SOME RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN STANDARD BRITISH ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION AND THE TEACHING OF EFL

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1. Preliminary remarks

In most English departments at German universities the teaching of practical English phonetics has enjoyed a long and well-established tradition. In more recent times, such courses have not only dealt with the groundwork of English (mostly articulatory) phonetics, but also added relevant aspects of modern phonological theory, socio-linguistics and dialectology. Since the availability of language laboratories and adequate practice material, pronunciation exercises have become an efficient means of pointing students individually in the direction of a "near-native" pronunciation – to what A.C. Gimson called the target of "high acceptability" (Cruttenden, 2000, 299).

As non-native teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and especially phonetics teachers, we are realistic – and self-critical – enough to know that few of our students, or, for that matter, few of us, will ever sound exactly like native English speakers. But we do have to make sure that the model prospective teachers set to following generations of pupils in our schools is not too far from what a native speaker sounds like. In this we rightly expect a high degree of precision in the phonetic/allophonic realization of phonemes and confident handling of accentual and intonation patterns of English. As J.D. O'Connor once put it: "Make no mistake, your aim must be to acquire a perfect English pronunciation. You will almost certainly not succeed in this aim because it requires […] a very rare gift; but unless this is your aim you will not make all the progress of which you are capable; keep working towards perfection until you are quite sure that it is neither necessary nor profitable for you to continue. Then you will have done yourself justice" (O'Connor, 1967, 6).

While this is a practical message constantly to be brought home to our students there are other, more theoretical, insights of which the phonetics teacher ought to make students aware. They shall be at the focus of this paper:

Festschrift for Max Mangold, Phonus 6, IPUS, Saarbrücken, 2002, 221-235

(a) There *are* recent developments in Standard British English pronunciation. Linguistic change, so neatly observable on the lexical plain, has – even "within living memory", to use a phrase by Barbara Strang (Strang, 1974) – not stopped at the phonological door. Thanks to a most thorough and ongoing documentation of English phonetics and pronunciation during the last several decades, we are able to keep track of these developments. In fact, as far as I know, no other language can pride itself on having been documented as thoroughly as English.

(b) Teachers of EFL should not ignore these developments, but rather react to them in an adequate way. Foreign language teaching in my observation often suffers from what I would like to call a "didactic time lag". After all, a typical middle-aged English teacher learned the language some thirty to forty years ago, perhaps from a not so very young teacher and, very likely, from not very up-to-date textbooks. This easily adds up to a time lag of several generations. Consequently, his or her English may well sound rather old-fashioned, if not antiquated. This can only be avoided by the teacher keeping in close touch with modern developments, seeking exposure to present-day English as much as possible, and adjusting and correcting his or her English accordingly.

(c) A certain warning may also be in order. Some features of modern speech may well be short-lived and not worth adopting, others may be out of place in a certain context and again others socially inappropriate. In any case, I think the foreign learner – and teacher – is well advised to stick to established norms. With regard to British English pronunciation, this in my view still remains RP, Received Pronunciation (or alternatively, as some prefer, the "BBC accent"; EPD 15, viii), in spite of what has been put forward against it. It still is the implicitly accepted standard of educated English in Britain, as codified in Jones and Wells' pronouncing dictionaries, Gimson's *Introduction* and Wells' *Accents of English*. Although Wells calls the term "less than happy" (Wells, 1982, 117), and, as Peter Roach ("rather quaint name"; 1983, 5) once put it, "the idea of a standard Received Pronunciation is a convenient fiction, not a scientific fact" (Roach,1983, 158), I think as EFL teachers we can live with such a fiction very well, and we should be grateful that we have it. Indeed, I believe that we must distinguish between the needs of EFL for an established standard and the changing socio-linguistic situation within the English speech community. As foreign teachers of English we can lean back comfortably and watch what will happen. In the meantime, we should, for pedagogical purposes, continue teaching the accent which in England and Wales is still "most widely regarded as a model for correct pronunciation, particularly for educated formal speech" (LPD 1, xiii), and most

frequently used by "announcers and newsreaders on serious national and international BBC broadcasting channels" (Roach, 1983, 4f).

