English pronunciation for student teachers

C. Gussenhoven
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Noordhoff Uitgevers

Second edition

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Preface to the second edition

Two kinds of change have motivated us to update our *English Pronunciation for Student Teachers*. First, the publication of J.C. Wells' *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* made a new transcription system for English available which we feel represents an improvement over the conventions used in the Fourteenth Edition of *Everyman's Pronouncing Dictionary*. One of these improvements is the introduction of the symbols **i** and **u** for close vowels in weak syllables, and the corresponding emphasis on the distinction between strong and weak syllables. In the presentation of the vowel system as well as in the discussion of the pronunciation of the RP vowels, we have accordingly kept the weak vowels separate from the other vowels. The second type of change concerns the model itself. RP has not remained the same in the years that have passed since the late seventies. In particular, the lax front vowels /e, æ/ have undergone a lowering process, and we now describe these vowels as opener than we did in the first edition.

We have taken this opportunity to rearrange the chapters in the book to suit the order in which they are usually dealt with at some of the institutions where our course is used. The change amounted to moving the chapters on 'Word Stress' and 'Strong and Weak Forms' forward: the idea is that the chapters that deal with the distribution of the RP phonemes (chapters 2 to 4) are treated before the chapters that deal with their realisation (chapters 6 to 14). Also, we have added Pronunciation Units dealing with the stress patterns of English words and with the use of weak and strong forms. This and the fact that the older units were beginning to sound dated, both as a result of the deterioration of the magnetic tape recordings and the changes in RP, made it necessary to produce new, digital recordings of both the Phoneme Discrimination Exercises and the expanded set of Pronunciation Units. Finally, we decided to integrate the Textbook and the Practice Book in a single volume.

This book includes a cd-rom with the Phoneme Discrimination Exercises and the Pronunciation Units, together with a convenient presentation program allowing users to navigate through the exercises as they please. All the exercises and units have been recorded by both a male and a female speaker. Users can choose which model voice to listen to and imitate or allow the program to make a random choice on every trial. The program also includes a recording facility, which allows the student to compare his or her own performance with that of the model speaker. Radboud University Nijmegen holds the copyright to the presentation program.

We would like to thank Emily Embree, Monique van der Haagen, Victoria Urkewich and Nicole Verberkt for various comments on the text of the first edition. We are particularly grateful to Ton Koet, not only for pointing out a number of flaws in our earlier text, but also for insisting that a second edition was more than overdue. We thank Catherine Nickerson and Geoff Lindsey for recording the taped material.

January 1997

Nijmegen — Carlos Gussenhoven
Rijswijk — Ton Broeders

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Hints for the teacher

The material in this book is best organised in two separate courses, a comparative course in the phonetics of British English and a practical RP pronunciation course. They could be taught intensively in the first year of an English language programme at a tertiary level of education, or be spread over two years. There are many ways in which the two courses could be organised and be related to each other. Here, we give some information on how we teach this combined programme at the University of Nijmegen.

Comparative phonetics of British English
The subject matter for this course consists of the 15 chapters in the book, plus appendices 1 and 2. Each chapter contains a set of exercises intended to test the student's understanding of the material discussed in that chapter and to provide an opportunity for transcription practice. The material is taught in two weekly lectures, one of which has the character of a practical class, in which the answers to the exercises are dealt with and students' questions (or the teacher's) about that week's subject matter are discussed. Twenty-six weeks is a bare minimum for going through the book, and in practice we often need to exclude the final chapter from the examination because of lack of time.

