

ROUTLEDGE ENGLISH LANGUAGE INTRODUCTIONS

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# Practical English Phonetics and Phonology

A RESOURCE BOOK FOR STUDENTS



Beverley Collins, Inger M. Mees and Paul Carley

Fourth edition

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# Practical English Phonetics and Phonology

*Routledge English Language Introductions* cover core areas of language study and are one-stop resources for students.

Assuming no prior knowledge, books in the series offer an accessible overview of the subject, with activities, study questions, sample analyses, commentaries and key readings – all in the same volume. The innovative and flexible ‘two- dimensional’ structure is built around four sections – Introduction, Development, Exploration and Extension – which offer self-contained stages for study.

Revised and updated throughout, this fourth edition of *Practical English Phonetics and Phonology*:

- ☐ presents the essentials of the subject and their day-to-day applications in an engaging and accessible manner;
- ☐ covers all the core concepts of phonetics and phonology, such as the phoneme, syllable structure, production of speech, vowel and consonant possibilities, glottal settings, stress, rhythm, intonation and the surprises of connected speech;
- ☐ incorporates classic readings from key names in the discipline;
- ☐ outlines the sound systems of six key languages from around the world (Spanish, French, Italian, German, Polish and Japanese);
- ☐ is accompanied by a brand-new companion website which hosts a collection of samples provided by genuine speakers of 25 accent

varieties from Britain, Ireland, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Singapore and West Africa, as well as transcriptions, further study questions, answer keys, links to further reading and numerous recordings to accompany activities in the book.

This edition has been completely reorganised and new features include: updated descriptions of the sounds of modern English and the adoption of the term General British (GB); considerable expansion of the treatment of intonation, including new recordings; and two new readings by David Crystal and John Wells.

Written by authors who are experienced teachers and researchers, this best-selling textbook will appeal to all students of English language and linguistics and those training for a certificate in TEFL.

**Beverley Collins** (1938–2014) held lectureships in phonetics at the universities of Lancaster and Leiden, and was Visiting Professor at Ghent University. He was also a regular lecturer at the UCL Summer Course in English Phonetics.

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## ROUTLEDGE ENGLISH LANGUAGE INTRODUCTIONS

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Beverley Collins, Inger M. Mees and Paul Carley

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## **Praise for the first edition:**

*'Practical Phonetics and Phonology* gathers together a far wider range of topics than other books on English phonetics. Many more accents of English are discussed, and we really learn about English as a world language. Experienced teachers of English and beginning students will all profit from this book.'

Peter Ladefoged, *University of California, Los Angeles, USA*

## Praise for the third edition:

‘This is a book that I have used in teaching with great success. I am delighted to welcome this new and extended edition.’

John Wells, *Emeritus Professor of Phonetics, University College London, UK*

‘The book is carefully planned, diligently structured and clearly written. The contents are up to date; they are geared to the needs of newcomers to phonetics and phonology. There is a strong emphasis on the practical side: the reader’s understanding is tested repeatedly throughout the book with more than 120 activities. Many sound samples are provided for close listening and analysis. A highly recommendable book!’

Petr Rösel, *University of Mainz, Germany*

## **Praise for the fourth edition:**

‘This book cleverly combines the details of English phonetics with a first look at sounds in other languages. Its real strengths are the exercises provided at every step of the way and its brief but unequalled survey of accents of English (using recordings on the companion website). It will remain the best all-round introduction to phonetics.’

Alan Cruttenden, *The University of Oxford, UK*

‘This classic text just keeps getting better. It is one of very few books that I keep constantly at my side as I author my own materials. It is rich in information, clearly written and easy to read. Most importantly, it is accompanied by audio recordings which exemplify the points made.’

Richard Cauldwell, *Speech in Action*



# Practical English Phonetics and Phonology

## Fourth Edition

A Resource Book for Students

BEVERLEY COLLINS, INGER M. MEES AND PAUL  
CARLEY

**A**

**B**

**C**

**D**

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# How to Use this Book

The *Routledge English Language Introductions* offer key information and a set of resources that you can use to suit your own style of study. The books are divided into four sections:

**A Introduction** – sets out the key concepts for the area of study.

**B Development** – adds to your knowledge and builds on the key ideas already introduced.

**C Exploration** – provides examples of language data and guides you through your own investigation of the field.

**D Extension** – offers you the chance to compare your expertise with key readings in the area. These are taken from the work of important writers, and are provided with guidance and questions for your further thought.

Most books in the *Routledge English Language Introductions* series are designed to be read either straight through (like a traditional textbook), or across the numbered units to allow you to follow a thread in depth quickly. For *Practical English Phonetics and Phonology* we have retained the four-section structure. However, the nature of phonetics requires a cumulative build-up of knowledge; so you first need to read all the units in [Sections A](#) and [B](#) fully and in sequence before going on to the accent samples in [Section C](#), and the extension readings in [Section D](#).

The glossary/index at the end, together with the suggestions for further reading, will help to keep you orientated. The textbook has a supporting website with extra commentary, suggestions, additional material and support for teachers and students.

## *Practical English Phonetics and Phonology*

One word in the title above is all-important: note that this book concentrates on *practical* rather than theoretical aspects of English phonetics and phonology. It has been our aim to present the subject in the kind of down-to-earth way that readers will find easy to follow, enabling them to absorb the most significant basic principles and terminology. Exercise activities are provided at regular intervals to reinforce and extend what has been learnt.

We emphasise throughout how phonetics and phonology can supply insights to help you understand those aspects of speech and pronunciation that most people seem to find interesting. These include such matters as the ways in which regional accents differ from each other, how over the centuries English pronunciation has changed (and is still changing) and how phonetic knowledge can help you to pronounce foreign languages more effectively. Incidentally, we must state at the outset that this is not a book on elocution or speech training. We believe that the way you speak your *native* language is your own concern, and it isn't any of our business to tell native English speakers that certain types of accent are better or worse than others. (For non-natives, we do provide some hints and guidance on making your English pronunciation more convincing.)

