

/ɜ:/      /u/      /ŋ/      /ʊ/

Bente Hannisdal and Thor Sigurd Nilsen

# ENGLISH

Pronunciation and Intonation

**British, American and World Englishes**  
**Fourth Edition**



Universitetsforlaget



## English Pronunciation and Intonation



Bente Hannisdal and Thor Sigurd Nilsen

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British, American and  
World Englishes

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# List of Symbols Used

## Vowel phonemes

RP:	Keyword:	GA:	Keyword:
/ɪ/	<i>pit</i>	/ɪ/	<i>pit</i>
/e/	<i>pet</i>	/e/	<i>pet</i>
/æ/	<i>pat</i>	/æ/	<i>pat</i>
/ʌ/	<i>butt, hurry</i>	/ʌ/	<i>butt</i>
/ɒ/	<i>pot</i>		
/ʊ/	<i>put</i>	/ʊ/	<i>put</i>
/iː/	<i>eat</i>	/iː/	<i>eat</i>
/ɑː/	<i>part</i>	/ɑː/	<i>part, pot</i>
/ɔː/	<i>port</i>	/ɔː/	<i>port</i>
/uː/	<i>shoe</i>	/uː/	<i>shoe</i>
/ɜː/	<i>bird</i>	/ɜː/	<i>bird, hurry</i>
/eɪ/	<i>bay</i>	/eɪ/	<i>bay</i>
/aɪ/	<i>buy</i>	/aɪ/	<i>buy</i>
/ɔɪ/	<i>boy</i>	/ɔɪ/	<i>boy</i>
/əʊ/	<i>bone</i>	/oʊ/	<i>bone</i>
/aʊ/	<i>brown</i>	/aʊ/	<i>brown</i>
/ɪə/	<i>fear</i>		
/eə/	<i>fair</i>		
/ʊə/	<i>pure</i>		
/i/	<i>city</i>	/i/	<i>city</i>
/u/	<i>infl<u>u</u>ence</i>	/u/	<i>infl<u>u</u>ence</i>
/ə/	<i><u>a</u>bout</i>	/ə/	<i><u>a</u>bout</i>

## Consonant phonemes

/p/	<i>pay</i>	/b/	<i>bay</i>
/t/	<i>ten</i>	/d/	<i>den</i>
/k/	<i>could</i>	/g/	<i>good</i>
/tʃ/	<i>chain</i>	/dʒ/	<i>Jane</i>
/f/	<i>ferry</i>	/v/	<i>very</i>
/θ/	<i>thing</i>	/ð/	<i>this</i>
/s/	<i>bus</i>	/z/	<i>buzz</i>
/ʃ/	<i>rush</i>	/ʒ/	<i>rouge</i>
/h/	<i>hat</i>		
/m/	<i>might</i>	/n/	<i>night</i>
/ŋ/	<i>thing</i>		
/l/	<i>light</i>	/r/	<i>right</i>
/j/	<i>yes</i>	/w/	<i>west</i>

## Other symbols

< >	letters of the alphabet
<V>	any vowel letter
<C>	any consonant letter
V	any vowel phoneme
C	any consonant phoneme
//	phonemic representation
[ ]	phonetic representation
[ <sup>h</sup> ]	aspiration
[ <sub>ɹ</sub> ]	dental articulation
[ <sub>ɹ</sub> ]	apical articulation
[ <sub>ɹ</sub> ]	retracted articulation
[ <sub>ɹ</sub> ]	lowered articulation
[ <sub>ɹ</sub> ]	voiceless
[ <sup>n</sup> ]	nasal release
[ <sup>l</sup> ]	lateral release

[ˈ]	half-long
[ç]	syllabic consonant
[ʔ]	glottal stop
[ɫ]	velarised /l/
[ɾ]	alveolar tap as in GA <i>city</i>
[ɹ]	alveolar tap as in GA <i>city</i>
[ɻ]	postalveolar approximant
[ʋ]	labiodental approximant
[ç]	fortis palatal fricative
[t̪]	fortis postalveolar or retroflex plosive
[d̪]	lenis postalveolar or retroflex plosive
[ɳ]	postalveolar or retroflex nasal
[ɭ]	postalveolar or retroflex lateral
[ɻ]	retroflex approximant
[ɛ]	open-mid front vowel
[ʊ]	close central rounded vowel
[ø]	close-mid front rounded vowel
[œ]	open-mid front rounded vowel
[y]	close front rounded vowel
[ɜ̃]	r-coloured vowel as in GA <i>bird</i>
[ə̃]	r-coloured vowel as in GA <i>better</i>
[ˈ]	primary stress
[ˌ]	secondary stress
[ˌ]	low fall intonation
[ˌ]	high fall intonation
[ˌ]	low rise intonation
[ˌ]	high rise intonation
[ˌ]	fall-rise intonation



