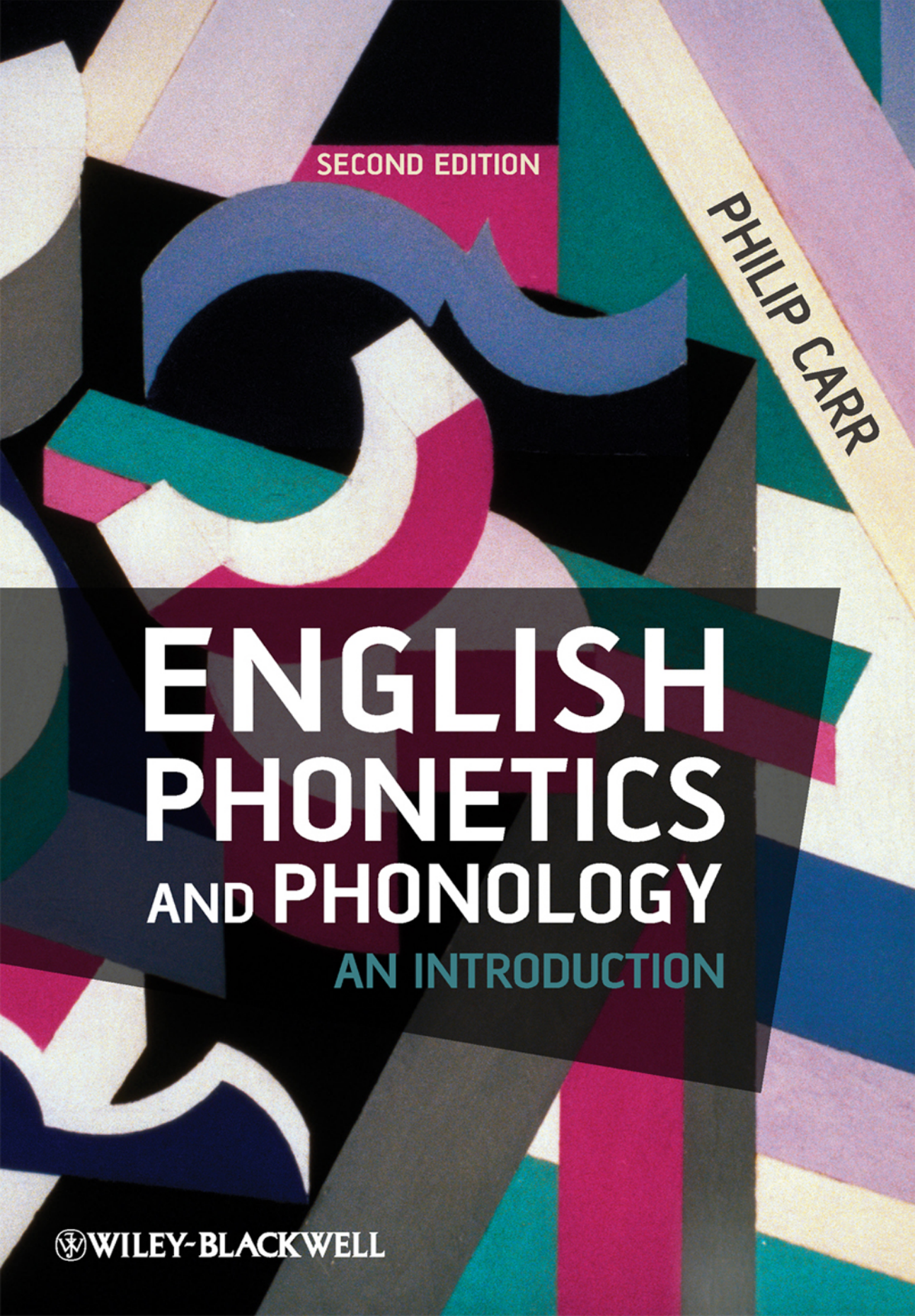
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PHILIP CARR
ENGLISH PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY
AN INTRODUCTION
WILEY-BLACKWELL

English Phonetics and Phonology

English Phonetics and Phonology

An Introduction

Second Edition

Philip Carr

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Editorial Offices
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Sound Recordings