In particular, I think we have no reason to jump on the bandwagon of so-called "Estuary English". This variety of English has recently been described and one might say, advertised, as "the new standard English" (Coggle, 1993). While it may be true that "Estuary English", a regional accent of English radiating from its London base and to some extent spreading throughout the South East of England, "is now spoken across a very wide social spectrum" (Coggle, 1993, 73), it is in my judgment far too regionally limited, and retains much of its original low class social connotations. In any case it cannot, as the discussion in Britain has shown, claim the authority of a standard, neither within Britain, nor for the purpose of teaching EFL.

In my following remarks I will therefore exclude such prominent "Estuary English" features as

– a reorganization of the vowel system along "Cockney" lines;

– the replacement of fortis plosives in medial position by the glottal stop, in e.g. *butter, settle, matter*;

– the affrication of fortis plosives in initial position, as in *tea, top, time*; Coggle's "breathy *t*" (Coggle, 1993, 43);

– the complete vocalisation of dark [ɬ], as in *little, milk, sell*; Coggle's "*bo'uw a miuwk* syndrome" (Coggle, 1993, 45-47).

All these features are, of course, well known from popular London English (Wells, 1982, 301-334), where they properly belong.

(d) Even at a time when English linguistics was not variationist oriented, Daniel Jones was far from maintaining that what he first called PSP (EPD 1), later RP (EPD 3ff), was a monolithic homogeneous accent. His successors on the chair of English phonetics and linguistics at the University of London and authorities at other British institutions have taken a similarly realistic attitude. A.C. Gimson distinguished three main types of RP, Conservative, General and Advanced, reflecting both generation and social differences (Gimson, 1989, 88). J.C. Wells established a different set of distinctions, neglecting to some extent the chronological aspect and concentrating on social implications: Mainstream RP versus U-RP (beside adding adoptive RP and Near-RP, which need not concern us here; Wells, 1982, 279). And, more recently, Alan Cruttenden has distinguished the three types of General RP, Refined RP and Regional RP (Cruttenden 2001, 80). The most obvious model for teaching EFL should be Wells' Mainstream RP, which corresponds to Gimson's and Cruttenden's General

RP, but includes some of what Gimson called Advanced RP features. Whichever classification of RP variability we use, it seems clear that what appears to be synchronic variation at a given time has in fact often diachronic aspects, in as much as it reflects age-graded usage differences. When investigating some of the changes within modern RP of the last two generations or so, we cannot but recognize that some speech habits once typical of younger speakers have now become typical of Mainstream RP, while other, so-called conservative, forms have become obsolete or are on the verge of becoming so.

In this paper I intend to survey some of these recent developments and at the same time consider their status from a didactic point of view.

2. Phonemic-systemic innovations (in progress)

2.1. Diphthongs and triphthongs

Innovations affecting the phoneme inventory of RP can mainly be observed with some of the traditional diphthongs and triphthongs.

(a) The loss of the centring diphthong /ɔə/ in words like *lore, court, sore* is a case in point. Contrary to Jones' *Outline* (Jones, 1960), Gimson's *Introduction* (Gimson, 1962) no longer included an /ɔə/ phoneme in his vowel inventory, and Wells states that he doubts "whether there are any native RP speakers below pensionable age who have contrastive /ɔə/" (Wells, 1982, 287). By now, /ɔə/ seems to have succumbed to the biological solution, having merged with /ɔː/, and making the word pairs *law:lore, court:caught, sore:saw* homophones in all relevant varieties of RP. Obviously, it would be anachronistic to teach a phonemic contrast. And yet experience shows that the "Schulenglisch" many of our students have been exposed to has not taken this change into consideration, making them sound, as one might jokingly say, like their British peers' grandfathers or grandmothers.