We examine the students in four separate tests:
1 Chapters 1 - 7
2 Appendix 2 (The pronunciation list)
3 Chapters 8 - 15
4 Appendix 1 (Transcription of a text)

Tests 1 and 2 are administered halfway through the year, and tests 3 and 4 at the end of the year. The test items in test 1 are similar to the exercises included in the book. In view of the subject matter of these first chapters, test 1 is to a large extent devoted to testing the student's ability to transcribe RP words and brief sentences with gradation words. We tend to test only their passive knowledge of the Dutch transcription symbols; certainly, a requirement to transcribe Dutch texts would appear to be too high at this point, and might also distract the student from the main purpose of the test, which is to show an adequate knowledge of the stress patterns and segmental composition of English words. The pronunciation list, which contains a list of some 1400 words whose pronunciation is unexpected given their spelling (test 2) is tested by giving the students a random selection of 50 (orthographically presented) words from the list; they pass the test if

they transcribe 36 of them right (where 'right' means in accordance with one of the RP variants given in Wells' LPD). Students vary greatly in their ability to perform this task at this early moment, and we therefore organise a number of resits of test 2 in the second half of the year.

Test 3 is similar in character to test 1, and likewise consists of questions that resemble the exercises in the book. Its emphasis is on testing the students' knowledge of the realisations of the RP vowels and consonants, as well as of the realisation of the Dutch substitute phonemes used by beginning or intermediate learners. Finally, test 4, too, is given at the end of the year. In our university it consists of a transcription of a spoken text, usually a fragment of a BBC radio news bulletin, an activity practised in class four or five times during the second half of the year. (We do not teach appendix 1 explicity, but refer students to the text for self-study.)

Pronunciation course

The pronunciation course is based on the recorded phoneme discrimination exercises and pronunciation units, which can be made available either on three cassette tapes or as digital audio-files on cd-rom. In either case, the students can work through the material on an individual basis, in a language laboratory or a multimedia resource centre. However, in order to introduce specific features of pronunciation to the students and to check on their performance, students will need the help of a teacher, either in personal tutorials or in small groups of up to ten students. This is because even though the order of the topics in the book is reflected in the order of the features dealt with in the pronunciation units, it will hardly be possible to synchronise the treatment of the chapters with the corresponding pronunciation units, and some provision must therefore be made for separate instruction sessions. We have found it efficient to devote the first four weeks to a thorough treatment of the phoneme discrimination exercises, something which can be done with larger groups of students in a language laboratory. This crash course in English sounds and symbols will enable students to study the first chapters in the 'theoretical' course more profitably and moreover provides an essential basis for the pronunciation units. The latter are best worked through by the student on an individual basis, aided by regular sessions with a tutor. While we keep students informed of their progress by means of informal assessments at a number of points throughout the year, their pronunciation proficiency is formally examined at the end of the year.

Hints for the future teacher

After finishing your English language studies, you may well choose a career as a teacher in secondary education.
It would clearly be unrealistic to expect your pupils to reach the same, relatively high, standard of pronunciation that you as their teacher are required to have. Some of your pupils may be very talented and get quite close provided they are exposed to a good and consistent model and their most consistent mistakes are pointed out to them.
The following, we suggest, are the points you had best concentrate on in your teaching of English pronunciation:

1 **Phonetic symbols**
To overcome the problem posed by the spelling pupils should, if at all possible, acquire a knowledge of the phonetic symbols at a fairly early stage, so that they can benefit from the information on pronunciation given in most recent dictionaries, and note down what vowels or consonants occur in a particular word. Notoriously problematical are questions such as/e/or/æ/;/ʌ/or/ɒ/;/θ/or/ð/;/s/or/z/;/ʃ/or/ʒ/.
You should always correct your pupils' 'transcriptional' errors, preferably after they have finished speaking or reading rather than by interrupting them in the middle of a sentence.

2 **Word stress**
Many English words are frequently pronounced with the accent on the wrong syllable. It is extremely important that this type of error is be avoided if the speaker is to be understood by the native speaker. Examples are *mistake*, *effect*, *spiritual*, *canal*, etc.

3 **Weak and strong forms**
Pupils should be made aware of the existence of weak (and strong) forms, learn to hear them, and use them in their own English.