The practical emphasis also explains why we include such a large number of audio recordings on the companion website. Not only does this provide you with spoken examples as you read along, but it also enables you to listen to nearly fifty minutes of samples of English drawn from all over the world. A final practical resource is the website with extra information, questions, and keys to exercise activities. By accessing this material, you can go on to expand your knowledge by investigating areas of speech science beyond what we can deal with in an introductory textbook.

[Section A](#) introduces some basic concepts and leads you on to absorb the ideas and terminology needed for the all-round study of human speech (i.e.

general phonetics). It introduces the phoneme and teaches you how to use phonemic transcription to write down the sounds of English with greater accuracy than ordinary spelling would ever allow. In addition, it provides an up-to-date description of the consonants and vowels of modern British English.

Building on this foundation, [Section B](#) develops your expertise through a closer study of many of the interesting features of connected speech such as assimilation, elision, stress and intonation. You'll also find out how English has developed over the centuries, and how its pronunciation is changing even now in our own time. This section is rounded off with guidelines showing you how practical phonetics can be used both as an aid for English speakers learning foreign languages, and also as an effective way of teaching English pronunciation to non- natives.

[Section C](#) explores English in a selection of its many varieties. The audio recordings include English spoken by twenty-five genuine speakers of different English accents worldwide – ranging from Dublin to Delhi, and from Scotland to Singapore. For each accent there is a full transcript plus a brief description of the salient phonetic features. [Section D](#) extends your knowledge further by means of a selection of writings about phonetics by well-known experts in the field. These take in a wide range – including attitudes to regional accents, teaching and learning the pronunciation of a foreign language, the need for a reformed alphabet which takes account of different pronunciations in different accents and the syllabification of English words. Our hope is that through reading these authors you'll be inspired to go on to discover much more about that most complex and fascinating of human activities – speech.

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[C2.5 Geordie \(Newcastle\)](#)

[C2.6 Accent detective work 1 \(Activity C2.2\)](#)

[C3.1 Scottish \(Edinburgh\)](#)

[C3.2 Irish Republic \(Greater Dublin\)](#)

[C3.3 Northern Ireland \(Belfast\)](#)

[C3.4 South Wales \(Glamorgan, Carmarthenshire\)](#)

[C3.5 Scouse \(Liverpool\)](#)

[C3.6 Accent detective work 2 \(Activity C3.1\)](#)

[C4.1 Southern USA \(Texas\)](#)

[C4.2 Kentucky](#)

[C4.3 New York](#)

[C4.4 Canadian](#)

[C5.1 Australian](#)

[C5.2 New Zealand](#)

[C5.3 South African](#)

[C6.1 Indian English](#)

[C6.2 Singapore](#)

[C6.3 Caribbean \(West Indian\)](#)

[C6.4 West African \(Sierra Leone\)](#)

[C6.5 Accent detective work 3 \(Activity C6.1\)](#)

# Prefaces and Acknowledgements

## Preface to the first edition

In the course of writing this book we have been helped in many different ways by colleagues, students, friends and family. Our thanks go out to them all, but especially to those mentioned below.

Ron Carter gave us much wise advice at the planning stage, and the series editor Peter Stockwell has provided us with valuable guidance from then on. Crucial help and support has come all along the way from the editorial staff at Routledge, successively from Louisa Semlyen, Christy Kirkpatrick, Kate Parker and Ruth Jeavons; a special note of gratitude for her efficiency, patience and cheerfulness under pressure goes to Margaret Aherne.

We want to thank all those colleagues who offered perceptive critical comments on preliminary drafts and the final manuscript. Most (though not all) of their suggestions have been acted upon, and we have ended up with a greatly improved book as a consequence. In this regard, we must make special mention of Philip Carr, Rias van den Doel, Jack Windsor Lewis, Robert Phillipson and Gilda Suárez de Nielsen. We also gained much from the detailed criticism contained in Paul Tench's review of the penultimate version of the manuscript. Colin Ewen not only read and commented on the book in draft form, but also aided us in a very practical way by constructing and digitising all the vowel diagrams and intonation representations. Help with providing and checking language materials was given by Sarah Branci, Rolf Bremmer, Inès Brulard, Robert Druce, Gyde Hansen, Arnt Lykke Jakobsen, María Pilar Lorenzo, Vincent Phillips, Klaske van Leyden and Carol Williams. Useful feedback on many matters came from students at the Copenhagen Business School who allowed us to expose them to earlier versions of the text. We are also grateful to Jennifer Jenkins, who used portions of the material with her students at King's College London. Finally, mention must be made of Arnold Warthog, who was constantly on hand to assist us in every aspect of our work.

For the audio CD, we benefited greatly from the technical expertise of Steve Hitchins, who assembled and edited the final version of the disk. In this connection, we also want to thank Vincent van Heuven for the use of recording facilities at Leiden University, and John Wells for permission to use a portion of the recording of the cardinal vowels made for University College London by the late A. C. Gimson. For the provision of recorded materials used in the collection of English accent varieties we are much indebted to Alastair Hamilton, Mia Overlade Hansen, Jen Hay, Gerry Knowles, Lesley Milroy, Debi Molnar, Tine Ditlev Nielsen, Kitt Spangbjerg Petersen, Yvonne Spuijbroek, Karen Stetting and Maria Vanlaeken- Kester. Finally, our thanks go out to all the anonymous recorded speakers for their time, trouble and goodwill.

Naturally, we do not wish to saddle any of those mentioned above with blame for whatever defects and errors remain in the book. That responsibility is ours alone.

This book is dedicated to the memory of I.M.'s mother, Birthe Mees, and B.C.'s sister, Beryl Adams.

