

5 Spelling

Given the stress that is laid on spelling by prescriptivists, and the existence of so many dictionaries which provide standard spellings for English words, it is perhaps surprising that there should be any variation in spelling within standard varieties. But there is. Some of this variation is variation between varieties. More often, though, there is variation within a variety. The pattern of variation, however, is not the same in every variety. The result is that in principle, given enough data, we would be able to distinguish varieties on their spelling habits. In practice, at least on the basis of a very small sample, this is less possible than people might think.

The major distinction is usually drawn between British and American spelling conventions. Let us begin by making the simplifying assumption that this is all we have to worry about. Given just these two varieties, we have the following possible cases:

- Both varieties spell a word the same way: *cat*.
- The two varieties spell a word in different ways: *honor/honour*.
- American English allows either of two spellings for a word, British English allows only one: *ax/axe*.
- British English allows either of two spellings for a word, American English allows only one: *generalise/generalize*.
- Both varieties allow variation in spelling for a word (though possibly not in the same proportions): *judgment/judgement*.

We can also analyse the variation in another dimension: does the variation apply to just one word – in the terms used to discuss pronunciation (see section 6.7.4), is it a matter of lexical distribution (for example *grey/gray*) – or is there a generalisable pattern (*honor/honour*)?

While dealing with these five types of comparison might be simple enough with just two varieties, once we try to deal with half-a-dozen things become more difficult. Perhaps fortunately, southern hemisphere varieties tend to follow British patterns in spelling, and only Canadian

English stands out as requiring clearly different treatment from British and US varieties. Accordingly, southern hemisphere varieties will be discussed here in terms of deviation from the British standards. Comments on US, British, Australian and New Zealand Englishes are based on corpus studies; South African English is not mentioned specifically here; it tends to follow British norms; comments on Canadian English are based on Pratt (1993) and Fee and McAlpine (1997).

5.1 Lexical distributional differences

By 'lexical distributional differences' we refer to differences which affect a single lexical item (or word) and where the difference is not part of a general pattern. A list of relevant words and where they are used is provided in Figure 5.1. In a case like *tire/tyre*, where *tyre* is used only of wheel-parts, but *tire* can also mean 'to fatigue', it is to be understood that the meaning with the restricted spelling (here 'wheel-part') is the one intended.

5.2 Variation in the system

5.2.1 <ise>/<ize>

There is a common misapprehension that *-ize* (and *-ization*) is American, while *-ise* (and *-isation*) is British. Oxford University Press continues to prefer *-ize* for its house style, and many British publishers allow either. American and Canadian publishers restrict themselves to *-ize*. Australian and New Zealand publishers tend to use *-ise* rather more consistently than their British counterparts, with <z> spellings usually being a sign of learned or scientific writing in those varieties. Prescriptive statements on the matter (for example Weiner and Hawkins 1984) say that the <z> spelling may be used only in the *-ize* suffix, derived from Greek, and that words like *supervise* (from Latin), *surprise* (from French) and *merchandise* (from French) cannot take the <z> spellings. However, of these, only *supervise* is not listed with a <z> in American dictionaries, and even that can be found spelt with a <z> on the internet (apparently especially from educationalists!) – though rather inconsistently, see Markham (1995).

5.2.2 <our>/<or>

One of the ways in which Webster fixed American spelling was in making it standard to have no unnecessary <u> in words like *colour* and *honour*. (For further discussion of Webster, see section 8.2.) This remains a good

<i>Spelling 1</i>	<i>Spelling 2</i>	<i>US</i>	<i>GB</i>	<i>CDN</i>	<i>Comment</i>
artifact	artefact	1	1, 2	1	
ax	axe	1, 2	2	2	
check	cheque	1	2	2	
curb	kerb	1	2	1	
disk	disc	1, 2	1, 2	1, 2	Computer disks are universally spelt with a <k>. The meaning of 'record' or 'CD' is usually spelt with <c> in Britain, but <k> in the US and Canada.
draft	draught	1	2	1	<i>draft a letter</i> is so spelt everywhere; other kinds of <i>draught</i> vary.
gray	grey	1, 2	2	2	
jail	gaol	1	1, 2	1	
mustache	moustache	1, 2	2	2	
net	nett	1	1	1	<i>nett</i> is a conservative norm, still used in Australasia.
pajamas	pyjamas	1	2	1, 2	
plow	plough	1	2	1, 2	
skeptic	sceptic	1	2	1, 2	
story	storey	1	2	2	
sulfur	sulphur	1, 2	2	2	
tire	tyre	1	2	1	
wagon	waggon	1	1, 2	1	Australasian usage seems to prefer variant 1.

Figure 5.1 Lexical spelling mismatches in British, US and Canadian English

means of telling the two varieties apart: outside proper names from the other system, British writers very rarely omit the <u>, and US writers rarely include it. Canadians here usually choose the US variant, New Zealanders choose the British variant. In Australia, however, usage is divided and both variants are found. Butler (2001: 160) reports that

'Two thirds of the nation's newspapers use the *color* spelling and only one third use *colour*, but Australians almost universally write *colour*.' The Australian Labor Party is so spelt.

5.2.3 <re>/<er>

The use of <er> and the end of words like *centre* and *theatre* is another of Webster's pieces of standardisation, and again a valuable one for distinguishing British and US writings. In this case, however, Canadians regularly use the British variant, and Australians and New Zealanders use the <re> spellings in relevant words consistently.