In addition to these general points there are a number of other priorities which concern specific (groups of) vowels or consonants.

4 Pupils should concentrate on the distinction between **syllable-final fortis and lenis consonants**, which, contrary to what is often believed, is generally signalled by **the duration of the preceding voiced portion.**

5 Pupils whose Dutch accent does not include **voiced fricatives** and **marginal /g/** should concentrate on voiced **/v, z,** ʒ/ **and /g/**.

Other points to emphasise are:

6 The various realisations of **/r/**, especially avoiding rolled realisations; the realisation of **the dentals** /θ/ **and** /ð/.

7 **Aspiration** and/or **weak affriction** of syllable-initial, and **preglottalisation** of syllable-final fortis plosives.

8 The opposition /e/-/æ/: these vowels differ in **quality** and, frequently, **duration**. Pupils should be encouraged to distinguish the words in groups like *bed*, *bet*, *bad*; *head*, *hat*, *had*; *said*, *set*, *sat*; *leg*, *lag*, etc.

9 The replacement of RP /ʌ/ with AN /ʏ/, as in *cup*, *such*, *money*.

10 The absence of **liaison**, including linking r, may be so striking in a Dutch accent that the listener's attention is drawn to it.

11 Undesirable **assimilations** like regressive voicing before /b, d/ and progressive devoicing of /v,z/ may be particulary conspicuous and should therefore be avoided.

Looking back on these priorities, you may be struck by the fact that, with the exception of /e/,/æ/,/ʌ/, no mention is made of **vowel quality**. Nevertheless, it is often the distinct realisation of vowels rather than anything else that carries the burden of the distinction between one accent and another. At the same time, this will also be the reason why, in this area, your corrections as a teacher will provoke greater resistance than elsewhere.

With reference to **intonation** it can be said that although Dutch patterns instead of RP ones do not generally lead to misunderstanding, they may frequently cause the speaker to sound less polite or tactful than he or she intended. In so far as intonation signals the speaker's attitude to the hearer (friendly, forthcoming, sarcastic, reserved, indifferent, etc), its importance is very considerable indeed. Pupils should be made aware of this, so that they may be more alert to this aspect of intonation when they are involved in a genuine conversation outside the language learning context.

Finally, there are a number of common errors that many teachers have always considered very important, but which are also usually very difficult to correct. It is our view that the energy this requires is usually better spent elsewhere. So do not worry too much about:

- r-colouring: Tell your pupils it does not fit in with the rest of their accent, but do not go on about it.
- Dutch /i/ in words like *coffee*, *easy*, *city*.
- the pronunciation of a strong vowel immediately before an accented syllable, as in *exist*, *contain*, *submit*.
- /æ/ for /ɑː/ in *dance*, *chance*, *pass*, *ask*, etc. If they insist on /æ/ and are consistent in their use of it, forcing them to change will probably do more harm than good.

1 The textbook

1 Spelling and pronunciation

1.1 Introduction

Imagine a Dutch speaker of English who pronounces *My country is very flat* as something like *My country* (with the first syllable as in *counter*) is *ferry flet*. This speaker's pronunciation deviates from an authentic English pronunciation for two rather different reasons. First, the spelling of *country* has apparently led him to think that it contains the vowel of *now*, instead of the vowel of *sun*. We might say that this is the problem of the **spelling**. Foreign learners often become acquainted with the written form of a word before they become familiar with the spoken form, and because, particularly in the case of English, the written form may give a poor indication of the spoken form, their pronunciation will often simply be aimed at the wrong form. With increased exposure to authentic English speech as well as with some conscious effort, this problem of the spelling is usually fairly easily overcome by Dutch learners of English.