(b) In time, the fate of /ʊə/ may be that of its cousin /ɔə/. Already such words as *sure, poor, moor* have lost their traditional /ʊə/ vowel with a majority of RP speakers. These have no vowel distinction between *shore* and *sure*, *pore* and *poor*, *more* and *moor*. While the lexical incidence of this merger is still restricted to a limited number of words, with the more frequent vocabulary items leading the way, and restricted to certain environments, others may follow. On the one hand, I would think that it is

certainly too early to dismiss this phoneme altogether, but on the other it does not seem too early to actively teach such pronunciations as /ʃɔː, pɔː, mɔː/, pointing out that realizations with /ʊə/ are on the way out. Wells' 1998 survey (Wells, 2000, 44) produced an average of over 70% opting for homophony of *yours* and *yaws* among persons born since 1954.

(c) Similar monophthonging developments are ongoing for /eə/, which tends to appear as /ɛː/, resulting in pronunciations like /bɛː, 'kɛːfl, fɛː/. Cruttenden calls the use of this new phoneme "a completely acceptable alternative in General RP" (Cruttenden 2001, 144) and even "typical of the large majority of speakers of General RP" (Cruttenden 2001, 82).

(d) The reduction of closing diphthongs followed by schwa to diphthongs or even monophthongs in rapid speech is of long standing in RP, having already been pointed out before Daniel Jones. Walter Ripman, for instance, mentions this levelling as a sign of "careless speech" (Ripman, 1914, 80). Jones regards it as a completely neutral variant in EPD 1 (xix), whereas Gimson quotes it as a feature of Advanced RP without any stigma of carelessness (Gimson, 1989, 139f), regarding it as "one of the most striking sound changes affecting Southern British English in the twentieth century" (Gimson, 1989, 140). This tendency has certainly not diminished, although, at least for /aɪə/ and /aʊə/ reduction to a monophthong /ɑː/ does not seem to be "the most likely situation in RP at the moment" (Cruttenden 2001, 140). It would seem, then, that while we are safe in not excluding such levelling tendencies from our teaching of English and demonstrating them with such potential homophones as *tyre* and *tower* /tɑːə/, *slur* and *slower* /slɜː/, *layer* and *lair* /lɛː/, we should not present them as the only and, in many cases, most natural variants.

3. Phonetic-realizational innovations

We can expect such phonetic changes to be somewhat more frequent than those affecting the phonemic system of the language.

3.1. Consonants

As far as I can see, we can largely neglect phenomena within the area of the consonants, which traditionally display much more phonetic stability.

(a) An exception is perhaps the recent increase in the use of the glottal stop [ʔ], both as a variant or reinforcement of plosives, but especially in syllable initial pre-vocalic position. While this "extended usage in RP" (Gimson, 1989, 169) is obvious and cannot be ignored, it should not lead the teacher of EFL in Germany to conclude that the pronunciation of his or her students would gain by neglecting Daniel Jones' advice: "Most foreign people, and more particularly Germans, have a tendency to insert the sound ʔ at the beginning of all words which ought to begin with vowels. […] It is important that the foreign learner should remedy this mistake" (Jones, 1960, 151). This especially holds true in phrasal verbs like *go in*, *make up*, *put off*, etc., where the insertion of a glottal plosive definitely sounds quite un-English.

(b) Another phenomenon worthy of our attention is the reduced occurrence of the "flapped r", especially in medial position following a stressed vowel, as in *sorry, very, carry*, etc., where Cruttenden considers the use of [ɾ] no longer "typical of the large majority of speakers of General RP" (Cruttenden, 2001, 82). Consequently, the teaching of this feature, a longtime favorite of EFL teachers, cannot be an objective any longer.

3.2. Stressed vowels

In the area of vowels, several very clear innovations are noteworthy.

(a) With all stressed front vowels, a certain lowering and centring effect seems to be in progress. With regard to /ɪ/ and /e/, Wells states that a relatively close pronunciation is associated with old-fashioned RP, whereas relatively open and central qualities are common with younger speakers (Wells, 1982, 291). We are then well advised to teach them with a somewhat lower height, approximating in the case of *bit* and *sick* cardinal vowel 2, and in *dead* and *keg* distinctly below this point. The same applies to /æ/, which today shows a clear affinity to cardinal vowel 4. In fact, Peter Roach notes that this vowel "is now considerably more open than it used to be, and the symbol /a/ might one day be considered preferable" (EPD 15, ix). We should however make sure that this new realization of /æ/ does not merge with the *cut* vowel, keeping *cat* and *cut* apart.

