constriction [ə], or a zero transcription for total lack of *r*. In the reduced set, the consonantal *r* subsumes the phonetic range of [ɚ]. The *r*-full pronunciations, of course, still contrast with *r*-less British English transcriptions. The losses in accuracy from the reduced set should not be minimized: the American English level of *r* that we left out, the vocalized consonantal form represented by [ɚ], is actually the most common transcription of the sound in Atlas files.

It is true that a reduction in the symbol set looks like a kind of de

facto phonemicization, but it is not. While the range of sounds represented by any particular symbol is somewhat increased over what it would have been with the full IPA set, we make no claim about the distinctiveness of the range of sounds. For example, only a transcription with consonantal r, [fɔr], for the word *four*, appears in our American English listing. With a complete IPA set, pronunciations of the number *four* with consonantal r would be regional, centered in western Pennsylvania and West Virginia, though that distribution is not generally noticed by the public. Our transcription, however, has no regional implication because the r symbol includes the range of [ɚ], and it is the only r-full option. In our transcriptions, non-r variants were excluded because of constraints on inclusion of the widely perceived regional and social pronunciations with [ə] as [foə] or with nothing as [fo], not as a consequence of the symbol set. Our use of the symbol r, then, is just a broad phonetic transcription, not a phoneme.

Another kind of apparent phonemicization occurs in the selection of particular symbols, and is amplified when we present the British and American vowel systems separately (see Figure 1). The low-front vowel is different in the British and American charts, and there are two more low-back vowels for transcription of British English than there are in American transcriptions. Finally, two of the diphthongs are represented differently for the two varieties. Our view is that the selection demonstrates an observation of the reality of use of the vowels in each variety. It is also true that we provide notation of length for some vowels used to transcribe British English, while no length markings are included for American English vowels; in so doing we do not intend any statement about relative vowel length between the varieties, just within British where the difference can be distinctive. Separate presentation of the vowel sets is a heuristic device, so that readers will know what sounds to expect in our transcriptions of the varieties. If we transcribe the diphthong of the word *light* differently for British and American English, as [lʌɪt] and as [laɪt] respectively, then that is because we hear the word that way, and that is how we recommend that our readers produce the word in accordance with our models. Every symbol retains its original IPA meaning, with a more or less expanded range of sounds. To worry whether or not there is actually any *sub voce* comment on phonology here is really beside the point when the purpose of the dictionary, to let readers pronounce words, is kept in mind.

Vowels (Br):	Front		Central		Back
High	i				u
		ɪ		ʊ	
Mid	e		ə		o
	ɛ			ʌ	
Low					ɔ
	a			ɑ	ɒ

(diphthongs: eɪ, ʌɪ, ɔɪ, au, əʊ)

Vowels (Am):	Front		Central		Back
High	i				u
		ɪ		ʊ	
Mid	e		ə		o
	ɛ				
Low	æ				ɔ
			ɑ		

(diphthongs: eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ, au; ou)

Consonants (Br and Am):

Stops: p, b, t, d, k, g	Click: ǃ
Fricatives: ɸ, f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, x, h	Lateral fricative: ɬ (=Br/Welsh ll)
Affricates: tʃ, dʒ	Nasals: m, n, ŋ
Liquids: l (=[l, ɫ]), r	Semivowels: j, w

Diacritics:
nasality (superscript diacritic): ˜ centralization (on-line bar): ‒ (ɨ, ʉ)
syllabicity: ˌ (m̩, n̩, l̩; only used in situations where ambiguity would otherwise occur)

Figure 1: Phonetic Symbol Set

When we began our work there was no SGML coding, and it was not practical to share across the Atlantic the hardware-based methods in use with Atlas computers to display and print phonetics. Our symbol set was initially implemented in text files with the VuWriter word-processing program. It was one of the few practical choices then, but the program was not then and is not now a very good word processor, and it employs exotic 12-bit character coding so that transcriptions in

its files are not portable to other platforms. We will convert the VuWriter files to ASCII character mappings of the phonetic symbols with our Atlas code mappings, and Oxford plans to convert our files to their own system when the time comes. That would allow convenient production of camera copy, and would also make the pronunciation files broadly accessible to those users who might want to manipulate them by computer. Our care with the converted files also raises the possibility of later conversion to a computer pronunciation dictionary, one in which the selection of the headword would not only call forth phonetic transcriptions but actual digitized pronunciations of the word by an RP and an American English speaker.