5.2.4 Consonant doubling

If you add a suffix to a verb like *travel* in British English, you usually double the <l>, to give *travelled*, *travelling*, *traveller*. Americans double the <l> only if the vowel immediately preceding the <l> carries stress: *compelling* but *traveling*. The exception is *woollen/woolen*, where the single <l> spelling in US English is (despite what has just been said) regular: although it is at the end of a stressed syllable, that syllable contains a vowel sound written with two vowel letters, and should thus work like *beaten*. While this distinction is most noticeable with the letter <l> it also applies to other letters, though not necessarily so consistently. Americans can write either *kidnaping* or *kidnapping*, either *worshiping* or *worshipping*, and everybody writes *handicapped* but *paralleled*. With the words *biassed* and *focussed*, everyone now prefers the single <s> variant, which follows the US rules, although the <ss> variants are still used in Britain.

Ironically, in a few words with final stress, usage in Britain tends to prefer a single <l> (which still gets doubled when an affix is added) while in the USA the double <ll> is preferred: *distil(l)*, *enrol(l)*, *entbral(l)*, *extol(l)*, *fulfil(l)*, *instil(l)*. None of these words is particularly common. Australian and New Zealand usage seems to be split on these words.

Canadians tend to prefer the British spellings for all of these words.

5.2.5 <ce>/<se>

There are two distinct sets of words where the difference between an <s> and a <c> becomes significant.

The first concerns words which are viewed as parallel to *advice* and *advise*. Here the noun has a <c> where the verb has an <s>. *Practice* and

practise are treated in British English as though they are differentiated in the same way (despite the fact that there is no parallel difference in pronunciation). In the USA both are spelt with a <c>. The distinction between *licence* and *license* is treated in the same way in British English, while the two are again spelt the same way in the USA, but this time both with an <s>. Actual usage is not entirely consistent in any country considered, with deviations from the expectations outlined above going in both directions.

The second set of words contains only nouns such as *offence/offense*, *defence/defense*, *pretence/pretense*. Here only the <c> variant is used in Britain, while the <s> variant is preferred in the USA. Note that this explains the US spelling of the noun *license* mentioned above. This differentiation is much better maintained than the *practice/practise* one just described.

Canadians prefer the British options in all of this except for the verb *practice*, but there is variation, perhaps especially in the word *offence/offense*.

5.2.6 <ae> and <oe>

When <ae> and <oe> are pronounced /i:/ (sometimes /e/), the usual US practice is to spell them with <e>. Thus we find variation in words such as *encyclop(a)edia*, *f(a)eces*, *b(a)emoglobin*, *medi(a)eval* and in *diarrh(o)ea*, *f(o)etid*, *f(o)etus*, *(o)estrogen*. Canadian journalistic writing usually prefers the US spelling here, though academic writing may not. It is hard to give a general statement for these words. Many are changing in Britain and the southern hemisphere to the American spellings, but the change is not equally rapid for all: *encyclopedia* is often seen spelt thus even in British-influenced territories, while *oestrogen* is more likely to maintain the classical spelling.

5.2.7 Base-final <e>

Consider a pair of words such as *like* and *liking*. The final <e> on *like* is to 'make the vowel <i> say its name' (as this is often phrased in primary teaching). This final <e> is not required when another vowel follows the <k>, as in *liking*. The <i> in the suffix fulfils the same purpose. Now consider *courage* and *courageous*. The vowel following the <g> is sufficient to make the stressed <a> in *courageous* 'say its name', but we still need the <e> to make the letter <g> into [dʒ] rather than [g]. Similarly, a <c> before <a>, <o> or <u> will signal [k] rather than [s].

If we put these together, then *likable* should require no <e>, while

placeable from the verb *place* should require one (*placable* is a different word, related to *placate*, and pronounced with a [k] and a short [a]).

Despite these general rules, there is a frequent spelling of words like *judg(e)ment* with no medial <e> after the <g>. The <dg> is obviously felt to be sufficient to mark the [dʒ] sound. The variation affects very few words (*acknowledgement, judgement, fledgeling*), and both spellings are found in both British and American English. However, the variant with no <e> is rather more common in North America, while the variant with an <e> is rather more common elsewhere.

While, in accordance with the rules, *movable* and *unmistakable* are clearly dominant spellings in print, spellings such as *moveable* and *unmistakeable* are also increasingly found. They occur only where the root of the suffixed form is a single syllable (*move, take*), and not where the root has more syllables – *debatable* does not retain the <e> of *debate*. These new spellings are found especially in Australasia and in Britain. The same is true of similar spellings with the affix *-y*: *jok(e)y, sbak(e)y, ston(e)y*, and so on. Although <c> and <g> do not need an <e> before <y>, the <e> is still often retained in words like *poncey* and *rangey*.

5.2.8 <y> or <i>

There are a number of words where a <y> is preferred in British spelling while an <i> is permitted in US spelling. The words include *cypher/cipher, gypsy/gipsy, pygmy/pigmy, sylvan/silvan, syphon/siphon* and *syrup/sirup*. Most of these words are so rare that actual usage is difficult to gauge, but it seems to vary from item to item, and to be slightly inconsistent on both sides of the Atlantic.

5.2.9 <x> or <ct>

There are a few words like *connexion/connection, inflexion/inflection* where there is variation between <x> and <ct>. Both spellings are found in all varieties of English, but with a preference for the <ct> variant in all, and <x> being particularly rare in the US and Australia. Given the existence of words like *collection* with only one spelling, the <x> variant seems likely to continue to get rarer.

5.3 Conclusion

The spellings discussed above do not exhaust the variable spellings found in English. No mention has been made of respellings such as *donut, lite, nite, tho, tbrn*, for example, of the difference between *bankie* and *banky*,

or the distinction between *whisky* and *whiskey*, which may carry semantic weight as well as indicating where a text is produced.