The second problem is more difficult to deal with. Unless we decide to do something about this, our natural tendency is to translate the foreign sounds into the sounds of our native language. This is known as (**phonological**) **interference**. For instance, even though our Dutch speaker of English may well know that the word *very* begins with a *v*, he actually pronounced an *f*, because this is how he normally pronounces Dutch words like *vlak* and *vis*, and even though he may know that *flat* has the vowel of *sat*, he will actually pronounce the rather different vowel of Dutch *zet*. Similarly, the vowel in a word like *bad*, which is the same as that in *sat* but is pronounced longer, may be 'translated' into the Dutch vowel of *crème*. Since the initial and final consonants will typically be pronounced like a Dutch *b* and a Dutch *t*, respectively, the result is that English *bad* is pronounced just like Dutch *bête*.

In this chapter, we emphasise that the spelling of words, even of Dutch words, does not always accurately reflect the pronunciation. In order to be able to represent the pronunciation of English words, a transcription system is needed in which every sound of the language has its own symbol.

In sections 1.4 - 1.6, we will introduce the transcription system used in J.C. Wells's *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary*, while section 1.7 will briefly discuss some of the conventions used in that dictionary. The problem of phonological interference will be discussed in chapter 5.

1.2 The spelling as a confusing factor

For understandable reasons we are inclined to attach more authority to the way words are spelt than to the way they are pronounced. This goes for our native language as well as for foreign languages. It is a tendency that will inevitably confuse our thoughts and discussions about the pronunciation of words, because instead of thinking in terms of sounds, we keep thinking in terms of letters. This is easy enough to demonstrate. Which of the following pairs of Dutch expressions do you think are pronounced exactly alike:

1	*wendde*	- *wenden*	6	*hoorn*	- *horen*
2	(*ik*) *teken*	- (*een*) *teken*	7	*niet Sien*	- *niets zien*
3	*jou*	- *jouw*	8	*hij* (*gaat*)	- (*gaat*) *hij?*
4	*u*	- *uw*	9	*kastje*	- *kasje*
5	*wijd*	- *weidt*	10	(*ik ken*) *haar*	- (*lang*) *haar*

For a speaker of colloquial Dutch who does not come from the northeast of the Netherlands, the members of the odd-numbered pairs are **homophones**. (In the northeast of the country, 2 and 6 also sound the same.) Also when reading or talking about 'vowels' (Du klinkers) and 'consonants' (Du medeklinkers), the first thought people often have is of vowel **letters** and consonant **letters**. When asked how many vowels English has, or Dutch has, for instance, many people might say 'five', because in the Roman alphabet, the set of letters used to spell these languages, there are five letters that are commonly used to represent vowels. The correct answer to the question will in fact depend on the particular variety of the language that is chosen, but for the English described in this book it is 22 (which is also the number of consonants in that language). And the answer for the type of Dutch that English is compared with in this book, is 26! So do not fall into traps like these and remember that this book is basically about sounds, not about spelling.

1.3 Spelling pronunciations

There is yet another aspect to this. As native speakers of Dutch, we will have learnt this language 'by ear', and were only taught how to write it when we went to school. When learning a foreign language, however, we often first become familiar with a word in writing, and form an opinion of how it is pronounced on the basis of how it is written. Unfortunately, there is a large discrepancy between the spelling and the pronunciation of English, and basing our pronunciation on the spelling of English words can lead to disappointing results. This discrepancy - which is considerably greater in English than it is in Dutch - has arisen chiefly because the spelling has remained virtually unchanged over a period of some centuries, while the pronunciation has undergone considerable changes during that time. By way of illustration, you might try and say which of the following pairs are pronounced alike in English, i.e. which words are **homophones**:

1	*cause*	- *cores*	7	*cease*	- *seas*
2	*seize*	- *sees*	8	*any*	- *Annie*
3	*son*	- *sun*	9	*gone*	- *gun*
4	*hues*	- *Hughes*	10	*major*	- *mayor*
5	*aunt*	- *aren't*	11	*ice*	- *eyes*
6	*air*	- *heir*	12	*full*	- *fool*

As a further illustration of the inconsistency of English spelling consider the words *bury*, *friend*, *Geoffrey*, *leisure*, *says*, *sweater*, *Thames* and *better* on the one hand and *bone*, *done*, *gone*, *cord*, *word*, *womb*, *woman* and *women* on the other: in the first set one and the same vowel is represented differently in each word, while in the second set the vowels are all different in spite of the similarity in spelling. Incidentally, only the first six pairs in the list above are homophones.

