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978-1-107-07470-5 - Sounds Interesting: Observations on English and General Phonetics

J.C. Wells

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Sounds Interesting

How do you pronounce *omega*, *tortoise* and *sloth*? – and why? Do *charted* and *chartered* sound the same? How do people pronounce the names *Charon*, *Punjab* and *Sexwale*?

In this engaging book, John Wells, a world-renowned phonetician and phonologist, explores these questions and others. Each chapter consists of carefully selected entries from Wells's acclaimed phonetics blog, on which he regularly posted on a range of current and widely researched topics such as pronunciation, teaching, intonation, spelling and accents.

Based on sound scholarship and full of fascinating facts about the pronunciation of Welsh, Swedish, Czech, Zulu, Icelandic and other languages, this book will appeal to scholars and students in phonetics and phonology, as well as general readers wanting to know more about language.

Anyone interested in why a poster in Antigua invited cruise ship visitors to enjoy a game of porker, or what hymns can tell us about pronunciation, should read this book.

J.C. WELLS is Emeritus Professor of Phonetics at University College London and a Fellow of the British Academy. His interests centre on the phonetic and phonological description of languages but also extend to lexicography and language teaching.

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Observations on English and General Phonetics

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Illustrations by Lhinton Davidson



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Preface

After my retirement in 2006 I started to write a phonetic blog discussing everything to do with phonetics, seen from my personal and professional perspective. I did this partly to keep my mind active after retirement; in a sense the interaction with a web-based readership served to replace the daily dialogue with colleagues and students that I enjoyed while employed as professor at UCL. Now I'm delighted to be able to share this compilation from it with a wider audience.

I've assumed that the reader is familiar with basic phonetic notions and with the International Phonetic Alphabet: see the *IPA Handbook* (Cambridge University Press 1999) and the IPA chart (www.langsci.ucl.ac.uk/ipa/ipachart.html). If you want to brush up on this, there are plenty of textbooks available. Try *Practical Phonetics and Phonology* by Beverley Collins and Inger M. Mees (Routledge 2013, third edition). Wikipedia is also a useful and generally reliable resource. You may wish to refer to my own works: *Accents of English* (Cambridge University Press 1982, three volumes), *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* (Pearson Education 2008, third edition – referenced below as LPD) and *English Intonation: an Introduction* (Cambridge University Press 2006).

In this book I put phonetic symbols in **bold**, without slashes or brackets unless it is relevant at that point to distinguish phonemes (in slashes //) from allophones or general-phonetic sound-types (in square brackets []). To indicate letters as opposed to sounds, I use italics. The prosodic conventions I use are a vertical stroke (|) to show an intonation phrase boundary, underlining to show the location of the nuclear (tonic) syllable, and the marks \, / and V to show a fall, a rise and a fall-rise respectively: see fuller discussion in 4.1–2 below.

Words written in capitals, e.g. DRESS, are keywords standing for the entire lexical set of words containing the vowel in question: see my *Accents of English*, chapter 2.2, or the Wikipedia article on 'lexical set'. Occasionally I use an asterisk (*) to denote an unacceptable form, as is usual in linguistic work.

I will be delighted if this modest collection of observations inspires a few readers to further explore traditional general phonetics for themselves and to make their own observations on how both English and other languages are pronounced. Linguistic diversity is fascinating, and pronunciation never stands still.

John Wells
London, February 2014