As with grammar, there are very few sure-fire ways of recognising a particular variety of English from the spelling. As with grammar, if we had sufficient data to produce a statistical profile, we could start to make informed guesses. As with vocabulary, it is often easier to use spelling to say where a text was not produced than to pinpoint its origin. National origins do affect the spelling in a text, but the correlation is frequently not quite as straightforward as may appear to the uninformed eye.

Exercises

1. Although it is often hard to tell precisely which country a given spelling might be found in, some combinations provide very strong evidence. The spelling 'Tire Centre', for instance, is likely to be seen in only one country. Which country? Why?

2. Consider the following brief text, and say what can be deduced about its origin on the basis of the spelling.

Such a picture is not all that far from reality for some of [our] biggest subsidised performing companies in opera, dance, music, circus and theatre. So last year the ... Government set up a Major Performing Arts Inquiry ... to look into the financial position of these, the nation's premier performing companies, and to propose options for improving their prospects. The inquiry's Discussion Paper, released last week, is the most significant document bearing on ... cultural policy since the Labor Government's Creative Nation statement in 1994.

3. How straightforward a task would it be to program a computer to take a document spelt in the British manner and turn it into one spelt in the American manner or vice versa?

4. The rather unnatural sentence below has been concocted to illustrate a number of points of orthographic variability. Identify the points in question. If you change them one at a time, do you end up with a sentence which could have been produced by a consistent writer, or do some spellings imply others?

I like to fantasise that someone does me the sizeable honour of providing me with a travelling scholarship to visit the Centre for Gypsy Studies.

5. In natural texts, the features of spelling discussed in this chapter

rarely occur with sufficient concentration to let you determine anything from a brief text such as that given in question 2. Choose a random text written in a variety of English which is not the one you feel most familiar with, and see how much help you can get from the spelling in determining the national origin of the text. Is it different for different types of text? In your texts, would vocabulary or spelling be better guides to telling you where the text is from?

Recommendations for reading

The best general book on English spelling is Carney (1994). Although Carney does not discuss spelling from our point of view, he does discuss places where there is variation, and often discusses the British/American split.

6 Pronunciation

Although it may be true that people believe that all Americans say *the hood of a car* where all Britons say *the bonnet of a car*, such features are scattered enough in real text not to be primary indicators of national variety. That honour belongs to pronunciation. On the basis of pronunciation – and a remarkably small sample of pronunciation at that – we are willing to place almost any speaker in the English-speaking world. We may not get it right: in particular United States and Canadian accents can be difficult to distinguish, as can Australian and New Zealand ones for outsiders (and sometimes for the locals, see Weatherall *et al.* 1998), and many Americans find it hard to tell the Southern Hemisphere varieties apart from British ones.

In this chapter we will consider problems involved in describing and comparing varieties of English in terms of their pronunciation; we will look at the kinds of influences that have led to the current pronunciations of varieties around the world, and discuss the kinds of pronunciation phenomena that you can encounter when describing a variety of English or when comparing two of them.

6.1 Describing varieties of English

Typically, accents of English are described in terms of deviations from one of the two best-described accents, RP and General American. RP, or Received Pronunciation, is the non-regional and upper-class accent of England, described in handbooks such as Jones (1918) and Gimson (1962); General American (GA) is an idealised version of the accent which is most widespread in the United States, specifically excluding features which mark the speaker as coming from New England, New York, or the linguistic South. GA is described in handbooks such as Larsen and Walker (1930), and in Kenyon and Knott (1953) is referred to, rather misleadingly, as ‘northern’. These two varieties are chosen as reference varieties because they are so well described, and because they

are the prestige varieties in their own areas of influence. This manner of describing accents has the advantage that most scholars of English accents are reasonably familiar with one or both of these accents, and can relate easily to descriptions given in terms of them.

There are at least two problems with such an approach. The first is that it is theoretically dubious. Each variety has its own system, and in principle the systems of the individual varieties are no more comparable than the systems of Swahili and Basque. In some ways, however, this argument might be seen as naive. Whatever the fine theoretical principles are, all inner circle varieties of English are derived from a small number of closely related originals, share large amounts of vocabulary, and tend to have related pronunciations in the same lexical items. For that reason, Wells (1982) introduced the notion of lexical sets. Lexical sets are groups of words which share a particular phoneme in most varieties of English. Each set is named by a word which illustrates the phoneme in question. For instance, the lexical set BATH includes words such as *bath*, *path*, *pass*, *laugh*, *castle*, *shaft*, and so on. These words are all pronounced with /ɑ:/ in RP and with /æ/ in GA, but the assumption is that in any given variety they will behave in the same way. There is another lexical set START which contains words such as *start*, *cart*, *heart*, *marsupial*, *cartilage* and *remark*. The BATH lexical set and the START lexical set are pronounced with the same vowel phoneme in RP, but not in GA. Lexical sets are thus not to be equated with phonemes, and so the theoretical problems mentioned above do not occur when we describe accents in terms of them. At the same time, they allow for comparisons across varieties in a useful way. Wells sets up lexical sets only for vowels, though in principle lexical sets for consonants could also be established: for example, we might want to set up WHELP and WENT lexical sets for those varieties (like Scottish English) which distinguish between *witch* and *which*, or a LOCH lexical set for those varieties which have a velar fricative in words like *loch*. It is also the case that the lexical sets which Wells establishes are not sufficient for all varieties. For example, in many varieties of New Zealand English, *goad*, *god* and *gold* all have phonemically distinct vowels pronounced [gʌud], [gɒd] and [gɔud] respectively. We need to set up a lexical set (which we could perhaps call COLT) to allow this distinction to be discussed. It is not clear how many lexical sets would be required altogether. Wells' selection is provided for reference in Figure 6.1. For the sake of brevity, and following usual practice, a phrase such as 'the vowel occurring in the BATH lexical set' will frequently be abbreviated in what follows to 'the BATH vowel'.