(b) In the back vowel region, the vowel /ɔː/ (*paw, faught, caught*) is of special interest in as much as it has become raised to a considerable degree within the last half century or so. Jones still defined the vowel as lying between half-open and open (Jones, 1960, 64). Modern representations put the vowel between half-open and half-close and even approximate it to, or put it above, cardinal vowel 7 (LPD 1, xvii; EPD

15, viii). This results in pronunciations in which the vowels in English *Paul, naught shorn* are indeed very close to those in German *Pol, Not, schon*. Compared to the short vowel /ɒ/ the quality of this vowel has become markedly different. Traditionally, the opposition between these two vowels was a quantitative one, with *pot* differing from *port*, and *cot* from *caught* in length. Today, Mainstream RP has established a primarily qualitative contrast between them. Such words as *pot* and *port*, *cot* and *caught* still represent minimal pairs, yet their phonemic contrast is constituted by the distinctive feature quality, rather than quantity. By now, this change is so well established that a retention of the older type of pronunciation in teaching would not be warranted.

(c) Among the diphthongs, we should comment on the pronunciation of the vowel in *go, boat, load*, etc. In Mainstream RP, the starting point of this vowel has recently shifted from a back/rounded to a central/unrounded position, replacing [oʊ] by [əʊ]. Pronunciations like [goʊ, boʊt, loʊd] are clearly old-fashioned, and not to be recommended as a model for EFL students. Even twenty years ago, Wells assigned them to "those who grew up before 1914" (Wells, 1982, 293), and these are certainly no models for our students. An exception to this is the vowel phoneme occurring before /l/, as in *gold, foal, roll*, etc. Here a somewhat opener starting point of the diphthong has usually been retained. In his LPD, Wells records these variants with the symbol /ɒʊ/ rather than /əʊ/.

3.3. Unstressed /ɪ/

It seems that in pre- and suffixes the frequency of /ə/ as opposed to short unstressed /ɪ/ has increased over the last few decades. Even Jones in the preface to the first edition of his EPD mentioned the possible "substitution of «ə» for «i» in the penultimate syllable of terminations such as -ity and -ily" (EPD 1, xix), without, however, noting them in the dictionary. It was not until Gimson's 14th edition that they were adequately represented in the phonetic transcription of the dictionary's entries. Gimson noted: "The trend towards /ə/ in weak syllables is now […] firmly established among middle and young generation RP speakers" (EPD 14, xvi). It would seem, then, that it is high time that we stop teaching such unrealistic archaic pronunciations as /ˈtʃɒklɪt, ˈhəʊplɪs, ˈprefɪs, ˈfæmɪlɪ/, and so on.

The same tendency also applies, although not to such a consistent degree, to unstressed prefixes, such as in *before, depend, regard*.

The word *family*, whose preferred pronunciation, incidentally, is given by both LPD and EPD as /ˈfæmli/, brings us to unstressed /ɪ/ in final position. I am referring to what Wells has called the "*happ*Y-vowel" (Wells, 1982, 257; this designation usually sets my students giggling for minutes). Here we are presently witnessing another qualitative change, in as much as many RP speakers seem to prefer a closer pronunciation. Rather than giving the vowel the quality of *sit* they tend to give it that of *seat*. In the word *city* we consequently have two different vowels. A stressed one, half-close and an unstressed one, nearly close. This would give us possible homophone pairs like *carkey* and *khaki*, *property* and *proper tea*. As J. Windsor Lewis has shown, the realization of this vowel is, however, quite complex (Windsor Lewis, 1990). Wells as well as Peter Roach have chosen to include this ongoing change in their dictionaries by using the symbol /i/ rather than /ɪ/. I myself consider this somewhat unfortunate since here, as in other cases, they depart from the established phonemic principle of notation. This variant might easily have been defined as an allophone of /ɪ/ restricted to this particular context, and therefore not calling for a separate transcription symbol. At any rate, with regard to my students, I have not found it necessary to elaborate too much on this recent change, since most of them as native speakers of German have a rather high /i/in both *sit* and *happy* anyway and need not be taught to raise this vowel in unstressed final position.

