A NEW DICTIONARY OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

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ABSTRACT. The author's newly compiled Longman Pronunciation Dictionary [5] is not restricted to British RP but also covers American English. Unlike EPD [2], it gives extensive coverage to inflected and derived forms; unlike LE, it has entries for affixes and compounds, and offers spelling-to-sound guidelines. Entries incorporate new treatments of epenthesis, syllabic consonants, and “compression” (variability). For nearly a hundred words where competing pronunciations are known to be in use, LE reports the findings of an opinion poll of speaker preferences—the largest such poll ever conducted.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Longman Pronunciation Dictionary (LPD) [5] was published last year as the culmination of four years' work.

There are three principal things, missing from ordinary dictionaries, that a pronunciation dictionary can offer: information on variants, on inflected and derived forms, and on proper names. All these are in LPD, along with guidance on English spelling-to-sound rules, on the pronunciation of combining forms and affixes (and the effect they have on word stress) and on English phonetics in general.

There was of course already in existence an excellent pronunciation dictionary of English: the classic EPD [2], compiled by Daniel Jones over seventy years ago and more recently revised, first by Gibson and now by Ramsaran. The aim of LPD was to improve upon it.

1.1 Variant pronunciations

Many English words are pronounced in more than one way. As well as the recommended or most usual pronunciation of a word (not necessarily the same thing!), LPD records also the variant pronunciations in common use: not only those considered to fall within RP, but also a limited range of variants from non-RP British English (regional forms restricted to particular parts of the British Isles). Thus as well as again with both /a/ and /e/, LED also shows one with northern /a/ alongside the usual /a/, and solves with the southern /a/ alongside /e/. Also, more importantly, it gives the General American forms, so entailing for those EFL learners who use their model. The entry for tomato reads to /tə'mætoʊ/ or /tə'meɪtoʊ/ -- where /t/ introduces an American pronunciation, here with the characteristic American voiced /t/. Judged so salient an allophone as to demand explicit notation, there are also occasional references to Scottish (though), West Indian (bridge), Irish (name of the letter I) and other varieties from outside England.

An extensive listing of variants creates the danger of making the dictionary difficult for the ordinary EFL student, who just wants advice on the pronunciation he should use. LPD helps this kind of user by putting the recommended form in colour (blue), and the other possibilities in less conspicuous black. If the recommended British and American forms are different from one another, then both are printed in colour.

1.2 Inflected and derived forms

These are always readily inferred by a dictionary user, even if they are regularly formed. He may know that breathe is brēθ rather than brēθit, and that breathe is brēθeit rather than brēθit.

1.3 Proper names

Ordinary dictionaries contain few proper names. Yet the spelling is a notoriously unreliable guide to their pronunciation. So LPD offers good coverage of names of

- people (forenames — Angshard, Graham, Ralph, and surnames — Nycefie, Macrionbana, McBlome, Meky);
- literary characters — Gulsarn, Lear, Peter Pan; gods, goddesses and figures of myth and legend — Thor, Hephaestus, Robin Hood;

- places (not only in Britain, as Gloucester and Chiswick, and the less well known Lymne, Stivichall, and Whedder, but also in Ireland (Leas, Rahiden), North America (Poughkeepsie, Spokane), South Africa (Vilianege) and Australia (Brisbain), as well as many hundreds in non-English-speaking countries); and
- commerce and products, such as the textilis we eat for breakfast or Exxon whose petrol we buy; and on from Aspro tablets, Armalite rifles, and Airline food and T-fronts underwear.

1.4 Foreign languages

A few entries are in a notoriously unreliable guide to pronunciation, the phonetic alphabet familiar to Nato and elsewhere.

1.5 Speech technology applications

As previously announced, LPD was compiled with machine-readable form and can thus in principle be made available as an electronic database. The requirement for such recognition a pronunciation dictionary look-up can be used in order to match an incoming signal against possible lexical strings; in speech synthesis its usefulness is obvious, given the uncertainty of English spelling-to-sound rules.

No comparable machine-readable database exists. Enquiries should be addressed to the publishers, Longman.

2. NOTATION

The transcription system is essentially the “EPD-14” IPA notation employed in the current, fourteenth, edition of EPD and by many other writers, particularly in the EFL sphere. This differs from older notations in that the distinction between paired vowels and short vowels is symbolized both by separate letters and by presence/absence of length marks.

Examples: lex (with stress on the first syllable), lex, lex; food fu:d, good food; food fu:d, good food.
and practical considerations have like happy, 99111334 Lue}; is in RP
Many speakers, however, identify to BPD-14, as follows.
forced certain minor modifications
2.1 Neutralization of high vowels
phonologically
lowed others [3, 4] in employing
the symbol i (lower case, no
neutralization, and also i for the
phonemic opposition. I have fol-
lowed the symbol i (lower case, no
extension to the EPD-14 system needs certain
extensions, chosen in such a way
as to harmonize with the notation
of an italicized symbol to show
syllabic consonants by
is written "sAd 'n, implying a
sequence of two weak-vowelled
syllables, the first of which loses
its syllabicity. The rule is,
however, subject to lexical con-
straints (contrast ballyer and
besurry).

3.5 Compression and smoothing
The number of syllables in an
English word may be variable: we
can often compress two syllables
into one. Thus listen[ed] for
instance, may have three syllables
or two; likewise lent[ed]. Choice of
variant may depend on stylistic
or pragmatic factors. This
variability is shown by a special
convention in LED, thus
1111n111, 'lin 111.
The phonological environment
for compression is typically a
sequence of two weak-vowelled
syllables, the first of which loses
its syllabicity. The rule is,
however, subject to lexical con-
straints (contrast ballyer and
besurry).

Combining these treatments of
potential syllabic consonants
and compression, we achieve
notably succinct entries for such
words as national 'næs 'næl and
liberal 'lib 'rəl; each of these
confines what Jones would treat
as six distinct variants.

By smoothing I refer to the
RP tendency for a stressed vowel
to be simplified when immediately
followed by a weak vowel. A
diphthong in this environment
is simplified; its second ele-
ment; a high vowel becomes lax.
Thus in client, the /æ/ may be
simplified to [æ] before /æ/. In
runyon the /æ/ may become [a].
However, these sequences are subject to the possibility of
compression. LED's entries read
kla:ər 'ont, 'ru:ən 'æs.
(An actual triphthong for nearly a
hundred words where competing
pronunciations are known to be in
use. LED reports the preferences
expressed by panel of 275 native
speakers of British English.
The panel consisted mostly of
academic phoneticians/linguists
specialists, school or college
teachers, radio announcers, and
speech scientists.

The survey revealed that in
zebra /æ/ is heavily preferred
over /i:/, in accomplishment /ə/ over
/i:/, in delay /ə/ over /i:/, and
in year /æ/ over /i:/; in people
/æ/ has largely displaced /i/;
zub is bow usually said without
/ə/ or /u/ and American
speakers prefer often with no /i/.

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