The second reason why comparing all accents with either RP or GA is problematical is that it is historically incorrect. RP is an upper-class

Note that the words denoting the sets have been chosen (a) so as not to be easily confused with each other, (b) to be monosyllables, usually ending with a voiceless obstruent.

KIT	BATH	THOUGHT	NEAR	HAPPY
DRESS	CLOTH	GOAT	SQUARE	LETTER
TRAP	NURSE	GOOSE	START	COMMA
LOT	FLEECE	PRICE	NORTH	
STRUT	FACE	CHOICE	FORCE	
FOOT	PALM	MOUTH	CURE	

Figure 6.1 Wells' lexical sets

accent in origin, and the people who provided the basis for the most widespread accents of Australia, New Zealand or South Africa were not upper-class people. Whatever they spoke, it was not the direct forerunner of RP. Moreover, in origin at least, RP was a London accent, the accent of the court and the professions. If we oversimplify, we can imagine RP and Cockney having had a similar origin, but having developed along slightly different lines. For many purposes we are really more interested in the parent-accent of both Cockney and RP than we are in either of these modern varieties. Unfortunately, we have little direct evidence about what that variety might have been like.

The use of Wells' lexical sets is the best way of avoiding both these traps. Even though the lexical sets tend to reflect historical classes, and tend to reflect particular sound-changes which have taken place in the histories of individual varieties, they nevertheless provide a relatively neutral vocabulary which avoids presuppositions. These lexical sets will be used in the discussion from now on.

6.2 Input varieties

The fundamental assumption about varieties of English in the colonies (see section 1.2) must be that their accents have developed in some way from the accents of the speakers who first established the appropriate colony. This is no more than an assumption: the accent may have been more strongly influenced by the accent of a larger, neighbouring colony, the colony may have self-consciously tried to adopt some accent foreign to many of its original members, the accent will almost certainly have been modified by the speech of later immigrants. Nevertheless, if we do not make this assumption, we have very little on which to base any discussion whatsoever. Now, in most cases we know a lot less than we

would like to know about the linguistic background of those early colonisers. We may know that they came from several parts of the south of England or Scotland, for example. But we also know that accents in England and Scotland may change considerably within a five-mile (eight-kilometre) radius, and we rarely know (a) precisely how many speakers from any particular area there were or (b) precisely where the people came from. In some ways, then, we are forced to do some linguistic detective work: 'if this is the current make-up of the local accent,' we have to ask, 'what can the input varieties have been?' Answering this question demands that we understand what happens in the process of dialect mixture (see the discussion in section 1.4).

Dialect mixture is the process that occurs when speakers with two or more different accents come together and speak to each other. The mixture can occur on two levels. On the micro-level, I change my accent to talk to you (this is usually called 'accommodation'). On the macro-level, the children who grow up in a society with no established accent of its own speak with a new accent which reflects some of the features of all the inputs. It is this macro-level mixture which is the most important when we are talking about accent-formation in new colonies, but the macro-level mixture is based on precisely the kinds of modifications that we all make when we accommodate to other speakers.

Thanks in particular to work done by Trudgill (1986), we know of some general principles which speakers seem to follow when accommodating to each other, and according to which new dialects are formed out of old ones. Some of these principles may be ones which you yourself have experienced in dealing with people who talk a different way from the way you do. You may or may not 'hear yourself' talk differently to different addressees, or hear members of your family adjust their speech (for example on the telephone) depending on the accent of their interlocutors.

- Where a lot of accents come together, it will be expected that the majority form will win out; 'majority' here may be interpreted in terms of the widest social usage.
- A form is more likely to win out if it is supported by the spelling system.
- Forms intermediate between competing original forms may arise.
- Phonological contrasts are more likely to be lost than gained.
- An increase in regularity is to be expected.
- Phonetically difficult sounds are likely to be eliminated.
- Variants which originate in different dialects may become specialised as markers of social class in the new accent.

6.3 Influences from contact languages

In the instances being discussed in this book, the English speakers formed a large enough community to maintain English as their primary language. Since the original colonists would be adult, they would not adapt their English much to the local languages. While their children would have the possibility of learning other surrounding languages, they would also have before them a model of English which paid little attention to the phonetics and phonology of the contact languages. Even today, when it is seen as politically correct to pronounce the aboriginal languages in the aboriginal way, the pronunciations that are heard are strongly influenced by English, even among the group of speakers who make a genuine attempt to conform to non-English models.

In New Zealand, early spellings indicate that words borrowed from the Maori language, the language of the indigenous people of New Zealand, were pronounced in a very anglicised way. For instance, Orsman (1997) notes several spellings for Maori *ponga* [pɔŋa] 'type of tree fern': *ponga*, *pongo*, *punga*, *ponja*, *bunga*, *bunger*, *bungie*, *bungy*. Some of these spellings may reflect varying pronunciations in the different dialects of Maori. The use of for Maori /p/, however, is an indication that the unaspirated /p/ of Maori was perceived in English terms rather than in terms of the Maori phonological system. Similarly, the frequent /ŋg/ pronunciations in medial position arise from treating this word as a simple word like English *finger*, rather than from listening carefully to the Maori pronunciation. Such uninformed pronunciations are still common in colloquial New Zealand English, but in the media Maori words (and, perhaps especially, Maori placenames) have been 'dis-assimilated' or 'de-Anglicised' (Gordon and Deverson 1998: 121) to a more Maori-like pronunciation. Toponyms such as *Raetibi*, *Te Kaurwhata* or *Wanganui* provide good test cases. They are pronounced /rætə'hi:, tɪ:kə'wɔtə, wɔŋə'nju:ɪ:/ in unself-conscious colloquial usage, but /'ræɪtɪhi:, tɪ'kaʊfɔtə, wɔŋə'nju:ɪ:/ in more Maorified media-speak. Even this latter pronunciation is, of course, not Maori: it is merely a closer approximation to the Maori pronunciation of these names.

