

The Phonetics of English Pronunciation

Session 01

Ingmar Steiner¹
Institute of Phonetics
Saarland University

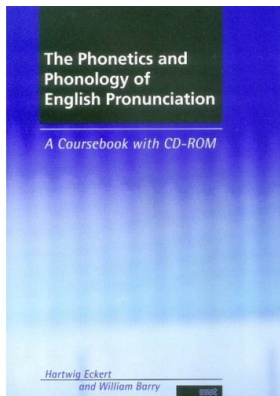
27.10.2008

¹using material by William Barry

Program for the term

- Week 1. Is pronunciation important?
The problems of learning an L2 pronunciation
- Week 2. What's different in English for Germans?
- Week 3. How can we know what's different about consonants?
- Week 4. Are German and English consonants very different?
- Week 5. English (and German) consonants 3
- Week 6. German and English vowels 1
- Week 7. German and English vowels 2
- Week 8. German and English vowels 3
- Week 9. Putting words together 1: Weak forms
- Week 10. Putting words together 2: Linking
- Week 11. Putting words together 3 (and creating new words):
Compounds and collocations.
(Homework: Transcription exercise)
- Week 12. More prosody: Intonation
- Week 13. Revision practice exam
- Week 14. Final Exam

Course textbook



Hartwig Eckert and William Barry:
*The Phonetics and Phonology of
English Pronunciation: A Coursebook
with CD-ROM*

Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2005
(2nd Ed.)

ISBN 3-88476-740-2, 298 pp, €19.50

Is pronunciation important?

- Words and word-forms, phrases and grammatical forms are registered *consciously*, but accent is registered *sub-consciously* as a part of the speaker's personality.
- Foreign accents awaken (often negative) national stereotypes, however unfair the association might be:
“Ve hef vace off makink you tok!” (We have ways of making you talk)
- In *favourable* circumstances, the incorrect pronunciation of a word does not cause misunderstanding... but...
- “If all my friends pronounce English like me, it must be right!” ... *Denglish* as the accepted norm... in Germany
- *Reading*: Eckert/Barry, pages 1-5

So what *are* the problems of learning an L2 pronunciation?

- Written vs. spoken language; letters vs. sounds. (orthographic interference!)
- Hearing *what* is said vs. listening to *how* it's said. (we are very good at *decoding* meaning; bad at *listening*!)
- Learning new (complex) articulation patterns (new *gestures* are (mostly) easy; but *not* when communicating)
- Changing established (complex) articulation patterns. (new sounds that are *near to L1 sounds* are especially tricky)
- Making new and changed patterns automatic. (if you want to *communicate*, you can't think of what your tongue and lips are doing. . .)

Letters vs. sounds: Orthography is only a rough guide to pronunciation!

- ⟨wind⟩ = German /vɪnt/ and English /wɪnd/
(but also English /waɪnd/_{verb})
- German ⟨Wein⟩ and English ⟨vine⟩: *both* pronounced /vaɪn/
- Consider George Bernard Shaw's (deadly serious) joke:
⟨ghoti⟩ = ?fish! [f] **f**ish, en**ough**
 [ɪ] **f**ish, w**o**men
 [ʃ] **f**ish, n**ati**on
- A very sure way of overcoming orthographic ambiguities is to become familiar with [fə'netɪk trɑ:n'skrɪpʃən]
- *Start to work with transcription now.*
Read the famous “spelling” poem (pp 253-4 in textbook) and compare the orthography with the transcription.

The “Spelling” Poem

*I take it you already know
Of **tough** and **bough** and **cough** and **dough**?
Others may stumble but not you
On **hiccough**, **thorough**, **laugh**, and **through**.
Well done! And now you wish perhaps,
To learn of less familiar traps?
Beware of **heard**, a dreadful word
That looks like **beard** but sounds like **bird**,
And **dead** – it’s said like **bed**, not **bead** –
For goodness’ sake don’t call it **deed**!
Watch out for **meat** and **great** and **threat**
(They rhyme with **suite** and **straight** and **debt**).
A **moth** is not a **moth** in **mother**
Nor **both** in **bother**, **broth** in **brother**,
And **here** is not a match for **there**
Nor **dear** and **fear** for **bear** and **pear**,
And then there’s **dose** and **rose** and **lose** –
Just look them up – and **loose** and **choose**,
And **cork** and **work** and **card** and **ward**,
And **font** and **front** and **word** and **sword**,
And **do** and **go** and **thwart** and **cart** –
Come, come, I’ve hardly made a start!
A dreadful language? Man alive!
I’d mastered it when I was five!*

Hearing *what's* said vs. listening to *how* it's said

- Primarily, we listen to someone to hear *what* he/she is saying.