Beverley Collins and Inger M. Mees  
Leiden and Copenhagen, March 2003

## Preface to the second edition

In this new edition, numerous changes, corrections and additions have been made throughout the text, including the introduction of several new maps and diagrams. The audio CD now contains examples of two more English pronunciation varieties – namely British Estuary English and New York English – both of which also feature in the revised text. In [Section B](#), a complete new unit, intended for the non- native learner of English, has been introduced, covering English orthography and spelling- to- sound pronunciation guides. In [Section D](#), there are two extra readings from leading figures in the fields of phonetics and sociolinguistics. John Wells discusses the problems associated with spelling reform, while Peter Trudgill covers current changes in the social perception of various British English regional and social varieties, ranging from traditional Received Pronunciation through to Estuary English and a selection of regional accents.

In producing this new version of our book, we have had help from many sources. First, at Taylor and Francis, we want to thank Peter Stockwell (series editor) for his advice and guidance, and Nadia Seemungal for her willingness to deal promptly with any problem thrown at her. We have had useful criticism and suggestions from a number of reviewers, who provided incisive assessment and criticism. In particular, we must mention Madalena Cruz- Ferreira, who not only reviewed the book in a most perceptive manner, but then, in response to our request, sent extra comments to us personally. Five anonymous peer reviewers also provided invaluable advice and suggestions. We are grateful to them all.

Help has also come in various ways from many friends and colleagues. We are especially grateful to Rias van den Doel for all the assistance he gave at the proofreading stage. In addition, we wish to express our gratitude to Inès Brulard, Philip Carr, Simon Cook, Anne Fabricius, Anne Margrethe

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We need hardly say, as before, that any blame for remaining errors or omissions in the text should be laid solely at our door.

Beverley Collins and Inger M. Mees  
Utrecht and Copenhagen, December 2007

## Preface to the third edition

Although this third edition has several additional features, many corrections and much revision, nevertheless the overall structure of the book remains the same. We saw no reason to make radical changes to what appears on the whole to have been a successful formula.

We wish once more to express our gratitude to all those, acknowledged above, who have assisted us in the past, and to the reviewers, students and colleagues who have helped us with this edition. Special thanks go to Philip Carr, Andrew Kehoe, Petr Rösel and Jack Windsor Lewis. We also want to put on record our debt to Paul Carley, Marta Dura, Alex Rotatori and Masaki Taniguchi for their contributions to the new language descriptions in [Section C](#). In addition, we have benefited from feedback from our students – especially from participants in the University College London Summer Course in English Phonetics (SCEP) in recent years. At Routledge, we have had much help and support, and we now want to thank Isabelle Cheng, Rachel Daw, Sarah May and, especially, for overseeing the whole operation, Nadia Seemungal.

Beverley Collins and Inger M. Mees  
Utrecht and Copenhagen, November 2012



## Preface to the fourth edition

Sadly, this latest edition continues without our good friend and colleague Bev Collins, who died in 2014. We are now joined by Paul Carley, who like Bev believes in a practical pedagogical approach to English phonetics and pronunciation teaching, and we are happy to be going forward in a manner which Bev would have approved of.

The most striking modification to this new fourth edition is the rearrangement of chapters to bring similar topics together, while other changes include expansion of the treatment of intonation, new readings, the adoption of the term General British (GB) and numerous updates to the description of modern British pronunciation. Where formerly recordings were included on an accompanying CD, they are now available for download on the companion website.

In addition to all those who have helped us with previous editions, we would like to thank Petr Rösler for his considerable contribution to the section on German and for providing the accompanying recordings. We extend our thanks to Graeme Dunphy for his assistance with interpreting the Belfast recording and Hiroshi Miura for suggesting improvements. At Routledge, we are grateful to Francesca McGowan, Nadia Seemungal- Owen and Lizzie Cox for their patience and support during the whole process.

Inger M. Mees and Paul Carley

Copenhagen and Cwmbach, December 2018

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- Avery, P. and Ehrlich, S. (1992) "Introduction: Preliminary considerations in the teaching of pronunciation," pp. xiii- xvi (excluding last paragraph). Reprinted from *Oxford Handbook for Language Teachers: Teaching American English Pronunciation* by Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich. © Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1992. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press.
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## Phonetic Symbols

The following list used in this book does not include (1) the symbols employed for English phonemic transcription (see pp. xxiv–xxv) or (2) the symbols for the cardinal vowels (see pp. 84–5). A more comprehensive set of symbols is to be found on the IPA chart on p. 317.

ɖ	voiced /t/, American English <i>bet<u>t</u>er</i>
ɹ	post-alveolar approximant, English <i>ru<u>r</u>al</i>
rr	voiced alveolar trill, Spanish <i>pa<u>rr</u>a</i> ‘grapevine’
ɾ	voiced alveolar tap, Spanish <i>pa<u>r</u>a</i> ‘for’
ʀ	voiced uvular trill, old-fashioned French <i>ru<u>e</u></i> ‘street’
ʁ	voiced uvular approximant, one of the possible realisations of Dutch of /r/ <i>ro<u>o</u>d</i> ‘red’
ʋ	labio-dental approximant, so-called ‘defective’ English /r/ <i>me<u>r</u>ry</i> [‘mevi]
ç	voiceless palatal fricative, German <i>ni<u>ch</u>t</i> ‘not’
x	voiceless velar fricative, German <i>Na<u>ch</u>t</i> ‘night’
ɱ	voiceless labial-velar fricative, Scottish English <i>wh<u>i</u>ch</i>
ɸ	voiceless bilabial fricative, allophone of English /f/, <i>he<u>l</u>p<u>fu</u>l</i>
β	voiced bilabial fricative, as in intervocalic /b/ Spanish <i>a<u>b</u>eto</i> ‘pine tree’
ɣ	voiced velar fricative, as in intervocalic /g/ in Spanish <i>a<u>m</u>igo</i> ‘friend’
ɭ	velarised alveolar lateral approximant (also termed ‘dark l’), English <i>sti<u>ll</u></i>
ɬ	voiceless alveolar lateral fricative, Welsh <i>ll<u>i</u>ne<u>ll</u></i> ‘line’
ɮ	voiced alveolar lateral fricative, Zulu <i>dl<u>a</u>la</i> ‘play!’ (imperative)
ʌ	