Similarly, in Canada it is becoming more frequent to see words borrowed from the First Peoples (as the Canadian Indians are now called) being spelt according to the conventions of the languages concerned – which often leads to a new pronunciation in English. Thus the people who used to be called *Micmac Indians*, are now called *Mi'kmaq* (singular *Mi'kmaq*); the Chippewyan would now refer to themselves as members of the Dene nation (since *Chippewyan* was an English version of the Cree name for their people); similarly, the people who used to be

called the *Ojibwa(y)*, now prefer to be called *Asbinabe* ('people'), which is their own name for their people (Fee and McAlpine 1997). With a pair such as *Tbompson* and *Nlaka'pamux*, these differences are as much lexical as they are phonological. But the difference between *Ottawa* and *Odarwa* is purely phonological.

In rare cases, contact can lead to the introduction of a new phoneme into English. South African English has a phoneme /x/ in a number of loan words. While most of these are Afrikaans words, some are Khoikhoi words, possibly mediated by Afrikaans: *gabba* /xaba/ 'friend' and *gatvol* /xatfɔl/ 'fed up, disgusted'. The addition of /x/ to English speech is perhaps not all that foreign, since it is already used in Scottish and Irish varieties of English, and this may have made its adoption easier.

6.4 Influences from other colonies

During the colonial period, contact between colonies was often arduous, and restricted to a small section of the populace. The linguistic results of such contacts would be expected to be minimal, and in general terms that is true. There are, however, some notable exceptions, which it is worth mentioning.

There were originally several independent settlements in North America (in Nova Scotia, in New England and in Jamestown, Virginia), with each settlement having its own distinctive make-up in terms of the origins of the migrants. The linguistic differences between these various groups can still be heard today. However, in the later stages of settlement, the Northern and Southern settlements in the present United States met. While the two can still be distinguished on dialect maps (see, for example, the data on *bristle* in the questions for Chapter 2), and even in terms of building styles (Kniffen and Glassie 1966, cited in Carver 1987: 10), nonetheless there must have been considerable mutual influence between the two groups.

The second notable exception is the influence between United States English and Canadian English. Many of the original Canadian settlers came from what is now the United States, and it is only natural that they should have spoken in the same way as their southern neighbours. While they tried to maintain their separateness in their language as well as their politics (a separateness which has led to many discussions of Canadian spelling over the years, for example – see Chapter 5), most Canadians still live very close to the United States and have regular contact with the United States. It is therefore not all that surprising that most outsiders can't tell the difference between Canadian and US Englishes.

The third notable exception is provided by Australia and New

Zealand. Although these two countries are a lot further apart than most people from the Northern Hemisphere realise, at approximately 1,200 miles (2,200km), nearly all trade and immigration to New Zealand came via Australia in the early days. In the 1860s the quickest route between Wellington and Auckland (the two main cities in New Zealand, approximately 500km apart as the crow flies) was by a 4,000km round trip via Sydney, and there were many Australians in New Zealand, particularly in the early days of settlement and through the gold rush of the 1860s. There is considerable evidence that much vocabulary is shared between Australia and New Zealand (Bauer 1994a), and again the accents, while not identical, are similar enough for outsiders not to be able to distinguish them.

6.5 Influences from later immigrants

British immigration into Australia, New Zealand and South Africa has been a continuing phenomenon. Immigrants to these countries, moreover, still thought of themselves as being British until well through the twentieth century. While the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 meant that from that date onwards Americans no longer looked toward Britain as a spiritual home, in Australia and New Zealand the word *Home* was still used with reference to Britain into the 1960s, though the usage died out a bit earlier in South Africa. This meant that people in the southern hemisphere colonies still cared about the situation in Britain and still wanted to sound as though they belonged to Britain until surprisingly recently – indeed, as far as the sounding like is concerned, it is not clear that all members of all the communities have given up on that aim even yet, and the broadcast media in Australasia still use British RP as a standard to which they aspire (Bell 1977), if less than previously. Under such circumstances, we can understand why RP is still given high social status and why no equivalent local varieties have emerged.

6.6 Influences from world English

During the Second World War (1939–45), when American troops were stationed in Europe and in the Pacific, they discovered that they had great difficulty in communicating with the local English-speaking populace. England and America really were two countries separated by the same language (as George Bernard Shaw once put it). Some of the problems were lexical, many were phonological. With the post-war developments first in radio and then in TV and the movies, it is hard to imagine that being a problem to the same extent today: American English is heard so regularly throughout the English-speaking world, that it has

become comprehensible, even prestigious, despite remaining 'other'. People who travelled enough to be familiar with the other idiom have rarely had great difficulty, and reading has never been a major problem. But the actual speech of Americans was once as much a problem as the pronunciation of unfamiliar varieties remains today. English people or southern hemisphere speakers visiting the southern American states can find the people less comprehensible than the Scots and the Irish, while Americans can have trouble understanding people from the north of England or from Australasia on first acquaintance.

