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English phonetics and phonology: A practical course (3rd edition)

By Peter Roach

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This book is a university level course book for teaching the pronunciation of standard British English or “BBC pronunciation.” This book is designed to be a companion to the 15th edition of the *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (Jones; Roach and Hartman, eds., 1997). A companion set of recorded audio CDs or cassettes (Roach 2001), containing cross-referenced practical exercises, is sold separately.

Although designed for helping non-native speakers communicate easily with native speakers, this book is a useful tool for linguists. First, it provides a simple but clear presentation of English phonology with a modest amount of theory included. If there is need to compare the description of some phenomenon in Language “X” with English, this book provides a good reference point. The section on sentence-level assimilation is very helpful for demonstrating the importance of writing morphophonemically rather than phonetically. There are good examples of processes such as assimilation, elision, etc. from English.

As for structure, Chapters 1–7 introduce the segments, both consonants and vowels, along with the relevant phonetic and phonemic theory. Chapter 8 discusses syllables and Chapter 9 discusses strong and weak syllables, which often cause problems for many non-native speakers. Chapters 10 and 11 discuss stress in both simple and complex words, along with inflectional and derivational affixes. Chapter 12 concentrates on sentence level rhythm and stress with the resulting weak forms. Chapter 13 discusses various problems in phonemic analysis and introduces some distinctive features for English phonology. Chapters 14–19 discuss various aspects of suprasegmentals, primarily intonation. The final chapter discusses laboratory phonetics and the study of dialects.

On the phonetics side, there are some excellent diagrams of the larynx and vocal mechanism. Good use has been made of face diagrams to illustrate the various consonant sounds. The sections on intonation and stress are very helpful in thinking through how these issues might relate to another language. The examples are clear and presented in short, focused units.

The weakest section of the book is Chapter 13. Much of what he says in this chapter about English vowels is open to question. For examples, he states that long vowels such as [ɑ:] and [ɔ:] are long or . There is no rationale given for this analysis, but it is in obvious contradiction to historical evidence, since it is clear from the spelling (<ar>, <or>) that the lengthened vowel is due to the loss of the consonant “r”. There is no reference to any historical processes in the book, which is also a weakness. His discussion of distinctive features seems to be more of an afterthought.

I was also disappointed to see that, although Roach included the most up-to-date version of the IPA chart for reference, the transcription of vowels at times failed to follow it. Thus, the symbol [ʌ] is defined as an open mid central vowel while the IPA clearly shows it as an open mid back unrounded vowel. No explanation is given for this inconsistency, but one may speculate that, by continuing to use the “usual symbol,” Roach avoided having to use the almost unwriteable central vowel symbol, [ɤ]. (Personally, I wish the International Phonetic Association would change it back to the way it was.)

In conclusion, this new edition has been significantly improved over the previous edition, and provides a concise, teachable course book for teaching English, or a useful reference for linguistics courses or papers discussing English phonology.

References

Jones, Daniel (Peter Roach and James Hartman, eds.). 1997. *English pronouncing dictionary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Roach, Peter. 2001. *English phonetics and phonology audio CD*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.