A pronunciation that is based on the spelling of a word is known as a **spelling pronunciation**. It may be noted that a spelling pronunciation sometimes becomes the accepted pronunciation, as happened in the case of *hotel* in both Dutch and English, in which word no *h* was pronounced at the time it was borrowed from French.

1.4 A transcription system for RP

In view of the large discrepancy between English spelling and pronunciation and the danger of spelling pronunciation this creates, we clearly need some form of notation which will enable us to represent the pronunciation of English words unambiguously. This can be done by means of a transcription system. Such a system is, in a

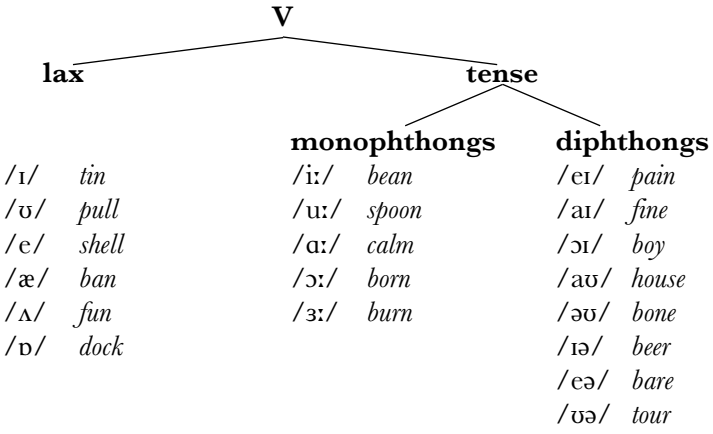
way, an improved alphabet: every vowel and every consonant, i.e. every **phoneme** of the language, has its own symbol.

At this point it should be realised that English, like any other language, is pronounced in a variety of ways. A business executive from Belfast will pronounce English differently from a greengrocer in London, and both will speak differently from a radio newsreader in Alabama. In so far as these varieties differ from the point of view of pronunciation they are known as **accents**. The various accents of a language differ, among other things, in the sets of phonemes they have. Here the vowels and consonants of one such accent of English are given, those of the standard accent spoken in England. It is technically known as **RP**, which is an abbreviation of 'Received Pronunciation'. (*Received* is here used in its now less common meaning 'generally accepted'.) RP is the accent most commonly taught to foreign learners of English in Europe and in many other parts of the world.

The transcription system used in this book conforms to that used in J.C. Wells, *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary*. It follows the general guidelines on phonetic transcription given in the Handbook of the International Phonetic Association (1997).

1.5 The vowels of RP

Like other Germanic languages, RP divides its vowel system into two classes, **lax** vowels and **tense** vowels. The lax vowels are usually **short**, and do not change their quality (i.e. they are **monophthongs**). Tense vowels are **long**, and can either be monophthongs, like /ɑː/ in *calm*, or **diphthongs**, like /aɪ/ in *fine*, which vowels are characterised by a change in quality. In Dutch, a short, lax vowel occurs in *bak*, while a long, tense monophthong occurs in *zaak*, and a long, tense diphthong in *tijd*.



Again, as is true for the other Germanic languages, there is a further distinction that can be drawn. All of the above vowels can appear in stressed syllables, such as the first syllable of *better* or the second syllable of *about*. In unstressed syllables, fewer vowels occur. These are called **weak** vowels. The most common of them is /ə/, which is called **schwa** /ʃwɑː/.