4. Lexical-incidental innovations

Changes in the pronunciation of individual vocabulary items "within living memory" are indeed much more frequent than one might think. I have recently compared several hundreds of pertinent entries in different editions of English pronouncing dictionaries. As a rule, I first looked at the pronunciation given in Wells' new LPD (LPD, 2000), then at Jones' first EPD of 1917. Whenever I found a discrepancy, I also compared the intervening editions of EPD, noting the changes, if any, along the way. Many of these are only recorded in recent editions of EPD or in LPD. Selected results shall be presented here.

4.1. Obsolete and obsolescent pronunciations

(a) *Girl, glycol, groats, sadist* and *Viking* are instances of words whose older pronunciations have been given up altogether during the recording history of EPD. Their development can be documented as follows: For *girl* EPD 1-12 still gave four

variants of the word in decreasing frequency: /gəːl, gɛəl, giəl, geəl/. EPD 13 dismisses /geəl, giəl/ mentioning that /gɛəl/ is a rare form, and since EPD 14 and in LPD we are left with the only standard modern form /gɜːl/. EPD records *groats* as /grits/ with a less common variant /grouts/ up to the 3rd edition of 1926. After that, up to and including LPD, we have exclusively /grəʊts/. /grɪts/ is dead! According to LPD *glycol* seems by now to have lost its preferred EPD 1-11 pronunciation with /ɪ/. While EPD 12-15 mention /aɪ/ and /ɪ/ forms, LPD no longer lists the pronunciations /ˈglɪkl, ˈglɪkɒl/. For *sadist*, not recorded prior to EPD 5, the verdict of "formerly also" is passed by LPD on the form with /æ/, which was the preferred variant in EPD 5. Another pronunciation with /ɑː/ is omitted both from EPD 14/2 and LPD. For *Viking*, LPD and EPD 15 no longer give the traditional EPD (including 14) variant pronunciation with /ˈviː-/.

(b) Obsolescence can also be observed with regard to /ɔː/ pronunciation in such words as *cross, off, cough, cost*, etc. EPD listed these words with a preferred /ɔː/ pronunciation up to EPD 6, with a variant /ɒ/ and reversed the order from EPD 7 on. EPD 14 labels the /ɔː/ forms as "old-fashioned", while EPD 15 lacks them altogether. Wells' LPD surprisingly retains them and even abstains from labelling these secondary forms. Teaching them to our students would certainly be unrealistic.

(c) The pronunciation of British proper names is notoriously difficult and unpredictable, their phonetic form often having far diverged from their etymology and spelling. English language teachers are equally notorious for their fondness of such irregularities. A personal anecdote may illustrate this. Some time ago, a colleague of mine asked me how I would pronounce a place-name spelled R-u-t-h-w-e-l-l. Expecting that there might be some hidden irregularity, I guessed at /ˈrʌðl/, only to be taught that it should be /ˈrɪvl/. I was impressed – and yet not totally convinced. So I went to the dictionaries and – couldn't find this pronunciation. Neither EPD nor LPD had it, and the *BBC Pronouncing Dictionary of British Names* (Pointon, 1983) hadn't got it either. All I could find was /ˈrʌθwəl/ and ("locally") /ˈrɪðl/, but no pronunciation with a /v/. It wasn't until I started preparing this paper, that I looked the word up in older EPD editions. And indeed, Jones had it from the first to the tenth edition of 1949 of his EPD. Which proves that such a pronunciation did indeed exist locally up to the middle of the twentieth century, but has since gone out of use. /ˈrɪvl/ must then be regarded as an historical pronunciation, very much on the same level as /ˈtʃaʊsər/ or /ˈʃɛːkspiər/ for *Chaucer* and *Shakespeare*. The form has by now been replaced mainly by spelling pronunciations, and it can be assumed that any attempt at purchasing a bus ticket to a place in Dumfries and Galloway named /ˈrɪvl/ must remain abortive. The same will be true with place-names like *Pontefract*, whose old