What is less clear, however, is the extent to which pronunciations from other varieties have any levelling effect on English world-wide; it may be that alternatives simply remain alternatives ('you like to-may-to and I like to-mah-to', as Ira Gershwin wrote in another context). There are certainly cases where one or another variant becomes dominant for a while. In New Zealand, during the cervical cancer enquiry of 1987, *cervical* was regularly pronounced with the PRICE vowel in the second syllable, which was stressed, while in the second enquiry of 1999–2000, the word was usually pronounced with the KIT vowel in the second syllable and the stress on the first syllable. When the American TV programme *Dynasty* was screened in New Zealand in the 1980s, the word was regularly pronounced with the PRICE vowel in the first syllable, though more recently it has reverted to having the (traditional British) KIT vowel there. More permanently, *schedule* seems to be losing its pronunciation with an initial /ʃ/ in favour of the American pronunciation with initial /sk/, *lieutenant* seems, away from the armed forces, to be /lu:tənənt/ rather than /ləftənənt/, and *nephew* seems virtually to have lost its medial /v/ in favour of /f/ in most varieties of English. The very fact that we can talk of a small number of such cases seems to imply that there is no general movement to do away with variation. This is considered again in Chapter 7.

6.7 Differences between varieties

Wells (1982) provides a classification for pronunciation differences between varieties which holds just as well for colonial varieties as it does for local accents. Varieties, he says, may have different pronunciations because of:

- phonetic realisation
- phonotactic distribution
- phonemic systems
- lexical distribution.

Each of these will be considered in turn.

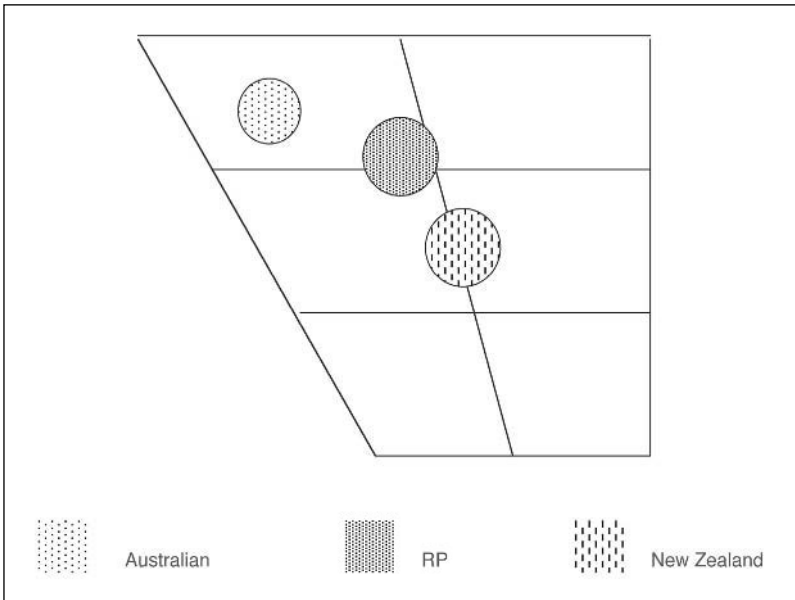


Figure 6.2 The KIT vowel in three varieties of English

6.7.1 *Phonetic realisation*

Phonetic realisation refers to the details of pronunciation of a sound which may, nevertheless, appear in the same lexical set in two varieties. Two specific examples will be considered here: the KIT vowel, and the medial consonant in *ETHER*.

The KIT vowel is a well-known shibboleth for distinguishing Australians from New Zealanders. Australians accuse New Zealanders of saying *fu**sh*** and *ch**u**ps* for *fi**sh*** and *chi**p**s*, while New Zealanders think that Australians say *fe**e**sh* and *che**e**ps*. Neither is correct, because in both cases they make the mistake of attributing the words *fi**sh*** and *chi**p**s* to the wrong lexical sets. For both Australians and New Zealanders (as for Britons and North Americans) *fi**sh*** and *chi**p**s* both belong to the KIT lexical set, not to the STRUT set or the FLEECE set. Accordingly, *s**i**ck*, *s**u**ck* and *se**e**k* are all pronounced differently for both parties. What is different, though, is the phonetic detail of the way in which the KIT vowel is pronounced; and the lay perceptions show the general direction of the phonetic difference. This is illustrated in Figure 6.2, which shows the pronunciation of the KIT vowel in Australian and New Zealand English and in RP.

The fricative in the middle of *ETHER* is usually pronounced in RP with the tongue behind the top incisors, while in California, the normal

pronunciation is with the tongue tip extruding slightly between the teeth (Ladefoged and Maddieson 1996: 143). The normal New Zealand pronunciation is like the Californian one; information is not easily available on other varieties. This difference is not audible to most speakers, and very few speakers are aware of this potential variability. Nevertheless, there are phonetic differences here in the way that particular sounds are produced.

The category of phonetic realisation also includes those cases where one variety has major allophones which another does not have, or a different range of allophones. For example, Canadian English is well known for distinguishing the vowels in *lout* and *loud* ([lʌʊt] and [laʊd] respectively) in a way which does not happen in standard varieties elsewhere. RP has a more palatalised version of /l/ before a vowel, while most other standard international varieties have a rather darker version of /l/ in this position (even if they make a distinction similar to the one in RP between the two /l/s in words like *lull* or *little*).