These sound files accompany exercises, the treatment of intonation, and the description of some of the varieties of English given here. They are marked in the margins with a headphones symbol (as shown), and are available at: www.wiley.com/go/carrphonetics

Listen to sound files online

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Track 1.2: Exercise 5
Track 1.3: Exercise 6

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Track 2.2: Exercise 2
Track 2.3: Exercise 3

Track 3.1: Exercise 3

Track 4.1: Exercise 3

Track 5.1: Exercise 4

Track 6.1: *Marry Merry Mary* (vowel neutralization in GA)
Track 6.2: Exercise 3

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Track 8.1: Exercise 1
Track 8.2: Exercise 2
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Track 9.2: Exercise 3
Track 9.3: Exercise 4

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Track 10.2: Example (2) (rising tone)
Track 10.3: Example (3) (rise-fall)
Track 10.4: Example (4) (fall-rise)
Track 10.5: Example (5) (last lexical item)
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Track 10.7: Example (7) (last lexical item)
Track 10.8: Example (8) (contrastive intonation)
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Track 10.10: Example (10) (contrastive intonation)
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Track 10.14: Example (15) (synonyms and given information)
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Track 10.18: Example (19) (final temporal adverbials and contrastive intonation)
Track 10.19: Example (20) (fronted temporal adverbials)
Track 10.20: Example (21) (event sentences)
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Prefaces to the First Edition

Preface for Teachers

Each year in the Department of English at Newcastle University, I am given eleven 50-minute lecture slots in which to introduce English phonetics and phonology to around a hundred students in the first semester of their first year on a variety of different undergraduate degree programmes, including English language and literature, linguistics, English language, modern languages, music, history and many others. Also included in the student body are European exchange undergraduates and students taking applied linguistics postgraduate degrees in media technology and in linguistics for teachers of English as a second language.

Given the range of degree types, this is a daunting task, made even more difficult by the fact that a substantial minority of the students do not have English as their first language. In a typical year, the student cohort will include speakers of Arabic, French, Spanish, German, Greek, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin or Cantonese Chinese, and Thai. Many of the non-native speakers will have been taught RP; others will have been taught General American. Amongst the native speakers of English, very few of the students will be speakers of RP, so that the non-native speakers are more likely to speak RP than the native speakers.

The vast majority of the student body will take their study of English phonetics and phonology no further, and the one factor which the majority of this diverse band of students shares is that they have no previous knowledge of phonetics or phonology; the course must therefore be *ab initio*.

One faces a dilemma in teaching such a course: on the one hand, one wants to cater to the small minority who will go on to study phonology at a more advanced level. On the other hand, one wants to introduce the subject without overwhelming the students with a mass of bewildering descriptive detail and an avalanche of seemingly arcane theoretical constructs. It is a moot point whether this dilemma can be resolved. However, this textbook was written as an attempt at a solution.

It is arguable that textbooks are harder to write than monographs, and that the more elementary the textbook, the harder it is to write: one can barely write a line without being aware of one's often questionable assumptions, and one has always to resist the temptation to question them in the body of the text. One continually has the sense of one's peers looking over one's shoulder and guffawing at the absurd oversimplifications which one is knowingly committing to print. But it has to be done: students have to learn to walk before they can learn to run; they also have to learn to crawl before they can learn to walk.

Writing and using textbooks is an empirical matter: it is very often immediately apparent when an exercise, chapter or book is simply not working, for a given body of students. Almost all of the textbooks which I have used on the first-year Newcastle course described here have proved to be unsuitable for this type of student cohort in one way or another; mostly, they have contained far too much detail. I have therefore set out to write a very short, very simple coursebook which deliberately ignores a great many descriptive/theoretical complexities.

My aim has not been to introduce students to phonological theory; rather, I have sought to introduce some of the bare essentials of English phonetics and phonology in a manner that is as theory-neutral as possible. This is fundamentally problematic, of course, since there is no such thing as theory-neutral description. I have therefore decided to adopt various theoretical/descriptive views, such as the tongue-arch/cardinal vowel approach to articulatory description, the phonemic approach to segmental phonology, the trochaic approach to English foot structure, and so on, on the purely pragmatic basis of what I have found to be easiest to convey to the students.