	voiced palatal lateral approximant, Italian <i>aglio</i> ‘garlic’; traditional pronunciation of Spanish <i>llave</i> ‘key’
ɲ	voiced palatal nasal, French <i>cyg<u>ne</u></i> ‘swan’
ɥ	voiced labial-palatal approximant, French <i>hu<u>il</u>e</i> ‘oil’
ɐ	central vowel between open-mid and open, German <i>Fis<u>ch</u>er</i> ‘fisherman’
ʏ	front-central rounded vowel between close and close-mid, German <i>f<u>ü</u>nf</i> ‘five’
ʔ	glottal stop, Cockney <i>bu<u>tt</u>er</i>
ʔ̥	pre-glottalised, English <i>crack<u>ck</u>down</i> [kræʔkdaʊn]
~	(through symbol) velarised, English <i>st<u>il</u>l</i> [stiɫ]
˜	(above symbol) nasalised, English <i>ma<u>n</u></i> [mæ̃n]
w	labialised, English <i>d<u>we</u>ll</i> [dʷwel]
ɹ	dental (applied to alveolars), English <i>hi<u>d</u> them</i> [hiɾ ðəm]
j	palatalised, English <i>t<u>u</u>be</i> [tʲju:b]
◌̥	(below symbol, but above for descending symbols) devoiced, English <i>t<u>w</u>eed</i> [twi:ɾ̥], <i>b<u>i</u>g</i> [bɪg̊]
h	aspirated, English <i>c<u>a</u>t</i> [kʰæt]
̩	(above or beneath the symbol) syllabic consonant, English <i>bu<u>tt</u>on</i> [ˈbʌt̩n]
ː	length mark, English <i>gr<u>ee</u>n</i> [ɡri:n]
+	(after or below symbol) advanced, English <i><u>k</u>ey</i> [k+i:], [ki:]
–	(after or below symbol) retracted, English <i>c<u>o</u>re</i> [k-ɔ:], [kɔ:]
ˈ	stressed, English <i>po<u>t</u>ato</i> [pəˈteɪtəʊ]
//	enclosing phonemic transcription
[ ]	enclosing phonetic transcription
*	unacceptable or non-existent form

## Intonation marking

'	Onset of high level head
↘	Onset of high falling head
`	High fall
˘	Low fall
˙	High rise
˘˙	Low rise
∨	Fall-rise
^	Rise-fall
>	Mid-level
	Intonation phrase boundary
	Sentence boundary

# English Phonemic Transcription Key

## Consonants

### FORTIS

#### Plosives

p	<i>pet, lap</i>	pet, læp	b	<i>bet, lab</i>	bet, læb
t	<i>town, mat</i>	taʊn, mæt	d	<i>down, mad</i>	daʊn, mæd
k	<i>cap, lock</i>	kæp, lɒk	g	<i>gap, log</i>	gæp, lɒg

#### Affricates

tʃ	<i>chin, batch</i>	tʃɪn, bæʃ	dʒ	<i>gin, badge</i>	dʒɪn, bædʒ
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#### Fricatives

f	<i>fast, safe</i>	fɑ:st, seɪf	v	<i>vast, save</i>	vɑ:st, seɪv
θ	<i>thigh, loath</i>	θaɪ, ləʊθ	ð	<i>thy, loathe</i>	ðaɪ, ləʊð
s	<i>sink, face</i>	sɪŋk, feɪs	z	<i>zinc, phase</i>	zɪŋk, feɪz
ʃ	<i>shy, wish</i>	ʃaɪ, wɪʃ	ʒ	<i>measure</i>	'meɪʒə
h	<i>hat</i>	hæt, –			

#### Nasals

#### VOICED

m	<i>meet, team</i>	mi:t, ti:m
n	<i>nice, fine</i>	naɪs, faɪn
ŋ	<i>–, long</i>	lɒŋ

#### Approximants

**Lateral** (approximant)  
**(Central) approximants**

l	<i>late, sail</i>	leɪt, seɪl
j	<i>yes, –</i>	jes
w	<i>wait, –</i>	weɪt
r	<i>race, –</i>	reɪs

## Vowels

Vowel	Keyword	Additional spellings
<b>Checked</b>		
ɪ	KIT /kɪt/	gym, manage, busy, England, guilt
e	DRESS /dres/	bread, friend, said
æ	TRAP /træp/	plaid
ʌ	STRUT /strʌt/	son, young, blood
ɒ	LOT /lɒt/	swan, because, knowledge
ʊ	FOOT /fʊt/	put, would, woman

### *Free steady-state vowels*

i:	FLEECE /fli:s/	neat, these, technique, belief
ɛ:	SQUARE /skwɛ:/	fair, their, vary
ɑ:	PALM /pɑ:m/	start, clerk, heart, memoir
ɜ:	NURSE /nɜ:s/	girl, term, heard, word, journey
ɔ:	THOUGHT /θɔ:t/	short, caught, war, saw, walk, broad
u:	GOOSE /gu:s/	rude, soup, shoe, do, crew

### *Free diphthongs*

eɪ	FACE /feɪs/	laid, may, weigh, they, break
aɪ	PRICE /praɪs/	try, lie, buy, guide
ɔɪ	CHOICE /tʃɔɪs/	boy
əʊ	GOAT /gəʊt/	nose, blow, soul, toe
aʊ	MOUTH /maʊθ/	drown
ɪə	NEAR /nɪə/	beer, pierce, zero, weird
ʊə	CURE /kjʊə/	tour, Europe, moor



### *Weak vowels*

ə	<i>bonUs</i>	comma, ability, useless, under, forget, bonus, famous
i		happy, money, hippie, mediate, pretend
u		graduate, to (weak form), thank you
ɪ		cottage, watches, expect
ʊ		accurate, regular

The phonemic transcription system is the same as that to be found in the eighteenth edition of the *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (Jones 2011) and in the *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* (2008), with one exception: for the vowel in SQUARE,  $\epsilon:$  is used instead of  $eə$ . The words printed in small capitals are the keywords used throughout this book to refer to the vowel in question.