local pronunciation /'pʌmfrət, 'pɒmfrɪt/ is now obsolete, LPD commenting “locally formerly also”. *Cirencester*’s old local pronunciations /'sɪsɪtə/ or even older /'sɪzətə/ are also definitely on the way out. A similar fate has befallen the London street name *Pall Mall*, a favorite among older philologists. Up to 1926, EPD preferred the form /'pel'mel/ to /'pæl'mæl/. From its 7th edition on, we find the same sequence, yet followed by a note distinguishing the two variants sociologically: “The pronunciation with e is generally employed by members of West End clubs. With other Londoners the pronunciation with /æ/ is common / the more frequent”. Only EPD 14 changes the order, assigning /æ/ first place, whereas LPD labels the /e/ form with “formerly also”. We can mention these older forms in a course on historical linguistics, but should no longer teach them in classes of modern English pronunciation and rather use our efforts to eradicate such pronunciations as */'lɒndn, 'lʌndn, 'wɒʃɪŋdn, 'bɜːmɪŋˌhæm, 'edɪnˌbɜːk, 'swɒnˌsiː/, and so on.

(d) The question of course can be asked: Why does a certain form die out? An explanation of the processes involved must resort to various factors, linguistic and possibly also non-linguistic. Among the linguistic factors, analogy and spelling pronunciation certainly rank highest. That at least in some cases extralinguistic factors are responsible for such changes is shown by the words *halfpenny*, *twopence*, and *threepence*, old favourites cherished by teachers of English phonetics. Here, the reason for the demise of the older forms is in fact to be looked for outside the linguistic sphere. It can be found in the reform of the monetary system. Since the decimalization of the British currency in 1971, the reduced forms of compounds with *penny* and *pence* have fallen out of use – together with the coins. Instead the full forms /'penɪ/ and /pens/, or commonly /piː/, tend to be used. Much as we may regret it, such pronunciations as /'heɪpənɪ, 'tʌpəns, 'θrepəns, 'θrʌpəns, 'θrɪpəns, 'θrʊpəns/ (and variants) are clearly historical forms referring to pre-1971 coins.

4.2. Changes in phoneme occurrence and/or frequency

One other category refers to changes of phonemes and/or frequency of variants as used in individual words, which have always had pronouncing variants.

4.2.1. Vowels

(a) A case in point are /ʊ/ and /uː/ in *room, groom, broom*. In 1917 Jones recorded /ʊ/ as the most common vowel in these words. Today, /uː/ has won out, Wells' poll carried out for LPD in 1988 counting 92% for /bruːm/, or 82% for /ruːm/.

(b) Occasional alternation between /ɑː/ and /æː/ is also noteworthy, although no clear pattern seems to emerge. With regard to the older /ɪgˈzɑːspəreɪt/, which was recorded as the preferred form up to EPD 12, modern /ɪgˈzæspəreɪt/ seems to be gaining ground, Wells' British panel preference showing 54% for the vowel /æ/, as against 46% for /ɑː/. The reverse is the case with the word *graph*. All EPD editions up to the 14th edition give /græf/ before /grɑːf/, whereas EPD 14/2 and LPD list /grɑːf/ first. According to LPD's poll panel an overall 59% of speakers prefer this pronunciation. In the case of *drastic* and *plastic*, /ɑː/ pronunciations seem to be of more recent date and as yet numerically quite negligible. EPD first lists a variant /ɑː/ for *drastic* in the 5th edition and for *plastic* in the 12th edition. LPD counts 9% and 12 % respectively for /ɑː/. In the words *patriot* and *patriotic* /æ/ and /eɪ/ are in variance. Here too, a glimpse at their history as recorded in the pronouncing dictionaries is revealing. In both words either vowel is possible, with the /æ/ pronunciations today the more frequent ones. *Patriotic*, which figured in Wells' opinion poll, shows 79 versus 21 percent for /æ/. Jones' historical records are somewhat bewildering: He preferred /ˈpeitriət/ over /ˈpæ-/ up to 1926, then reversed his preference between the 7th and 10th editions and came back to /ˈpei-/ for his more recent editons, while Gimson again listed /ˈpæ-/ first. For the adjective, Jones listed exclusively /ˌpætriˈɔtik/ up to 1940, then added "rarely pei-" in EPD 7-13; in 1977 Gimson struck the label "rarely". Apparently, in his observation, the frequency of the /eɪ/ forms had increased.