There was never a question of inclusion of broad regional accents in the dictionary. Even dialectologists can lay aside their interests and choose to develop pronunciation models at the national level, and that was the idea here. One might hope, however, that the interests of dialectologists and their experience with regional and social variation will inform and improve their pronunciation models, at least insofar as practicing dialectologists are supposed to be more aware of, or more sensitive to, the actual extent and status of regional and social variation. We are positivists, not prescriptivists, and we try to tip the balance in favor of what *is* rather than what *should be*. At the same time we do want to keep things simple in view of the wide audience for a dictionary like this one, and so we have applied rational means to avoid proliferation of entries – even when we know that more pronunciations exist than we have included.

Our key concept in the creation of our models was that of 'marked' features. This kind of marking is not the same as grammatical markedness, though it borrows from it. A regionally or socially 'marked' feature, for us, is a pronunciation that is readily identifiable as belonging to some region or to some social group. By 'readily identifiable', we mean that it is recognizable, not just to us in our professional capacity as dialectologists, but in popular perception as best we can interpret it. For example, Americans typically say of people from Boston or from the Coastal South that 'they don't say their *r*s'; we dialectologists know differently, that in fact there is a range of pronunciations of *r* in these regions in the postvocalic environment, and, further, that there are regional and social distributions within that range. Following popular judgment, however, in the American English model we exclude pronunciations

without *r* after vowels because they are 'marked' by region.

For both the British and American English models, we are fortunate to have a class of linguistically-sensitive speakers who can confirm our ideas about marked features: the news media on radio and television. In both countries there is a fear among broadcasters of being branded as 'regional' and thus of being prevented from moving up to major markets and the national news desks. This fear may be accompanied by the mistaken impression that accentless speech is somehow more objective, and both have grown out of an institutional history of prescriptivism. The result is a self-imposed but nonetheless real and general horror of marked features and pronunciations. If the news readers don't like to say it, we don't want it in our models.

Since the American English model avoids marked pronunciations, there is a risk of presenting in aggregate a set of pronunciations not employed by any large population of Americans. No prestigious equivalent to RP exists among US varieties. It is the special combination and distribution of features that distinguishes regional and social US standards, and such combinations and distributions are matters of statistical probabilities, not strict rules. We have not represented major sound changes in progress in the model as they occur in any one region or group, but instead have given each change a separate review: we included postvocalic -*r* consistently; advanced (or rotated, see Labov 1991) versions of diphthongs as found in *house* ([hæʊs], with onset as in the word *had*), *fire* ([fɑr], monophthonigized as in the word *far*), *bed* ([beɪd], with raised onset as in *bade*) were not included. Marked pronunciations may be less common overall, but not necessarily: American pronunciations of the word *house* as [hæʊs], or merger of the words *caught* and *cot* as homonyms [kɑt], have in the past been marked but are now advancing, especially among younger speakers, and it is difficult to know when to mark the change by changing the mark. When a colleague once asked me whether he should prefer the accent of Ohio, or the one from California, as the basis for a model of American English pronunciation, I could not answer him: both Ohio and California have more than one accent, and in every state there are marked features for different levels of education and other social characteristics. As one of my students once told me, America is not a 'melting pot' where everybody comes out the same, but instead a 'mixing bowl' where differences among individuals are widely

tolerated – except by the news media among themselves. Under that view, our American pronunciation model is a sort of common denominator, not possessed exclusively by any group but available collectively to a great number of people along with their own marked forms.

British English presents an interesting problem if we think about marked pronunciations. RP can be said to exclude marked regional and social features of other varieties of English spoken in Britain, and at the same time it can be said to be characterized by its own marked pronunciation. Unlike the situation in America, there is without doubt a distinctive, historically prestigious variety in Britain. However, as time has passed and conditions in Britain have changed, RP itself has developed different varieties, so that there is a question of marked pronunciations within RP itself (cf. Wells 1982, Honey 1989). As Upton puts it, 'In spite of the acknowledged existence of broadly based and more restricted [conservative] RP varieties, it is the latter which has tended to characterize many descriptions of RP ... the RP label has undeniably come to be associated restrictively with a small group of older middle- and upper-class speakers possessing close links with the south-east of England.' According to our logic of marked forms, the British English model is obliged to omit features that are marked as being part of the more restricted, conservative variety, as well as any pronunciations that are marked as non-RP.