# Section A

## Introduction

A1

# English Worldwide

## Introduction

If you've picked up this book and are reading it, we can assume one or two things about you. First, you're a human being – not a dolphin, not a parrot, not a chimpanzee. No matter how intelligent such creatures may appear to be at communicating in their different ways, they simply do not have the innate capacity for language that makes humans unique in the animal world.

Then, we can assume that you speak English. You are either a **native speaker**, which means that you speak English as your mother tongue; or you're a **non- native speaker** using English as your second language; or a learner of English as a foreign language. Whichever applies to you, we can also assume, since you are reading this, that you are literate and are aware of the conventions of the written language – like spelling and punctuation. So far, so good. Now, what can a book on English phonetics and phonology do for you?

In fact, the study of both **phonetics** (the science of speech sound) and **phonology** (how sounds pattern and function in a given language) are going to help you to learn more about language in general and English in particular. If you're an English native speaker, you'll be likely to discover much about your mother tongue of which you were previously unaware. If you're a non-native learner, it will also assist in improving your pronunciation and listening abilities. In either case, you will end up better able to teach English pronunciation to others and possibly find it easier to learn how to speak other languages better yourself. You'll also discover some things about the pronunciation of English in the past, and about the great diversity of accents and dialects that go to make up the English that's spoken at present. Let's take this last aspect as a starting point as we survey briefly some of the many types of English pronunciation that we can hear around us in the modern world.

## Accent and dialect in English

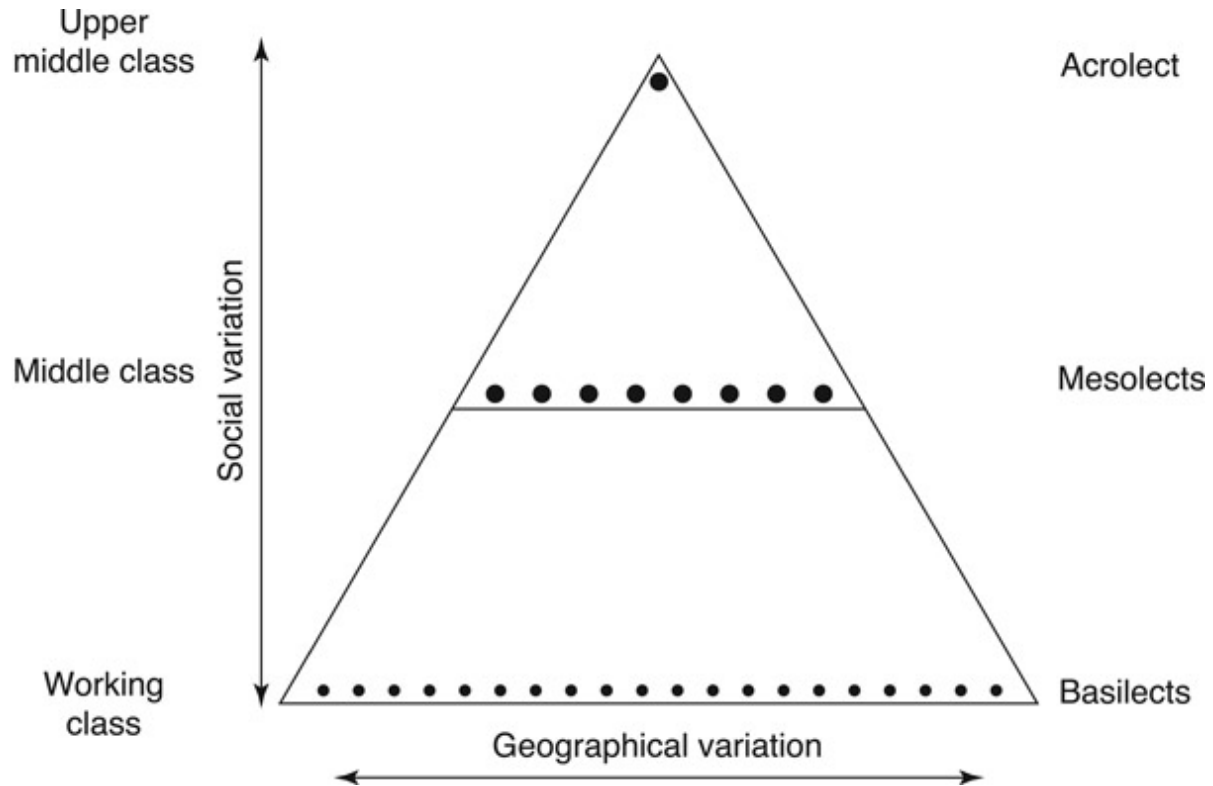
You may well already have some idea of what the terms ‘accent’ and ‘dialect’ mean, but we shall now try to define these concepts more precisely. All languages typically exist in a number of different forms. For example, there may be several ways in which the language can be pronounced; these are termed **accents**. To cover variation in grammar and vocabulary we use the term **dialect**. If you want to take in all these aspects of language variation – pronunciation together with grammar and vocabulary – then you can simply use the term **variety**.