I have ignored acoustic phonetics for the very simple reason that our department lacks a phonetics lab, and I have not included distinctive features, since the mere sight of arrays of features marked with '+' and '–' symbols seems to render large numbers of my first-year students dizzy (particularly those majoring in English literature). I have also excluded feature geometry, the mora, underspecification and a great many other theoretical/descriptive notions, in an attempt to pare the subject down to a bare minimum of these.

The first four chapters are deliberately very short indeed, and contain only the most elementary introduction to articulatory phonetics. My aim there is to offer the student a gentle introduction to the course. I have spread the introduction of the phonemic principle over two chapters, since, in my experience, students find their first encounter with these ideas something of a quantum leap. The chapters on word stress, rhythm, connected speech phenomena and accent variation contain a very stripped-down, minimal, account of those subjects; I hope that there is enough there to act as a foundation for those students who wish to study these matters in more depth. In the chapter on syllable structure, I have been a little more ambitious in introducing analytical complexity, on the assumption that syllable structure is something that beginning students seem to be able to get the hang of more easily than, say, rhythm or intonation.

I believe that one of the most important duties of a university teacher is to induce in the student a sense of critical awareness, a grasp of argumentation and the role of evidence. On the other hand, one has to be very wary of introducing students at the most elementary stage to the idea of competing analyses: they find it difficult enough to get the hang of one sort of analysis, without being asked to assess the merits and demerits of competing analyses (even at the post-elementary stage, most undergraduates are very resistant to the idea of critically comparing different analyses). I have tried to overcome this dilemma by introducing competing analyses and assumptions at one or two points, while consciously ignoring them elsewhere.

The exercises are meant to be discussed at weekly seminar/tutorial meetings; my experience is that, if phonetics/phonology students are not made to do exercises, they easily come to believe that they have grasped the subject when in fact they have not. It is my hope that students who have completed this course would find it possible to tackle more advanced textbook treatments of these topics, such as those given by Giegerich (1992) and Spencer (1996). Whether that hope is fulfilled is, of course, very much an empirical matter.

Preface for Students

This is an elementary introduction to English phonetics and phonology, designed for those who have no previous knowledge whatsoever of the subject. It begins with a very elementary introduction to articulatory phonetics, and then proceeds to introduce the student to a very simplified account of some of the main aspects of the phonological structure of present-day English.

It is arguable that there are two main questions one might ask in studying the English language: what is it about English that makes it a language (as opposed to, say, a non-human communication system), and what is it about English that makes it English (as opposed to, say, French or Korean)? This book attempts to provide the beginnings of an answer to both of those questions, with respect to one aspect of English: its phonology.

Thus, although the subject matter of this book is English, there is reference to the phonology of other languages at several points, often in contrastive exercises which are designed to bring out one or more differences between English and another language. These contrastive exercises are included because native speakers of English, who often have little or no detailed knowledge of other languages, tend to assume that the phonology of English is the way it is as a matter of natural fact, a matter of necessity. For many such speakers, it will seem somehow natural, for instance, that the presence of the sound [f] as opposed to [v] functions to signal a difference in meaning (as in *fan* vs *van*). To the English speaker, [f] and [v] will therefore seem easily distinguishable, and that too will appear to be a natural fact. But the fact that these sounds have that function in English is a conventional, not a necessary or natural fact: English need not have been that way, and may not always

be that way. Just as one can gain a new perspective on one's own culture by learning about other cultures, so one can gain a fresh perspective on one's native language by learning a little about other languages. One can also, in learning about other cultures, gain some sense of what human cultures are like. Similarly, one can begin to get a sense of what human language phonologies are like by learning in what respects they resemble each other. Those points of resemblance concern general organizational properties of human language phonologies, such as the phonemic principle and the principles of syllable structure.

Reading a textbook on linguistic analysis is not like reading a novel. It is vital that the student complete the exercises at the end of each chapter before proceeding to the next chapter: they are designed to get the student to apply the ideas introduced in the chapter. The reader will not have properly grasped the ideas contained in this, or any other, textbook on phonology by simply sitting back in an armchair and reading the text, even if the student is under the impression of having understood the ideas. Vast numbers of students who have attempted to master linguistic analysis without actually doing it have ended up with disastrous exam results: no one ever became any good at linguistic analysis without actually doing it.