6.7.2 Phonotactic distribution

Phonotactic distribution refers to the ways in which sounds can cooccur in words. The major phonotactic division of English accents is made between rhotic (or 'r-ful') and non-rhotic (or 'r-less') accents (see section 1.4). The difference hinges on the pronunciation or non-pronunciation of an /r/ sound when there is an orthographic <r> but no following vowel. Rhotic accents use an /r/ sound in *far down the lane* as well as in *far away in the distance*; non-rhotic accents have no consonant /r/ in the former (although the vowel sound in *far* reflects the <ar> spelling). GA, Canadian, Scottish and Irish varieties of English are rhotic, as is the English in a small area in the south of New Zealand; RP, Australian, New Zealand and South African Englishes are non-rhotic, as is the English in parts of the Atlantic States in the United States (stereotypically, the accent of Boston Brahmins, who are reputed to say 'pahk the cah in Hahvahd Yahd' for *park the car in Harvard Yard*). The words *heart* and *hot* differ only in the vowel quality in RP, but only in the presence versus absence of an /r/ in GA (and in both features in Scottish English). This difference of rhoticity has some unexpected by-products in that, for example,

- only non-rhotic accents have an /r/ in the middle of *drawing* (/drɔːrɪŋ/);
- speakers of non-rhotic accents trying to imitate an American accent are likely to put an /r/ on the end of a word like *data*, which has no /r/ for Americans;

- only in varieties that maintain the /r/ are words such as *horse* and *boarse* kept distinct, as /hɔ:rs/ and /hɔ:rs/ respectively in GA; in non-rhotic varieties these words have become homophones.

Another matter of phonotactic distribution is whether the HAPPY vowel is associated with the KIT vowel or the FLEECE vowel. Increasingly, English speakers all round the world think that the word *needy* has the same vowel sound occurring twice in it, though there are some older RP speakers, and some speakers of GA who have two different vowels in the two syllables of such words.

There are some phonetic environments where phonemes contrast in one variety of English but not in another, with the result that homophones in one variety are distinguished in another (and this is predictable on the basis of the phonetic context). The phenomenon is known as neutralisation (see McMahon 2002: 58–60).

For example, in some varieties of North American English, the SQUARE, DRESS and TRAP vowels are not distinguished where there is a following /r/. So *Mary*, *merry* and *marry* are homophonous in these varieties, although they are all phonemically distinct in RP. In New Zealand English *Mary* and *merry* may be homophonous, but *marry* is distinct. In varieties where this happens, the SQUARE, DRESS and TRAP vowels are still kept distinct elsewhere.

The TRAP and DRESS vowels are not distinct for many speakers of New Zealand English if there is a following /l/, so that *Alan* and *Ellen* are homophones for these speakers. The same is also true for some Australians, but these words are phonemically distinct for most other speakers. Even for speakers who do not distinguish between *Alan* and *Ellen*, the words *sad* and *said* are phonemically distinct.

6.7.3 Phonemic systems

For our purposes, the phonemic system for a particular variety is based on the minimum number of symbols needed to transcribe that variety. Another way of looking at this is to ask which of the lexical sets in Figure 6.1 have ‘the same vowel’ in them. We do not have a corresponding list of lexical sets for consonants, but the parallel process involves determining for each variety how many distinct lexical sets are required. Consider the partial systems illustrated in Figure 6.3, and the distribution of phonemes among the lexical sets. It can be seen in Figure 6.3 that RP requires four phonemes for these particular lexical sets, GA just three, and Scottish English also three, but a different three. Some varieties of North American English have the same vowel in the THOUGHT lexical set

<i>Lexical set</i>	<i>RP</i>	<i>GA</i>	<i>Scottish</i>
GOAT	oʊ	o:	o
FORCE	ɔ:	o:	o
THOUGHT	ɔ:	ɔ:	ɒ
PALM	ɑ:	ɑ:	a
LOT	ɒ	ɑ:	ɒ

Figure 6.3 Three phonemic systems for dealing with some lexical sets

<i>free</i> and <i>three</i>	no distinction made by some non-standard varieties in Britain, Australia and New Zealand
<i>where</i> and <i>wear</i>	distinguished in some conservative accents of New Zealand and the US, regularly distinguished in Scotland and Ireland except by some young speakers
<i>lock</i> and <i>loch</i>	distinguished in Scotland, Ireland and South Africa
<i>tide</i> and <i>tied</i>	distinct in Scottish English, due to the effect of the Scottish Vowel Length Rule (see section 2.3.3)
<i>beer</i> and <i>bear</i>	often not distinguished in New Zealand English
<i>moor</i> and <i>more</i>	often not distinguished in the English of England
<i>kit</i> and <i>bit</i>	often do not rhyme in South African English
<i>scented</i> and <i>centred</i>	not distinguished in Australian, New Zealand and South African Englishes; distinguished by vowel quality in RP; distinguished by the absence versus the presence of /r/ in standard North American varieties

Figure 6.4 Further points of phonological difference

as in the LOT lexical set, and require only two phonemes for this part of the system.

Phonemic systems have implications for rhymes: for Tom Lehrer (Lehrer 1965) the following lines have a perfect rhyme

We'll try to stay serene and calm
When Alabama gets the bomb.

because the PALM lexical set and the LOT lexical set are phonemically identical in his variety of English. Since they are different in my variety of English (which is like RP in this regard), the couplet quoted above is not a good rhyme for me.

While there are many aspects of phonemic structure that are shared by the varieties of English discussed in this book, there are, on top of those illustrated in Figure 6.3, places where there are differences (see Figure 6.4 for some examples).