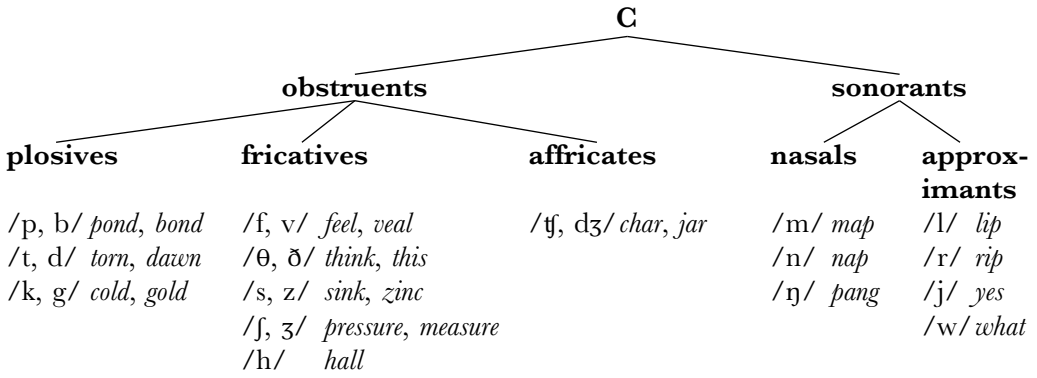
/ə/ *a(bout)*
/i/ *(happ)y, (rad)i(o)*
/u/ *(infl)u(ence)*

In addition, the vowels /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ can occur in unstressed syllables, usually as alternatives for /ə/:

/ɪ/ *(ros)e(s), e(ffect), (mark)e(t)*
/ʊ/ *(pop)u(lar)*

1.6 The consonants of RP

The consonants of RP fall into the following groups:



These subclasses will be defined in chapter 10. By way of quick introduction, note that the first subdivision is between **obstruents** and **sonorants**. Obstruents are subdivided into **plosives** (formed by making a blockage which is suddenly released), **fricatives** (formed by making a narrowing through which air is pressed) and **affricates** (which are combinations of plosives and fricatives). It should further be noted that the obstruents mentioned first in each pair, i.e. /p, t, k/, /f, θ, s, ʃ/ and /ʧ/, are called **fortis** (Latin for *strong*) obstruents, and that the ones that are mentioned second, i.e. /b, d, g, v, ð, z, ʒ, ʤ/,

are called **lenis** (Latin for *weak*) obstruents. Sonorants are more like vowels: we can use a sonorant consonant to hum a song. Sonorants are subdivided into **nasals**, during which air escapes through the nose, and **approximants**, for which this is not the case.

1.7 Transcribing words

In the transcriptions of words, you will encounter a number of things which will be discussed in greater detail later in this book, but which we briefly introduce here.

First, the stress mark [ˈ] is used to mark the syllable with the word stress, as in *contest* (noun) /ˈkɒntest/, *piano* /piˈænəʊ/, *reality* /riˈæləti/. Word stress will be dealt with in chapter 3.

Second, in unstressed syllables sonorants sometimes appear as syllabic consonants. This means that a schwa has disappeared before them, i.e. that the syllable has no vowel. Such syllabic consonants are often written with a vertical line below them. Examples are *button* /ˈbʌtn̩/, *bottles* /ˈbɒtl̩z/, *seventeen* /ˈsevn̩ˈtiːn/. In AN, this is less usual, but northeastern dialects have syllabic nasals in the second syllables of words like *eten* ('eetn'), *kopen* ('koopm'). Syllabic consonants will be treated in section 13.6.