We can make two further distinctions in language variation: namely, between **regional variation**, which involves differences between one place and another, and **social variation**, which reflects differences between one social group and another (this can cover such matters as gender, ethnicity, religion, age and, very significantly, social class). Regional variation is accepted by everyone without question. It is common knowledge that people from London do not speak English in the same way as those from Bristol, Edinburgh or Cardiff; nor, on a global scale, in the same way as the citizens of New York, Sydney, Johannesburg or Auckland. What is more controversial is the question of social variation in language, especially where the link with social class is concerned. Some people may take offence when it is pointed out that accent and dialect are closely connected with class differences, but it would be very difficult to deny this fact.

In considering variation, we can take account of a range of possibilities. The broadest local accents are termed **basilects** (adjective: **basilectal**). These are associated with working-class occupations and persons less privileged in terms of education and other social factors. The most prestigious forms of speech are termed **acrolects** (adjective: **acrolectal**). These, by contrast, are generally found in persons with more advantages in terms of wealth, education and other social factors. In addition, we find a range of **mesolects**

(adjective: **mesolectal**) – a term used to cover varieties intermediate between the two extremes, the whole forming an accent continuum. This situation has often been represented in the form of a triangle, sometimes referred to as the **sociolinguistic pyramid** ([Figure A1.1](#)). In England, for example, there is great variation regionally amongst the basilectal varieties. On the other hand, the prestigious acrolectal accent exhibits very few differences from one area to another. Mesolects once again fall in between, with more variation than in the acrolect but less than in the basilects.

In the British Isles it is fair to say that one variety of English pronunciation has traditionally been connected with the more privileged section of the population. As a result, it became what is termed a **prestige accent**, namely, a variety regarded highly even by those who do not speak it, and associated with status, education and wealth. This type of English is variously referred to as ‘Oxford English,’ ‘BBC English,’ ‘Standard Southern British English’ and even ‘the Queen’s English,’ but none of these names can be considered accurate. For a long time, phoneticians have called it **RP** – short for **Received Pronunciation**; in the Victorian era, one meaning of ‘received’ was ‘socially acceptable.’ In recent years the term ‘Received Pronunciation’ has caught on with the media, and now has wider currency with the general public.



[Figure A1.1](#) The sociolinguistic pyramid

Traditional RP could be regarded as the classic example of a prestige accent since, although it was spoken only by a small percentage of the population, it had high status everywhere in Britain and, to an extent, the world. RP was not a regional but a social accent; it was to be heard all over England (though only from a minority of speakers). Although to some extent associated with the London area (hence the term ‘Standard Southern British English’ used by some phoneticians), this probably only reflected the greater wealth of the south- east of England as compared with the rest of the country. RP continues to be much used in the theatre and at one time was virtually the only speech employed by national BBC radio and television announcers – hence the term ‘BBC English.’ Nowadays, the BBC has a declared policy of employing a number of announcers with (modified) regional accents on its national TV and radio networks. On the BBC World Service, there are in addition announcers and presenters who use other global varieties. Traditional RP also happens to be the kind of pronunciation still heard from

older members of the British Royal Family; hence the term ‘the Queen’s English.’

Within RP itself, it was possible to distinguish a number of different types (see Wells 1982: 279–95 for a detailed discussion). The original narrow definition included mainly persons who had been educated at one of what in Britain are called ‘public schools’ (actually very expensive boarding schools) like Eton, Harrow and Winchester. It was always true, however, that many English people from less exclusive social backgrounds modified their regional speech and ended up speaking RP or something very similar to it. In this book, because of the dated social connotations, we shall not use the label RP (except consciously to refer to the upper- class speech of the twentieth century). We shall instead endeavour to describe a more encompassing neutral type of modern British English which lacks obvious local accent features. To refer to this variety we shall employ the term **General British** (abbreviated to **GB**).<sup>1</sup> We shall thus be able to allow for the present- day range of variation to be heard from educated middle- and younger- generation speakers in England who have a pronunciation which isn’t specific to a particular area.

### [Traditional Received Pronunciation \(RP\)](#) [recording A1.1](#)

*Jeremy:* yes what put *me* off Eton was the importance attached to games because I wasn’t sporty – I was very bad at games – I was of a rather sort of cowardly disposition – and the idea to have to run around in the mud and get kicked in the face – by a lot of larger boys three times a week – I found terribly terribly depressing – fortunately this only really happened one time a year – at the most two – because in the summer one could go rowing – and then one was just alone with one’s enormous blisters – in the stream –

*Interviewer:* which games did you play though – or did you have to play –

*Jeremy:* well you had to play – I mean I liked – I was – the only thing I was any good at was fencing and I liked rather solitary things like



fencing or squash or things like that – but you had to play – Eton had its own ghastly combination of rugger and soccer which was called the ‘field game’ – and that was for the so- called Oppidans [*fee-paying pupils who form the overwhelming majority at Eton*] like myself – and then there was the Wall Game – which was even worse – and that was for the college – in other words the non- paying students known as ‘tugs’ –

*Interviewer:* known as –

*Jeremy:* tugs –

*Interviewer:* ah right –

*Jeremy:* they were called tugs –

*Interviewer:* there was a lot of slang I suppose *Jeremy:* there was a *lot* of slang – I wonder how much it’s still understood – and I don’t know if it still exists at Eton – whether it’s changed

Jeremy, a university professor, was born in the early 1940s. His speech is a very conservative variety, by which we mean that he retains many old-fashioned forms in his pronunciation. Jeremy, in fact, preserves many of the features of traditional Received Pronunciation (as described in numerous books on phonetics written in the twentieth century) which have since been abandoned by most younger speakers.

### [Modern General British \(GB\)](#) [recording A1.2](#)

#### ***The story of Arthur the rat***

There was once a young rat named Arthur, who would never take the trouble to make up his mind. Whenever his friends asked him if he would like to go out with them, he would only answer, ‘I don’t know.’ He wouldn’t say ‘yes,’ and he wouldn’t say ‘no’ either. He could never learn to make a choice.