4.2.2. Consonants

(a) Pronunciation variants can also be observed in the area of consonants, for instance in their fortis vs. lenis opposition. The phonemic contrast between fortis and lenis fricatives has been firmly established for many centuries, and carries a considerable functional load. We are therefore well advised to teach our students the importance of this distinction, especially since many German, especially southern, dialects do not have it. Nevertheless there is some uncertainty about the fortis/lenis distribution of some English fricatives and we can note that in a number of words they have recently

changed or are in the process of changing their force of articulation. Among the cases where this is so are words having the prefix *trans*-. In some of them, the possibility for pronouncing /s/ has increased: *transatlantic, transalpine, transoceanic, transpontine, transverse* according to LPD can today all have fortis /s/ (EPD 15, however, exempts the first two words), and in the words *transit, transitive, transitivity* there is now a clear preference for /s/. *Transition,* on the other hand, shows the reverse preference: 75% /-ˈzɪʃn/, as against an older majority of /-ˈsɪʃn, -ˈsɪʒn/. Formerly unknown or non-standard fortis/lenis variation is now also possible in such words as *desist, kismet, opposite, quasi, prosody* showing a majority of /z/ and a minority of /s/, while *absurd, desolate, desultory, exit* and, at least according to LPD (not so according to EPD 15), even *greasy* vary /s/ and /z/ in inverse frequency.

(b) The dental fricative does not seem to show as much fortis/lenis variance, but *booth*, traditionally ending on a lenis, can now be heard as /buːθ/, as in American English. *Zither* was only recorded as /zɪθə/ up to EPD 12; EPD 13 to 15 list both /ˈzɪðə/ and /ˈzɪθə/, but LPD only has /ˈzɪðə/, making this 19th century German loanword conform to other native Germanic words, in which medial fricatives are lenis. The plural of nouns ending in /θ/ has traditionally been formed with a lenis combination following a long vowel or diphthong and a fortis combination after a short vowel. Witness *path/paths* vs. *month/months*. In *cloth/cloths*, and *bath/baths*, however, this rule seems to have been broken, with both variants (/klɒθs, klɒðz, bɑːθs, bɑːðz/) possible. With regard to the form /bɑːθs/, Wells even notes that 50% of his panel voted for the form “traditionally considered non-standard”.

(c) So-called yod-dropping has been a historical process ever since Middle English times, and it seems to be going on in some contexts, as can be seen in the variants /uː/ and /juː/ following /l/ in such words as *revolution, absolute, illusion,* etc. As a pupil and student, I learned all these words with /j/, and few of my students seem to have learned differently. And yet it is interesting to note that the variant without yod has been the majority variant at least ever since Daniel Jones’ first edition of EPD. By now these variants have, as Gimson points out, grown “increasingly more common” (Gimson, 1989, 214; Cruttenden 2001, 212), and both EPD 15 and LPD note them as the most frequent ones. The same has happened to the words *suit* and *super* and their compounds. Both were listed in EPD 1-13 with a preferred yod pronunciation; only EPD 14 changed the order giving /suːt/ and /ˈsuːpə, ˈsuːpəˌmɑːkɪt, ˌsuːpəˈstɪʃn/ as the more common variant and noting for *suit* “the word [...] increasingly has the form /suːt/”. Indeed, Wells’ panel decided 72% for /suːt/ and only 28%, largely older speakers, for /sjuːt/.