<i>Word</i>	<i>Lexical set to which the stressed vowel belongs in different varieties</i>					
	<i>RP</i>	<i>GA</i>	<i>CDN</i>	<i>Aus</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>SA</i>
auction	THOUGHT ~ LOT	THOUGHT ~ PALM	THOUGHT = LOT = PALM	LOT	LOT	THOUGHT
floral	FORCE	FORCE	FORCE ~ LOT	LOT ~ FORCE	LOT	FORCE ~ LOT
geyser	FLEECE	PRICE	PRICE	FLEECE ~ PRICE	PRICE	PRICE ~ FACE ~ FLEECE
lever	FLEECE	DRESS ~ FLEECE	FLEECE ~ DRESS	FLEECE	FLEECE	FLEECE
maroon	GOOSE	GOOSE	GOOSE	GOAT ~ GOOSE	GOOSE ~ GOAT	GOOSE
proven	GOOSE ~ GOAT	GOOSE ~ GOAT	GOOSE	GOOSE	GOOSE ~ GOAT	GOOSE
vitamin	KIT	PRICE	PRICE	PRICE ~ KIT	PRICE	KIT ~ PRICE
year	NEAR ~ NURSE	NEAR	NEAR	NEAR	NEAR	NEAR ~ NURSE

Figure 6.5 Lexical set assignments of a few words in different varieties

<i>Word</i>	<i>Lexical set to which the marked unstressed vowel belongs in different varieties</i>					
	<i>RP</i>	<i>GA</i>	<i>CDN</i>	<i>Aus</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>SA</i>
Birmingham	COMMA	TRAP	TRAP	COMMA	COMMA	COMMA
ceremony	COMMA	GOAT	GOAT	COMMA	GOAT ~ COMMA	COMMA
fertile	PRICE	COMMA ~ Ø	PRICE ~ COMMA ~ Ø	PRICE	PRICE	PRICE
monastery	COMMA ~ Ø	DRESS	DRESS	COMMA ~ Ø	Ø	COMMA ~ Ø
secretary	COMMA ~ Ø	DRESS	DRESS	COMMA ~ Ø	DRESS ~ Ø	COMMA ~ Ø
territory	COMMA ~ Ø	FORCE	FORCE	COMMA ~ Ø	FORCE ~ Ø	COMMA ~ Ø

Figure 6.6 Lexical set assignments of a few words in different varieties: unstressed vowels

<i>Word</i>	<i>Pronunciation of the marked consonant(s) in different varieties</i>					
	<i>RP</i>	<i>GA</i>	<i>CDN</i>	<i>Aus</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>SA</i>
<u>ass</u> ume	sj	s	s ~ sj	sj ~ ʃ	ʃ ~ sj ~ s	sj
<u>fig</u> ure	g	gʃ	gʃ ~ g	g	g	g
<u>h</u> erb	h	∅	h ~ ∅	h	h	h
<u>neph</u> ew	f ~ v	f	f	f ~ v	f	f ~ v
<u>qu</u> arter	kw	kw	kw ~ k	kw	k ~ kw	kw
<u>sch</u> edule	ʃ	sk	sk ~ ʃ	ʃ ~ sk	sk ~ ʃ	ʃ
<u>th</u> ither	ð	ð ~ θ	ð	ð	θ ~ ð	ð
<u>w</u> ith	ð	ð ~ θ	θ ~ ð	ð ~ θ	θ	ð

Figure 6.7 Consonantal difference between a few words in different varieties

6.7.4 Lexical distribution

Lexical distribution is the kind of pronunciation difference which is most easily noticed and commented on. This is the case where one variety puts a particular word in a different lexical set from another. Thus in RP the word *tomato* has its second (stressed) vowel in the PALM lexical set, while in GA it is in the FACE lexical set. The important point here is that there is no general pattern to observe, it is simply a matter of individual words behaving in particular ways (often for good historical reasons). A few examples are given in Figure 6.5, where ‘~’ indicates ‘is in variation with’, that is both are heard, and ‘=’ indicates that the various lexical sets are phonemically identical.

Just as often, it is vowels in unstressed syllables that vary. A few examples are given in Figure 6.6. And some examples of consonant differences are given in Figure 6.7. In these figures ‘∅’ indicates zero, meaning the relevant segment is not pronounced.

Exercises

1. What kind of difference in pronunciation is the most important in allowing you as someone who hears different varieties of English to locate a speaker as coming from a particular country?
2. This chapter has focused on differences in segments (consonants and vowels). What other kinds of differences in pronunciation may be relevant?

3. What differentiates the way you speak from either British RP or General American? Give five features.

4. Many lay people tend to treat all pronunciation differences as though they were differences in lexical distribution. For example, they may say of Australians and New Zealanders that 'They say *pen* instead of *pan*'. Yet this is really a difference of phonetic realisation: Australian and (especially) New Zealand TRAP is close enough to sound very similar to RP DRESS everywhere it occurs. Which of the following are genuinely matters of lexical distribution, and which are something else? If the example does not show lexical distribution, what kind of difference is it?

- a) Americans and many Australians make *dance* rhyme with *manse*.
- b) Some old-fashioned New Zealanders still say /basɪk/ for *basic* in some contexts.
- c) In Canada, *Don* sounds like *Darwn*.
- d) Australians say *to die* when they mean *today*.
- e) English people say *to-MAH-to* and not *to-MAY-to*.
- f) For many speakers of English, *real* sounds just like *reel*.

Recommendations for reading

Trudgill and Hannah (1994) discuss the pronunciation of individual varieties of English, comparing each with RP. For non-American varieties, the individual chapters in Burchfield (1994) are useful. The major source is probably Wells (1982), though that is occasionally a little out of date now. On comparing varieties see McMahon (2002: chapter 8).