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# NEW TRANSCRIPTIONAL POLICIES IN THE LATEST ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION DICTIONARIES. A HELP OR HINDRANCE TO THE FOREIGN LEARNER?

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## Abstract

Up until very recently, Jones' *English Pronouncing Dictionary (EPD)* was the undisputed norm with regard to the pronunciation of RP English. This situation began to change with the publication of Wells' *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary (LPD)* (1990, 2000), followed soon by Roach & Hartman's updated version of Jones' classic pronunciation guide (1997) culminating with the arrival of Upton, Kretzschmar, and Konopka's *Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation for Current English (ODP)* (2001). This commendable diversification of the transcriptional practice has, however, brought about a number of problems for the foreign learner. In this paper I will present the conventions governing the use of the new non-phonemic symbols in the three aforementioned dictionaries. It is argued that, despite their apparent simplicity, the changes introduced affecting high vowels seem to complicate things unnecessarily for the foreign learner, who seems to feel more at ease with a type of transcription where no non-phonemic symbol is used. The casuistry introduced in the representation of high elements followed by a vowel is, on the other hand, a long way from the simplicity principle advocated by Jones.

## 1. Introduction

In 1981 Gimson (1981: 250) wrote that 'the importance given to pronunciation in English dictionaries ... has varied widely according to the whim of the editor or the attitude of the publishing house', a statement that up until the end of the 1980s was applied mainly to those dictionaries whose basic aim was the representation of the lexico-semantic level. In matters of (British) pronunciation, however, D. Jones's *English Pronouncing Dictionary (EPD)*<sup>1</sup> turned out to be the indisputable work for well over half a century as the fourteen editions of such dictionary testify, the 1977 version being extensively

revised by A. C. Gimson, and the 1988 revised and supplemented by S. Ramsaran.

The arrival to the market of Wells' *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* (1990, 2000), Roach & Hartman's updated version of Jones's EPD (15th edition, 1997) and, more recently, Upton, Kretzschmar, and Konopka's *The Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation for Current English* – ODP for short – (OUP, 2001)<sup>2</sup> has meant a change in transcriptional policies in the way in which English high monophthongs are represented. The adherence to certain phonotactic principles and to a higher phonetic faithfulness to reality has resulted in a greater transcriptional complexity which seems to be moving away from the phonological parsimony so eagerly sought after by D. Jones. One could agree with Wells' statement (2000: xviii) that differences between various systems of transcription are 'in many cases trivial' were it not for the fact that the latest typographical innovations, motivated by the inevitable changes affecting RP, are not so trivial not just to foreign students who try their hands at phonetic transcription for the first time, but also for more advanced learners. Far from the simplicity and straightforwardness that characterize the EPD by Jones–Gimson, the innovations introduced in the latest edition of the above-mentioned dictionaries, though not substantial in nature, do not provide, as far as vowel high phonemes is concerned, a more attractive pedagogical option with the exception of Upton et al.'s rendering of word-medial vowel segments.

There is no question that Wells, and Roach & Hartman consider a phonemic transcription to be the most convenient way to map out the pronunciation of English words for users of English whether they be native, or second or foreign language learners. Unlike Upton et al. (2001: x), who choose a 'broadly phonetic' transcription in order to capture the degree of variability found in 'Broadcast RP', Wells (2000: 577) represents a modernized RP version linked to BBC newsreaders using a 'phonemic' notation with some 'minor' exceptions – some of which are discussed below – very much like Roach & Hartman (1997: v) who resort to a 'modified phonemic transcription' in representing BBC English. Monophthongs, high vowels in particular, can vary more or less haphazardly between close and open qualities, their phonemic representation being far from settled and open to current debate. Windsor Lewis (1990), for instance, mentions the following types of <ɹ> values: traditional, open, Russellian, variable, close and non-enclitic. He pointedly remarks (1990: 167) that there is not a clear-cut division between them, but rather a gradient, and that 'context-sensitive variation is probably rather higher than Wells seems to allow ...'. Ramsaran (1990: 185) on her part discusses the 'indeterminate quality' when talking about the tensing of final <ɹ> by many younger RP speakers. She considers that '/ɹ/ still occurs quite often utterance finally'. In *An English Pronunciation Companion* (1982: 13) by A. C. Gimson and S. M. Ramsaran we read that 'The pronunciation with /ɹ/ is still the dominant form in such positions [i.e. *happy*, *money*, etc.] if all RP speakers are taken into account'. And Wells himself (2000: 511) in justifying his use of *ɪ* in positions where traditionally /ɹ/ occurred, acknowledges that '... some speakers use *ɪ*,

some use **i:**, some use something intermediate or indeterminate, and some fluctuate between the two possibilities ...’.