In this the British English model directly confronts conservative RP. It is perfectly reasonable to dialectologists that the model ought to be addressing a more inclusive range of speech rather than the more old-fashioned and exclusive south-east variety, but that is exactly the point where trouble comes. The British model includes 'intrusive r', as in *law r'and order*, as an optional pronunciation, and while 'intrusive r' is well-established in mainstream RP it is a shibboleth for conservative elocutionists. Other 'advanced' features are, for example, the 'northern [a]' as an optional alternative to [ɑ] as in *dance* [dans, dɑns], and words like *hair* represented as [hɛː] and not with a diphthong [hɛə], which is now marked as old-fashioned. Judgments like these have raised some of the more conservative eyebrows at Oxford, and commitment to representation of RP in this way is not an inconsequential step for Oxford to take.

Some sample entries from the letter 'N' can illustrate the appearance of the text:

nepotism Br ˈnɛpətɪz(ə)m; Am ˈnɛpəˌtɪzəm
Neptune Br ˈnɛptʃuːn, ˈnɛptjuːn; Am ˈnɛpˌt(j)un
neptunium Br nɛpˈtʃuːnɪəm, nɛpˈtjuːnɪəm; Am nɛpˈt(j)uniəm
nerd Br nəːd; Am nərd / -z
nereid Br ˈnɪərɨd, ˈniːrɨd; Am ˈnɪrɨd / -z
nerve Br nəːv; Am nərv / -z, -ɪŋ, -d
nerveless Br ˈnəːvləs; Am ˈnərvləs / -li, -nəs
nerve-racking Br ˈnəːvˌrakɪŋ; Am ˈnərvˌrækɪŋ
nervous Br ˈnəːvəs; Am ˈnərvəs / -li, -nəs
nervy Br ˈnəːv}i; Am ˈnərv}i / -ɪə(r), -ɨst, -ɬi, -ɪnɨs; -iər, -iɨst, -əli, -inɨs
nerve-wracking Br ˈnəːvˌrakɪŋ; Am ˈnərvˌrækɪŋ
nescience Br ˈnɛsɪəns; Am ˈnɛʃ(i)əns, ˈnɛsɪəns
nescient Br ˈnɛsɪənt; Am ˈnɛʃ(i)ənt, ˈnɛsɪənt
nesh nɛʃ
ness nɛs / -ɪz
nest nɛst / -s, -ɪŋ, -ɨd
nest egg Br ˈnɛst ɛg; Am ˈnɛst ˌɛg / -z
nestle Br ˈnɛs}l; Am ˈnɛs}əl / -lz, -lɪŋ\-lɪŋ, -ld; -əlz, -(ə)lɪŋ, -əld
Nestlé Br ˈnɛsleɪ, ˈnɛsl; Am ˈnɛsli
nestling (noun) Br ˈnɛslɪŋ; Am ˈnɛs(t)lɪŋ / -z
net nɛ}t / -ts, -tɪŋ, -tɨd; -ts, -dɪŋ, -dəd
nether Br ˈnɛðə(r); Am ˈnɛðər
Netherlands Br ˈnɛðələn(d)z; Am ˈnɛðərlən(d)z
nethermost Br ˈnɛðəməust; Am ˈnɛðərˌmoust
netherworld Br ˈnɛðəwəːld; Am ˈnɛðərˌwərld
netsuke ˈnɛts(ʊ)k}i / -ɪz; -z
nettle Br ˈnɛt}l; Am ˈnɛdl / -lz, -lɪŋ\-lɪŋ, -ld; -z, -ɪŋ, -d
nettlesome Br ˈnɛtlsəm; Am ˈnɛdlsəm
network Br ˈnɛtwəːk; Am ˈnɛtˌwərk / -s, -ɪŋ, -t
neume Br njuːm; Am n(j)um / -z
neural Br ˈnjʊərḷ, ˈnjuːr|; Am ˈn(j)urəl, ˈn(j)urəl
neuralgia Br njʉˈraldʒə(r), njʊəˈraldʒə(r), njuːˈraldʒə(r); Am n(j)uˈrældʒə, n(j)əˈrældʒə
neuritis Br njʉˈrʌɪtɨs, njʊəˈrʌɪtɨs, njuːˈrʌɪtɨs; Am n(j)uˈraɪdɨs, n(j)əˈraɪdɨs
neuroanatomy Br ˌnjʊərəʊəˈnatəmi, ˌnjuːrəʊəˈnatəmi; Am ˌn(j)urouəˈnædəmi, ˌn(j)ərouəˈnædəmi
neurobiology Br ˌnjʊərə(ʊ)bʌɪˈɒlədʒi, ˌnjuːrə(ʊ)bʌɪˈɒlədʒi; Am ˌn(j)urəbaɪˈalədʒi, ˌn(j)ərəbaɪˈalədʒi
neurological Br ˌnjʊərəˈlɒdʒɨk}l, ˌnjuːrəˈlɒdʒɨk}l; Am ˌn(j)urəˈladʒək}əl, ˌn(j)ərəˈladʒək}əl / -li; -(ə)li
neurologist Br njʉˈrɒlədʒɨst, njʊəˈrɒlədʒɨst, njuːˈrɒlədʒɨst; Am n(j)uˈralədʒəst, n(j)əˈralədʒəst / -s
neurology Br njʉˈrɒlədʒi, njʊəˈrɒlədʒi, njuːˈrɒlədʒi; Am n(j)uˈralədʒi, n(j)əˈralədʒi
neuromuscular Br ˌnjʊərə(ʊ)ˈmʌskjʉlər, ˌnjuːrə(ʊ)ˈmʌskjʉlə(r); Am ˌn(j)urəˈməskjələr, ˌn(j)ərəˈməskjələr
neuron Br ˈnjʊərɒn, ˈnjuːrɒn; Am ˈn(j)uran, ˈn(j)uran / -z
neurone Br ˈnjʊərəʊn, ˈnjuːrəʊn; Am ˈn(j)uˌroun, ˈn(j)uˌroun / -z