- *What did the person say?*
 - “Ich bin in den Laden reingegangen...”?
 - “Bin in den Laden reingegangen...”?
 - “Bin in’n Laden reingegangen...”?
 - “Bin in’n Lad’n reingegang’ng...”?
- *Orthography is not very good at capturing the details of the pronunciation:*
[bɪn ɪn ˈlaːdɪ̯ ʀaɪŋgəgəŋ]

Another example. . .

- “Hast Du einen Moment Zeit?”
- *How would you say it?*
 - [hast du: ʔainən mo'mɛnt 'tsait] “Hast Du einen Moment Zeit?”
 - [has du_ain: mo'mɛn 'tsait] “Has Du ein' Momen Zeit?”
 - [has du_ən mo'mɛn 'tsait] “Has Du 'n Momen Zeit?”
 - [hasʏ mo'mɛn 'tsait] “Has 'n Momen Zeit?”

Hearing *what's* said vs. listening to *how* it's said (2)

- Even though we listen to understand, we still notice other things:
 - a) If a speaker is local or from a different region.
 - b) If the person friendly or not;
 - c) (on the telephone) If he/she is old/ill/unhappy etc.
-  What can *you* say about the man's accent?   
- Potentially, we have the ability to distinguish what is different. . .

Can you describe what is “different” (from native) in the pronunciation? Not so simple?
- . . . So we need the *tools* (= terminology, understanding, training) to *identify* what the differences are.
- . . . Also, *hearing* and *identifying* the problems is not everything!

Learning new (complex) articulation patterns

- The problem sounds that you identify have to be *produced, articulated, pronounced!*
- That means *learning new motor patterns...*
... and most of your everyday motor patterns were established when you were between 6 months and 6 years old!
- A speech sound requires fine control of up to 50 muscles.
- Establishing the gestures means that you learn to (subconsciously) link the muscular control pattern with the sound you are producing.
Things necessarily feel strange at first!
- But remember also: *sounds are rarely produced in isolation...*
all the gestural combinations have to be established too.

Changing established articulation patterns

- Some English sounds are only *a little bit different* from German ones. . . these are often more troublesome than completely new sounds (N.B. British & American have different “faux amis”: G. “Cord” - Br./Am. “caught”; G. “Mett” - Br./Am. “mat”)
- It is more difficult for learners to hear and identify the difference.
- It requires more careful adjustment of the articulatory gestures to avoid “slipping back” into the established German pattern. . . . Even more than with “new” sounds, these will feel strange because *you are moving your articulators along new tracks*.
- (and you may find that after many years the shifted articulation even affects your *native language pronunciation!*)

Making new and changed patterns *automatic*

- *Auditory awareness + new articulatory gesture* is not the final answer!
- You speak to express your thoughts and feelings (just as you normally listen to understand someone else's thoughts)...
so you have no time to pay proper attention to your pronunciation.
- All articulatory gestures have to be “overlearned”; they have to be automatic (with a sub-conscious link between the “feel” of the articulatory movements and the sound of the utterance)

To sum it all up. . .

- Pronunciation is a difficult thing to get into, because
 - you have to *make conscious* something that you use sub-consciously,
 - something you *learned* to use sub-consciously *many years ago*.
- Pronunciation is difficult to change because
 - *Any* established motor pattern is difficult to change (have you tried to change how you walk?)
- Pronunciation is difficult to learn, because
 - it has to be “overlearned” so that the new patterns can be used in communication just as the old ones are.

Don't forget to read:

- Pages 1-5 (a general explanation and motivation)
- Pages 253-4: The “Spelling Poem”

It might surprise you, how much you already know about the exceptions to the standard English spelling-to-sound rules ... but it might surprise you how many exceptions there are that you *don't* know.

Course webpage

<http://www.coli.uni-saarland.de/~steiner/teaching/englishphonetics/>

You *don't* have to hand anything in this week!