His aunt Helen said to him, ‘No one will ever care for you if you carry on like this. You have no more mind than a blade of grass.’ Arthur looked wise, but said nothing.

One rainy day the rats heard a great noise in the loft where they lived. The pine rafters were all rotten, and at last one of the joists had given way and fallen to the ground. The walls shook, and all

the rats' hair stood on end with fear and horror. 'This won't do,' said the old rat who was chief. 'I'll send out scouts to search for a new home.'

Three hours later the seven scouts came back and said, 'We've found a stone house which is just what we wanted: there is room and good food for us all. There is a kindly horse named Nelly, a cow, a calf, and a garden with an elm tree.' Just then the old rat caught sight of young Arthur. 'Are you coming with us?' he asked. 'I don't know,' Arthur sighed, 'the roof may not come down just yet.' 'Well,' said the old rat angrily, 'we can't wait all day for you to make up your mind. Right about face! March!' And they went off.

Arthur stood and watched the other rats hurry away. The idea of an immediate decision was too much for him. 'I'll go back to my hole for a bit,' he said to himself, 'just to make up my mind.'

That night there was a great crash that shook the earth, and down came the whole roof. Next day some men rode up and looked at the ruins. One of them moved a board, and under it they saw a young rat lying on his side, quite dead, half in and half out of his hole.

You'll notice straightaway that this speaker, Luke, whose non-regionally defined speech is not atypical of the younger generation of educated British speakers, sounds different from Jeremy in many ways. Since Luke grew up in the early 2000s (the recording dates from 2018), his pronunciation indicates that well before the end of the twentieth century GB was effectively largely replacing traditional RP.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, there was talk of a 'new' variety of British English which was dubbed **Estuary English** – a term originally coined by David Rosewarne (1984) and later enthusiastically embraced by the media. The estuary in question is that of the Thames, and the name was given to the speech of those whose accents are a compromise between traditional RP and popular London speech (or Cockney, see [Section C2](#)). Listen to this speaker, Matthew, a university lecturer, who was born and grew up in London, and whose speech is what many would consider typical of Estuary English. Matthew's accent is clearly influenced by his London upbringing, but has none of the low-status basilectal features of Cockney as described on pp. 224–5.

### [Estuary English](#) 🎧 [recording A1.3](#)

*Matthew:* but generally speaking – I thought Sheffield was a lovely place –  
I enjoyed my time there immensely – some of the things that people

said to you – took a little bit of getting used to – I did I think look askance the first time – I got on a bus – and I was called ‘love’ by the bus driver – but I wasn’t really used to this kind of thing at the time – I do remember one thing – it was delightfully quiet in Sheffield because – I grew up – in west London near the flight path of Heathrow – the first night I slept in Sheffield – I couldn’t sleep – and – this was despite some kind of – hideous sherry party which had been thrown to – loosen up the students in some kind of way – and eventually I worked out why I couldn’t sleep – and that was because it was so bloody quiet – I was used to the dim roar of Heathrow – and the traffic of the M4 and the A4 – vague hiss in the background – and to be confronted with a room to sleep in – where there was no noise whatsoever – was quite frightening really – and I think that was one of the reasons – that I developed the habit of wanting to go to sleep with music on – to protect me from this terrifying silence – now I must stress that Sheffield is not known for its silence generally – but the university part of the city – is in a very green area – well away from all of Sheffield’s industrial past as it were – and was actually a very quiet place – unless there was somebody running down your student corridor shrieking

In the 1990s and the first few years of the 2000s, this putative new variety was fiercely debated both in the media and academia, but since then interest in Estuary English has waned and been replaced by discussion of the capital’s latest linguistic innovation – Multicultural London English (see p. [225](#)). Claims were made that Estuary English would in the future become the new prestige British accent – but it’s too early to make predictions. What does seem certain, however, is that change is in progress, and that one can no longer delimit a prestige accent of British English as easily as one could in the early twentieth century. The speech of young educated speakers in the south of England indeed appears to show a considerable degree of London influence (Fabricius 2000). By introducing the term GB, which is more encompassing than traditional RP, we take account of this development.

## World Englishes

A British model of English is what is most commonly taught to students learning English as a second language in Europe, Africa, India and much of Asia. In this book, GB is the accent we assume non- native speakers will choose. Our main reason for selecting GB is that English of this kind is easily understood, not only all over Britain, but also elsewhere in the world.

In Scotland, Ireland and Wales, notwithstanding the fact that there never were very many speakers of RP in those countries, the accent was formerly held in high regard (certainly this is less so nowadays). This was also true of more distant English-speaking countries such as Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Today scarcely any Australians, New Zealanders or South Africans consciously imitate traditional RP as was once the case, even though the speech of radio and television announcers in these countries clearly shows close relationships with British English. In the USA, surprisingly, there was also many years ago a tradition of using a special artificial type of English, based on RP, for the stage – especially for Shakespeare and other classic drama. Even today, the ‘British accent’ (by which Americans essentially mean traditional RP) retains a degree of prestige in the United States; this is especially so in the acting profession – although increasingly in the modern cinema it seems to be the villains rather than the heroes who speak in this manner!