There are some proper names mixed in among the headwords, from international companies like *Nestlé* to place names like *Netherlands*, and even (though not on this page) the name of villains from the late-lamented *Dr. Who* television series on BBC, the *Daleks*. There are some technical terms, but usually those that have more currency than just among specialists; *nereid* and *neuromuscular*, for instance, are not that exotic. There are also some words borrowed from other languages, such as *netsuki* (a term for a sort of clasp for a kimono), that may not be completely naturalized yet, or may even be stuck in immigration. We present both British spellings and American spellings as separate headwords, which are usually not consecutive in the alpha order of the listings, on the principle that readers will look up specific words that they want to pronounce and will not want to have to guess where to find them. We will end up with nearly 100,000 headwords, which is about the same size as the *Oxford Spelling Dictionary*, not counting all of the forms implied by inclusion of pronunciations for suffixes. I am not sure what the actual count will be.

The typical entry has first the headword, then British pronunciations, then American pronunciations, and finally indication of pronunciation for common suffixes. If the British and American pronunciations are the same, there is just the one transcription, as for *nest* (we may, however, for final publication include transcriptions from each variety even if duplicates). There are surprisingly few words like that, mainly one-syllable words because of differences in stress and stress-marking. British English prefers strong initial stress without secondary stress, American English employs both primary and secondary stresses in varied ways, and we have indicated those differences. Any symbols represented in parentheses are optional. Readers can put such sounds in or leave them out; for example, 'intrusive r' is always listed in parentheses in the British transcriptions, and in the American pronunciation of *Neptune* readers may choose either [nɛptjun] or [nɛptun], without the glide. There is a different alternation for that word in British English, between [nɛptjuːn], close to the American variant with a glide, or [nɛptʃuːn], where the glide in the second syllable has been replaced by an affricate, an option in advanced RP. If variant transcriptions cannot be represented by means of parentheses, we spell them all out, as in the long entries for the *neuro*-listings. The order of the

transcriptions within each variety is not significant; we indicate no preferences. We also give no usage labels: British and American transcriptions are provided for every word, whether or not we suspect that it has more currency on one side of the Atlantic. If you want to sound American and still use the word *nappy* (and not *diaper*) to describe what babies need, you can do it. The breakpoint for addition of suffixes is shown in the transcription by means of a curly brace, if there are any changes in pronunciation attendant upon the addition of the suffix. For the word *nervy*, for instance, the final vowel changes quality depending upon the variety and the suffix; for *nestle*, there are different ways of handling syllabification with the suffixes. I hope the entries are pretty much self-explanatory; we have tried to minimize those tricks that cause annoyance and misunderstandings in other pronunciation dictionaries.

We trust that these methods of presentation and the models of the national varieties as we have described them are sufficiently accurate and authoritative to demonstrate major differences between British and American English. The variation we do include within each variety is explicitly not dialectal, but instead is unmarked or phonotactic. We trust that our dictionary should thus be suitable for the international market, and that it can serve as an acceptable authority for mass audiences in the two national markets. We look forward to the appearance of the book from Oxford in due course.

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