Third, the sonorant /r/ only occurs at the beginning of a syllable before a vowel. As a result, words that end with an *r* in the spelling, like *star*, *far*, *chapter*, do not end with /r/ in the pronunciation, unless the next word or suffix begins with a vowel. This /r/ is known as a **linking /r/**. Compare:

No final /r/		**linking /r/**	
star	/stɑː/	*starring*	/ˈstɑːrɪŋ/
It's far	/ɪts ˈfɑː/	*How far is the school?*	/haʊ ˈfɑːr ɪz ðə ˈskuːl/
The Far West	/ðə ˈfɑː ˈwest/	*The Far East*	/ðə ˈfɑːr ˈiːst/
Chapter 9	/ˈʧæptə ˈnaɪn/	*Chapter 8*	/ˈʧæptər ˈeɪt/

Strictly speaking, because linking /r/ is the first consonant of the following syllable, we should place the stress mark before it, *the Far East* /ðə ˈfɑː ˈriːst/, but this is not usual. This phenomenon will be further dealt with in sections 11.14 and 13.9.

1.8 Using the LPD

J.C. Wells' *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* (LPD) gives both RP and American English pronunciations in the transcription system introduced in sections 1.5 and 1.6. The LPD is an important source of information, since unlike most other dictionaries that include transcriptions of their entries, it also gives the pronunciation of proper names, geographical names, brand names, and anglicised pronunciations of foreign expressions like *gesundheit*, *a priori*, *au naturel* and *Concertgebouw*. Whenever the American English pronunciation differs from the pronunciation in RP, the latter is given to the left of the symbol ||. Moreover, for each variety, more than one pronunciation may be given for the same word. One of these **variant forms** (or **variants**) is the **main pronunciation**, while the others are **alternative pronunciations**. The main pronunciation is obviously the one recommended to foreign learners, and is printed in blue.

To familiarise yourself with the LPD, read 'A quick guide to the dictionary' on pages viii and ix.

The LPD uses four transcription conventions that are not followed in this course.

1 The LPD uses a raised schwa (e.g. *bail* beɪˈl) to indicate that a schwa-like vowel usually occurs in the position concerned. Please just ignore the raised schwa: write /beɪl/.

2 The LPD uses italic symbols to indicate that the sound is only pronounced in formal styles. In informal styles, such sounds are **elided**. Generally, it is best to aim at a pronunciation without these sounds.

3 The LPD uses the symbol ‿ to indicate the potential loss of a syllable. For instance, the transcription /ˈveəri‿əs/ is meant to indicate that the pronunciation is either a trisyllabic /ˈveəriəs/ or a disyllabic /ˈveərjəs/. Please do not write this **compression** symbol, and give the 'uncompressed' pronunciation.

4 The LPD uses three symbols to indicate stress. In this book, only the 'primary stress' mark [ˈ] is used, as in /ˈbetə/ *better*, /əˈbaʊt/ *about*, /ˈænəkdəʊt/ *anecdote*. Words in which the LPD uses a 'secondary stress' mark [ˌ] in a syllable before the primary stress mark, as in /ˌækəˈdemɪk/ *academic*, are transcribed with double stress in this book: /ˈækəˈdemɪk/. The 'tertiary stress' symbol [˳] is not used in this book.

Exercises

1 Look up the main pronunciation of the following words in the LPD:

1 *wart*
2 *what*
3 *yacht*
4 *done*
5 *gone*
6 *monkey*
7 *donkey*
8 *womb*
9 *woman*
10 *women*
11 *other*
12 *hovercraft*
13 *cigarette*
14 *characteristic*
15 *ploughshare*
16 *lifebuoy*
17 *Eton*
18 *London*
19 *Moscow*
20 *Berlin*
21 *Los Angeles*
22 *Canberra*
23 *Paris*
24 *Copenhagen*
25 *The Hague*

2 What do you think is the spelling of the following words? Check your answers in the LPD.

1 eə
2 mʌŋk
3 ˈaɪən
4 ɪə
5 ˈɪərə
6 ˈɒnə
7 dʒɒg
8 ˈjɒgət
9 wʌn
10 ˈmeri
11 draʊt
12 ˈkɒlə