Like most linguistics textbooks, this book is cumulative in nature: what has been introduced in earlier chapters is presupposed in later chapters. It is fatal, therefore, to let several weeks go by without doing the reading and the exercises, in the hope of catching up later: the result is very likely to be that you will simply find yourself out of your depth, even though this is an elementary textbook. It is simply not possible to dip in and out of a linguistic analysis textbook, no matter how basic, in the way that one might dip in and out of a dictionary or an encyclopedia.

This book is designed to cater for students who, in all probability, will not pursue their studies in English phonetics and phonology any further. However, students who will be proceeding to a more advanced level should be able to tackle more advanced textbook treatments of these topics, such as those given by Giegerich and by Spencer (see Suggested Further Reading at the end of the book). Those students should also find it easier to tackle one of the many introductions to general phonological theory which are not focused on English (again, see Suggested Further Reading). In order to prepare such students for more advanced study, I have introduced, at some points, an indication of some of the difficulties with some of the assumptions made in this textbook, or a brief discussion of competing analyses. Although this textbook merely scratches the surface of the subject matter, I hope that there is enough here to make the subject of phonology seem intriguing to the student who intends to pursue his or her studies.

It is my hope that this book will be of some use to teachers of English as a foreign language, although it is not designed specifically for such readers. I am always surprised to discover how little in the way of knowledge of English phonetics and phonology such teachers often have. I have no experience of such teaching, and while I make no suggestions as to how the notions introduced in this book might be put to use in the TEFL classroom, I find it hard to believe that a knowledge of

the basics of English phonetics and phonology could fail to be useful to the TEFL teacher in some way, even if only as background knowledge which extends the teacher's knowledge of English. I also hope that some of the contrastive exercises might help suggest ways in which one's native language phonology can interfere with one's attempt to acquire English as a second language.

Newcastle, February 1999

Preface to the Second Edition

The first edition of this book was written while I was teaching in an English university. Since then, I have moved to the English department at Montpellier University, in France. While I always had non-native speakers of English in my classes at Newcastle University, most of my students were native speakers of English; now, the vast majority of my students are not native speakers of English. Most are French, but there are also Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, German, Dutch, Polish, Russian and Bulgarian students, among others. The book has changed as a result: it is more orientated towards learners of English as a foreign language, but it is still useful for native speakers, I believe.

The main changes to the text concern the later chapters: chapters 8, 9 and 10 have been entirely rewritten, and there is a new chapter (chapter 11) on the relationship between spelling and pronunciation, known as grapho-phonemics. Teachers whose students are native speakers of English may choose to skip this chapter, but it could prove useful for students who wish to go on to teach English as a foreign language. I have expanded the appendix (renamed as chapter 13) to cover additional varieties of English. There are now sound files which accompany exercises, the treatment of intonation, and the description of some of the varieties of English given here: these are marked in the margins with a headphones symbol.

I have insisted on retaining practice at phonetic transcription, for two reasons. Firstly, I believe that it reinforces the distinction between phonetic transcription, based on listening to speech sounds, and phonological analysis, in which phonemes (as conceived of here) are not speech sounds, and cannot be heard. Secondly, I hope that some readers of this book will go on to engage in the empirical study of varieties of English, which typically involves both listening carefully to, and phonetically transcribing, recordings of speakers of various accents, and also engaging with theoretical issues in the analysis of those accents. The phonetic transcription exercises are now based on audio recordings.

The book is not intended as an introduction to phonological theory; some books of that sort are listed in the Suggested Further Reading. Inevitably, I have had to draw on notions proposed in various theoretical frameworks. Any proposed distinction between theory and description is fraught with difficulties: there can be no description without theoretical assumptions, as the philosopher of science Karl Popper pointed out. However, in my view, some kind of distinction between theory and description must be upheld. My aims here are primarily descriptive.

Any queries and/or corrections can be sent to: philip.carr@univ-montp3.fr

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Acknowledgements, Second Edition

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