(d) Two other words which have changed sides within EPD recording times shall be mentioned, *privacy* and *nephew*. /ˈpraɪvəsɪ/ has lost preferred status to /ˈprɪvəsɪ/ since EPD 13, which interestingly enough diverges from the most common American English pronunciation. /ˈprɪvəsɪ/ now holds a percentage of 88% in Wells' opinion poll. *Nephew* pronounced with /f/ has today clearly overtaken the older /v/ pronunciation, leaving it behind with only 21%. Wells notes that "[i]t is evident that the traditional RP form with /v/ has largely been displaced by the spelling pronunciation". In this, as with most other cases, the newer forms are due to changing pronunciation patterns among the younger generation of RP speakers. Wells' numerous graphs from his 1988, 1993 and 1998 polls (LPD 2; Wells, 1995; Wells, 1999; Wells, 2000) speak a clear language, showing highly significant age-grading: An overwhelming majority of over 90% of those born after 1948 adhered to the spelling pronunciation /ˈnefjuː/.

4.3. Innovations in word stress

Only a few examples from among innovations pertaining to the supra-segmental domain of word stress shall be mentioned here. They are certainly not less worthy of the EFL teacher's attention.

(a) The polysyllabic words *secretive* ('inclined to secrecy'), *sonorous, precedence* are first examples. Their initial stress (/ˈsiːkrətɪv, ˈsɒnərəs, ˈpresɪdəns/) is not of long standing. Jones listed exclusively /siˈkriːtiv/ up to EPD 11, and only EPD 14 puts /ˈsiːkrətɪv/ in first place. EPD 15 omits /sɪˈkriːtɪv/ for this meaning altogether. With regard to the other two words, LPD is the first to list their initially stressed forms as the more usual ones, with EPD 15 following.

(b) The adjectives *applicable, formidable, hospitable, despicable* – /əˈplɪkəbl, fəˈmɪdəbl, hɒˈspɪtəbl, dɪˈspɪkəbl/ – were all originally stressed on the first syllable. Today, the majority of RP speakers use second syllable stress, 81% of speakers preferring /hɒˈspɪtəbl/ and 54% /fəˈmɪdəbl/. That this stress shift does not operate equally in all adjectives with the *-able* suffix is shown by /ˈlæməntəbl/, which apparently has kept its initially stressed form as the most usual one.

(c) It is quite a common conversation piece in Britain to discuss which of the two pronunciations of the following words is the correct one: /ˈkɒntrəvɜːsɪ/ or /kənˈtrɒvəsɪ/, /kəmˈpeərəbl/ or /ˈkɒmprəbl/, /ˈkɪləmiːtə/ or /kɪˈlɒmɪtə/. Although the linguist abstains from verdicts of right or wrong, statements of frequency are of

interest. Historically speaking, the variants with initial stress are again the older ones, and as such they were exclusively listed by Jones. /kənˈtrɔvəsi/, first listed in EPD 5, has by now attained primary status with 55% according to Wells' count. /kɪˈlɒmɪtə/ also first appears on the scene in 1940 and more or less runs counter to the analogical pull to be expected from such words as *millimeter* and *centimeter*. /kəmˈpeərəbl/, following the verb analogically with second syllable stress, is first recorded by LPD as a minor variant. This pronunciation is absent from all EPD editions including EPD 15.

5. Concluding remark

It is beyond doubt that to quote Gimson, "[t]he foreign teacher of English constitutes a special case. He has the obligation to present his students with as faithful a model of English pronunciation as is possible" (Cruttenden, 1994, 273). This certainly includes a realistic standard of pronunciation reflecting recent developments. The large number of innovations operating in English at the present time, only some of which have been surveyed here, force us to stay up-to-date in this regard. Regular direct aural exposure to the language is, of course, the best means to achieve this, but that must be complemented by the continued study of the relevant literature in the fields of phonetics, phonology and socio-linguistics. Likewise, frequent reference to the most recent edition of a pronouncing dictionary – and not the one he or she may have bought as a student some decades ago – is certainly advisable. Only this can keep us from succumbing to the "didactic time lag" endangering our English competency.

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