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 English pronunciation

This book is an introduction to English pronunciation. It covers both the sound segments of English, i.e. the individual speech sounds, and supra-segmental features such as stress and intonation, which extend over more than one segment. The science which studies the physical characteristics of speech sounds is called **phonetics**, while the study of how sounds function and are organised into systems is called **phonology**.

The first chapters deal with the individual speech sounds, or phonemes, of English. They provide a detailed account of how these segments are articulated, how they can be described and classified, and how they form patterns. Chapter 7 looks at how the speech sounds may be subject to modification in connected speech, while chapters 6 and 8 outline the main principles of English stress and intonation. The final chapter presents the main pronunciation features of a selection of varieties of English from around the world. The terms, concepts and symbols introduced in these chapters provide necessary background knowledge for more advanced studies of English pronunciation, language variation and change, and for English language teaching.

English can be said to be particularly challenging when it comes to pronunciation, as there is often a great discrepancy between the way a word is spelt and the way it is pronounced. Consider the words *good*, *mood*, *flood* and *brooch*. They all contain the letters <oo>, but this spelling is pronounced differently in each word. Conversely, the same sound can be represented by many different spellings, as illustrated by the words *sea*, *see*, *seize*, *be*, *key*, *quay*, which all are pronounced with the same vowel sound. In order to show the pronunciation of words and utterances in English, we use a set of designated symbols. It is important to note, however, that there are many different conventions for

representing the English speech sounds. The symbol conventions used in this book are in most respects the same as those found in *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* (LPD, Wells 2008).

## 1.2 Dialect and accent

When we talk about “the English language”, we normally refer to Standard English – the type of English that is most often described in books about English grammar and usage, and the language that is used in most literature. Standard English is the dialect used in writing, almost to the exclusion of other dialects. This does not mean that it is any “better” than other dialects. There is nothing we can express in Standard English that cannot be expressed in other dialects. We may say that other dialects are non-standard, but that does not mean that they are substandard.

Since this is a book about the pronunciation of English, we shall leave aside the question of a written standard, and concentrate on the spoken language.

It goes without saying that there is great linguistic variation from one place to another. We very often make a distinction between regional and social dialects. The term “regional dialect” is used about the variety of a language used within a certain geographical area. For example, in England it is fair to say that people from Sheffield with similar jobs and with more or less the same educational background will have the same regional dialect. Within the same community, however, there will be people with different educational backgrounds and jobs. Even though they live within the same geographical region, they will have clearly different dialects, and this is what is meant by a social dialect. More educated people generally speak a dialect that is closer to Standard English, which is traditionally considered more prestigious.

It is very important to distinguish clearly between dialect and accent. The term “dialect” refers to grammar (i.e. syntax and morphology), vocabulary (lexicon), as well as pronunciation. Accent, on the other hand, refers exclusively to pronunciation, including both intonation and the pronunciation of segments. Both dialects and accents can be



referred to as “varieties” of a language. The Standard English dialect can be spoken with almost any regional or local accent, even though it is extremely rare to hear a “broad” local accent without any of the grammatical or lexical features of the local dialect.

It is surely no surprise to find that native speakers of English have different accents – after all, there are native speakers of English in the United States, Canada, the West Indies, South Africa, Australia, and elsewhere, in addition to native speakers in the British Isles. It is sometimes said about a person that s/he speaks without an accent. This is not correct. Everyone speaks with an accent. In England, it is safe to say that most accents indicate which geographical region a speaker comes from.

If you spend some time travelling around Britain, you may be surprised by the linguistic variation between different parts of the country. We are, after all, talking about a relatively small geographical area. The differences between dialects were, however, far greater a century ago than they are now. Widespread education and increased mobility, particularly since World War Two, together with radio and television, have helped to level out the extreme differences between dialects. The most noticeable result is in the lexicon – many traditional local dialect words have disappeared, or exist only in the speech of older people. There are many regional speakers today who speak the Standard English dialect with a regional pronunciation.