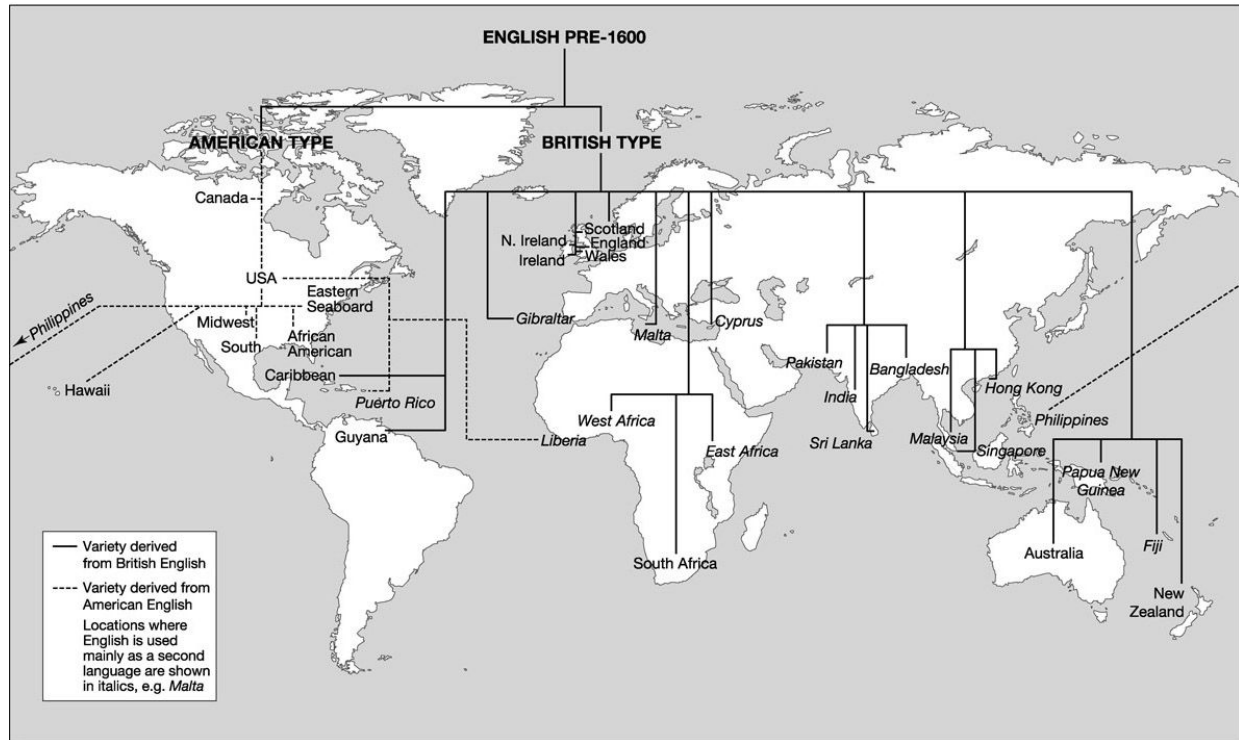
But in the twenty- first century, any kind of British English is in reality a minority form. Most English is spoken outside the British Isles – notably in the USA, where it is the first language of more than 220 million people. It is also used in several other countries as a first language, e.g. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the countries of the Caribbean. English is used widely as a second language for official purposes, again by millions of speakers, in Southern Asia, e.g. India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and in many countries across Africa. In addition, there are large second-language English-

speaking populations in, for example, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore. In total, there are probably as many as 330 million native speakers of English, and it is thought that in addition an even greater number speak English as a second language – numbers are difficult to estimate (Crystal 2003: 59–71). [Figure A1.2](#) (p. 8) provides a map showing the two family trees of British and American varieties of English. Locations populated largely by second-language English users are indicated in italics. See Crystal (2003: 62–5) for a table giving estimates of first and second-language English speakers in over 70 countries.

Let's now look a little more closely at two regions of the world where English is used as a first language – North America (USA and Canada) and Australasia (Australia and New Zealand). In the United States, over the course of the last century, an accent of English developed which today goes under the name of **General American** (often abbreviated to **GA**). This variety is an amalgam of the educated speech of the northern USA, having otherwise few recognisably local features. It is said to be in origin the educated English of the Midwest of America; it certainly lacks the characteristic accent forms of East Coast cities such as New York and Boston. Canadian English bears a strong family resemblance to GA – although it has one or two features which set it firmly apart. On the other hand, the accents of the southern states of America are clearly quite different from GA in very many respects.

GA is to be heard very widely from announcers and presenters on television and radio networks all over the USA, and for this reason it is popularly known by another name, 'Network American.' General American is also used as a model by millions of students learning English as a second language – notably in Latin America and Japan, but nowadays increasingly elsewhere. We shall return to this variety in [Section C1](#).

Other varieties of English which are now of global significance are those spoken in Australia and New Zealand. Once again there is an obvious relationship between



[Figure A1.2](#) Map indicating locations of main varieties of English worldwide (after [Stevens 1980: 86](#); [Crystal 2003: 70](#))

these two varieties, although they also have clear differences from each other. New Zealand English has distinct ‘South Island’ types of pronunciation – but there is surprisingly little regional variation across the huge continent of Australia. On the other hand, there is considerable social variation between what are traditionally termed ‘Broad Australian,’ ‘General Australian’ and ‘Cultivated Australian English.’ The first is the kind which most vigorously exhibits distinctive Australian features and is the everyday speech of perhaps a third of the population. The last is the term used for the most prestigious variety (in all respects much closer to British GB); this minority accent is not only to be heard from television and radio presenters but is also, in Australia itself, taught as a model to foreign learners. General Australian, used by the majority of Australians, falls between these two extremes.

Finally, we have to remember that while there are so many different world varieties of English, they are essentially (at least in their standard forms) very similar. In fact, although the differences are interesting, it’s the degree of

similarity characterising these widely dispersed varieties of English which is really far more striking. English as used by educated speakers is readily understood all over the world. In fact, it is unquestionably the most widespread form of international communication that has ever existed.

## ***Note***

- <sup>1</sup> The name was first suggested by Jack Windsor Lewis in his (1972) *Concise Pronouncing Dictionary of British and American English* and has been taken up by Cruttenden (2014) and Carley, Mees and Collins (2017).