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RP innovations in Pronouncing Dictionaries

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7 RP INNOVATIONS IN PRONOUNCING DICTIONARIES

Having discussed recent changes and innovations that may be considered to fall within RP elsewhere (Chapter 4), I now turn my attention to the three pronouncing dictionaries that are widely used and that English language professionals and learners alike consult if in doubt. This chapter thus does not offer an in-depth evaluation or analysis of the symbols chosen by the three dictionaries; it presents a mere comparison.

The dictionaries that this chapter aims to compare are: *Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation for Current English* (Upton et al. 2003, hereafter as ‘ODP’), *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* (3rd ed., Wells 2008; hereafter as ‘LPD’), and *Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary* (18th ed., Roach et al. 2011; hereafter as ‘CEPD’).

The last of the three dictionaries follows the steps of Daniel Jones, who is sometimes credited with the authorship. I have decided to sever this tradition on two grounds: firstly because the 18th edition of CEPD no longer describes RP but the ‘BBC English’ and secondly because ‘both the purpose of a model and the accent targeted as the touchstone for [...] the *Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary* are quite different from those originally identified by Jones’ (Upton 2012a: 57).

Upton et al. are about to publish a second edition of their dictionary (it should officially come out in December 2016, but it is more likely that it will be in the first months of 2017; Upton, personal communication). It is called *The Routledge Dictionary of Pronunciation for Current English*. At the moment (November 2016) I cannot access this dictionary, but I have been assured by Upton that the 2nd edition does not bring any new features that should compromise what this publication presents. I thus refer to the 1st edition (2003).

7.1 Vowels

The table below offers a neat overview of the symbols found in the three dictionaries.

Table 96. Comparison of vowels in three pronouncing dictionaries

vowel	ODP	LPD	CEPD
KIT	ɪ		
DRESS	ɛ	e	
TRAP	a	æ	
LOT	ɒ		
STRUT	ʌ		
FOOT	ʊ		
BATH	ɑ: ~ a	ɑ:, § a	ɑ:
CLOTH	ɒ		
NURSE	ə:	ɜ:	
FLEECE	i:		
FACE	eɪ		
PALM	ɑ:		
THOUGHT	ɔ:		
GOAT	əʊ		
GOOSE	u:		
PRICE	ʌɪ	aɪ	
CHOICE	ɔɪ		
MOUTH	aʊ		
NEAR		ɪə	
SQUARE	ɛ:	eə	
START	ɑ:		
NORTH	ɔ:		
FORCE	ɔ:		

vowel	ODP	LPD	CEPD
CURE		ʊə ~ ɔ:	
happY		i	
lettER		ə	
comma		ə	

It can be observed immediately that there is a lot of agreement among the three dictionaries, and there is almost total agreement between LPD and CEPD. ODP diverges from the other two dictionaries in a number of more or less contentious points.

LPD, unlike CEPD, includes short BATH [a], but this realisation is marked with §, which is a symbol used to signal non-RP variants: '[p]ronunciations which are wide spread among educated speakers of British English but which are not, however, considered to be RP (Received Pronunciation) are marked with symbol §.' (Wells 2008: xiv). Interestingly, Wells sticks to [æ] even here, although northern short BATH (unlike traditional RP TRAP [æ]) has always been realised as a fully open front vowel; i.e. there has not been any change or development in the past decades.

No mention in any of the three dictionaries is made of FOOT/GOOSE fronting. Arguably, this phenomenon has been researched only a little and it is a phenomenon that seems to be strongly linked with young RP speakers (Upton 2008: 245). Besides, it is a feature that displays a range of various realisations in terms of centralisation, lowering and unrounding (Cruttenden 2008: 127). All these reasons seem to be behind the fact that this feature is not even touched upon in the dictionaries. It remains to be seen for how long.

LPD also introduces a new allophone [ʊ] in GOAT words where the diphthong is followed by /l/, e.g. *cold*. The entry for this word in LPD is then /kəʊld/ → /kɔʊld/. The symbol → 'precedes secondary pronunciations that can be regarded as derived by automatic rule from the main pronunciation'; an example is 'the use of the special allophone ɒʊ before l in some varieties of (near-) RP' (Wells 2008: xxviii). Such a change could eventually lead to the introduction of a new lexical set—possibly called COLD?