It is possible to group accents in England into Southern, Western and Northern. This is, however, a very rough classification. Within the Northern group there are very strong differences between a speaker from, say, Manchester and one from Newcastle. In spite of such obvious drawbacks, it is a useful categorisation. Apart from these English accents, there are also distinctive accents in Scotland, Wales, and Ireland (but here again there are major differences internally – a person from Glasgow does not have the same accent as a person from Aberdeen). Within all these major accents, there are a great number of local accents, and most people are able to say approximately where a speaker comes from merely by listening to her/his accent.

Local or regional accents are most typical of areas in the English-speaking world where English has been established for a fairly long time. Thus, such accents are typical of the British Isles and the eastern

part of the United States. In the rest of the areas where English is spoken as a native language, the main dialect differences relate to grammar and lexicon rather than accent. This is the case in, for example, the western part of the United States, Australia, and South Africa.

In communities where there are close correlations between accent and class, the broadest local pronunciation features are typically found with speakers at the lower end of the social scale, while speakers at the higher end have fewer or no local features in their speech. Non-localisable, or non-regional accents therefore traditionally have the most social prestige in many English-speaking areas.

## 1.3 RP and GA

This book teaches basic phonetics and phonology as applied to English. It cannot possibly cover all the diverse accents of English, but focuses on the two British and American varieties typically used as models in textbooks and dictionaries: **Received Pronunciation (RP)** and **General American (GA)**.

There is no universal standard spoken English comparable to the Standard English dialect used in writing. RP and GA are, however, sometimes referred to as *standard* accents of British and American English, respectively. Importantly, this does not mean that they are inherently better than other pronunciation varieties. It means, rather, that they enjoy considerable social prestige and have been codified for teaching purposes. There are thus many practical reasons for focusing on these accents, as they are the accents that are best described in existing textbooks on English pronunciation, and referred to in pronunciation dictionaries and in other English dictionaries. RP and GA are also commonly used as reference accents in the literature that describes other varieties of English.

Received Pronunciation<sup>1</sup> has its historical origins in the south-east of England as the accent of the rich and educated in London and the surrounding areas. In the 19th century it spread throughout the country

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<sup>1</sup> *Received* here is used in the (now archaic) sense of “socially approved”.

with the public schools, and in the 20th century it became the accent favoured by the BBC. Today, RP is non-regional within England, as it is not linked to any specific region, and native RP speakers can be found in all areas of Britain. Socially, it is associated with education and the upper and upper-middle classes. It is still the accent typically used by news-readers on national radio and television, and is often referred to as “BBC English”.

While RP has remained the typical British English model in pronunciation dictionaries and textbooks, its position is not as strong as it used to be, with the increased democratisation of education and wider acceptance of regional accents. It should also be noted that there is a great deal of variation within modern RP. For example, a word like *sure* can be pronounced either with a diphthong /ʊə/ or a monophthong /ɜ:/; *tune* can be pronounced with either /tj/ or /tʃ/ initially; and *network* can be said with a glottal stop [ʔ] instead of [t]. These and other variations are typically indications of ongoing changes within the accent, often as a result of influence from non-standard varieties.

General American is the term often given to the regionally most unmarked accent of American English. While there is much less geographical variation in speech in the United States compared to Britain, some areas have distinct accents, notably Eastern New England, New York and the South. GA is then a variety that excludes all regionally marked pronunciation features from these areas. It is widely spoken by those with a higher education, and is the typical accent of national news broadcasters (and is therefore sometimes referred to as “Network English”). GA is also the kind of American pronunciation taught to foreign learners of English, and the American model in pronunciation dictionaries. While there is a high degree of uniformity with regard to its major features, GA allows some variation, including the choice between /ɔ:/ and /ɑ:/ in words like *off* and *long*.

RP and GA share most of their basic speech sounds, or phonemes (see the lists on pages v–vi), but there are some important differences with regard to the articulation or distribution of certain sounds. For example, /t/ is often pronounced as a voiced /d/-like tap sound in GA in words like *city* and *better*. RP does not pronounce the <r> in words like

*car* and *card*, but GA does. Both accents have /æ/, but only GA uses it in words like *pass* and *dance*, where RP has /ɑ:/.

In the following chapters, the features of both accents will be presented and described. The theoretical aspects, including the definitions of terms and the classification principles and categories, are the same for both accents, and can be applied universally.