CURE is both [kjʊə] and [jɔ:] for all the three dictionaries; CEPD and LPD give the former variant first to indicate that it is more common. Interestingly, with *poor* the order of the two variants is reversed: LPD even supports its choice by making reference to a preference poll in which 74% of British English speakers prefer [ɔ:] (Wells 2008: 628).

7.2 Consonants

Consonants are not as volatile as vowels and the three dictionaries thus show a great deal of agreement regarding their representations. The consonants are the same as in The List of phonetic symbols (p. 10) here. Yet, there are a number of consonantal features that may be considered RP, and these merit an in-depth treatment.

The glottal stop

[ʔ] is missing in entries for words where it could possibly appear. This is not surprising given the sheer complexity of the feature.

While ODP does not mention the feature at all, LPD provides information about [ʔ] in an extra information box: '[ʔ] is found as an allophone of t only at the end of a syllable, and if the preceding sound is a vowel or sonorant. Providing these conditions are met, it is widely used in British English where the following sound is an obstruent, a nasal, a semivowel or non-syllabic l' (Wells 2008: 345). LPD provides the following examples: *football, outside, that faint buzz, atmospheric, button, that name, Gatwick, quite well, brightly*. LPD goes on to say that 'some speakers of British English also use it at the end of a word under other circumstances as well: *not only this, but also that*'. Interestingly, LPD does not provide much information regarding the status of [ʔ] in RP. It says that 'it is condemned by some people; nevertheless, it is increasingly heard' (Wells 2008: 345).

CEPD treats the glottal stop in the Glossary at the back of the dictionary. It describes how the sound is articulated and tells its readers that '[t]his pronunciation is found in many urban accents, notably London (Cockney), Leeds, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and others, and is increasingly accepted among educated young people' (Roach et al. 2011: 567). No information is provided regarding the status of [ʔ] in RP or the various phonetic environments in which [ʔ] can appear.

Intrusive /r/

ODP indicates the possibility of an intrusive /r/ by means of the following: (*r*). The italicised form stands in opposition to the non-italicised form, which indicates linking /r/. Thus *Clara* is transcribed as [kle:rə(*r*)]. ODP also mentions in the Introduction that though it was '[l]ong condemned by teachers of pronunciation, this is nevertheless a firmly established feature of today's RP' (Upton et al. 2003: xiii).

LPD (Wells 2008: 663) explains what intrusive /r/ is. It then informs its readers that it cannot show intrusive /r/ across word boundaries. It does, however, show word-internal intrusive /r/, e.g. in *thawing* [θɔːrɪŋ]. The raised type indicates that the sound is optional.

CEPD does not include intrusive /r/ in its entries. As it is the case with the glottal stop, it provides information about this phenomenon in the Glossary (2011: 565). It says that intrusive /r/ occurs in BBC English but does not include any information regarding the degree of its acceptability in the prestige accent.

Yod-coalescence

In LPD *tune* is given as [tju:n] and [tʃu:n]. The former comes first even though in the preference poll this variant only scores 44% (and less than 32% for people born since 1981; Wells 2008: 845). Wells also remarks that the coalesced sound is avoided in careful RP (2008: 52). CEPD reverses the order of the two variants, thereby preferring coalesced [tʃ].

ODP includes both variants, but it does not provide a hierarchy of variants in terms of acceptability. While it may be difficult to determine now which variant should be prioritised, the trend presented in Wells (2008: 845) strongly suggests that the coalesced variant will gain more and more ground.

The two variants occupy the same positions in CEPD and LPD for *gradual* (the difference between *tune* and *gradual* being the position of the word stress in relation to the coalesced syllable). The preference poll in LPD reveals that 51% of British English speakers prefer [dʒ]. ODP *gradual* is the same as *tune* (i.e. neither of the two variants is preferred to the other).

Both LPD and CEPD offer more information about this phenomenon in an extra information box and the Glossary respectively (Wells 2008: 350; Roach et al. 2011: 563). They point out that it can also occur across word boundaries, thereby giving *let you* [letʃu]. They agree that this belongs to RP.

Yod-dropping

Upton (2008: 250) notes that in RP /j/ is commonly dropped only after /s/ and /l/.

Indeed, LPD and CEPD prefer [su:t] to [sju:t] in *suit*. The former supports its choice by citing a preference poll in which 72% of British English speakers drop /j/ in this word (Wells 2008: 790). ODP transcribes *suit* as [s(j)u:t]; the bracketed sound is viewed as optional.

With *new* the situation is different: LPD gives both options, but [nu:] is labelled § (non-RP). CEPD and ODP only give [nju:].