Indeed the consumer has to understand that competitive publishing makes it difficult to present a unified view of English. Also, it is clear that homogeneity in sound representation is an unrealistic claim, but from a consumer’s standpoint this should not preclude greater consensus in balancing phonetic faithfulness with pedagogical efficiency. The non-coincidental transcriptional policies, some of them provoking a downright disapproval on the part of the competition,<sup>3</sup> coupled with some inconsistencies as we shall see below, are a matter of serious concern and puzzlement for the dictionaries’ largest audience: the foreign student.

In the following pages I shall begin by presenting a summary of the conventions that govern the use of the new symbols introduced to represent high vowel segments in the latest edition of the three dictionaries under analysis.<sup>4</sup> I shall then discuss how consistently they are used by their authors before finally making some remarks about the usefulness of the new transcriptional systems for those for whom English is not their mother tongue.

## 2. Monophthongs /ɪ:/– /ɪ/, /u:/– /ʊ/ and i – u as new values

In the latest edition of the LPD (1990, 2000) and the EPD (1997) words like *lady*, *pretty*, etc., appear transcribed as **'leɪd i**, **'prɪt i**. This is a divergence not just of the standard set up by Jones<sup>5</sup> and continued by Gimson who both represent these words as **'leɪdi**, **'prɪti**, etc., but it is also a departure from the standard British vowels phonemic inventory. Roach & Hartman (1997: xiv) use this new, non-phonemic symbol on the grounds that ‘there are many places in present-day British and American English where the distinction between /i:/ and /ɪ/ is neutralised’. In more technical terms, the authors introduce an archiphoneme, represented with phoneme slashes for the sake of ‘simplicity’ we are told.

Previously (1982), Wells discussed in his *Accents of English* the status of final vowels like the ones occurring in *happY*, *lettER* and *commA*. He acknowledges that they are ‘weak’ vowels, and that – in the case of the first word – ‘Most RP ... have [ɪ] for *happy*’ (1982: 165). A few lines below he states that ‘Some English northerners, some RP speakers ... have a context-sensitive variation between [i] (used finally and before a vowel ...) and [ɪ] (used finally before a consonant and in absolute final position ...)’. Consistent final [i] is found in much of the south of England ...’ (1982: 165–6). In any case, he admits that the ‘phonemic identification with strong vowels will usually be debatable’ (*ibid*, 165). In the 1990 LPD edition, he leans towards the use of the symbols **i–u** ‘in positions of neutralization’ (1990: xviii), whereas in the LPD-00 edition, he explicitly states that **i** and **u** are used as symbols representing /ɪ:/ – /ɪ/ and /u:/ – /ʊ/ respectively in positions of neutralization, this taking place ‘when the vowel is in a WEAK syllable at the end of a word or at the end of part of a compound word or of a stem ...[or] when the vowel is in a weak syllable before another

vowel' (2000: 511). Thus the student is given, under the English phonemic system heading, two symbols that are not part of the phonemic inventory, listed as 'weak vowels',<sup>6</sup> together with /ɪ/-/ʊ/, which are also weak vowel phonemes.<sup>7</sup> The problem for the foreign student here is obvious: he is told that the system used in LPD 'conforms to the current de facto standard' (2000: xviii). Furthermore, if we look at the latest EPD edition in which 'the basic principle of the transcription used is, as in all previous editions, *phonemic* [the authors' italics]' (1997: viii) the student has still to discover that this is not always so. There are occasions where **i** stands for [ɪ] and [I] as in *happy*, and there are other cases where **i** is just a weak element as in *various*, which can be reduced to [j] under the effect of compression (Wells, 2000: 165). This ambivalent character is all the more disturbing when one considers that **i** can apparently represent /ɪ/, a weak or lenis element, and at the same time it can stand for /i:/, a fortis phoneme. Moreover, the idea of considering **i** as a weak element clashes with those transcriptional systems of a qualitative nature where such a symbol stands for a tense, strong vowel.

A tense vowel is precisely the value Upton et al. (2001) assign to final <-y>. Although they transcribe *pretty* as 'prɪti like Wells, and Roach & Hartman, the final symbol is now 'intended to imply both greater tensions that (sic) the [ɪ] commonly used for BR in this position and also greater length' (2001: xiii). It therefore has nothing to do with neutralization.

In his *English Phonetics and Phonology* (1995), P. Roach, contradicting his previous statement about the phonemic character of his system of transcription, acknowledges that the use of **i**, in contrast with /i:/ and /ɪ/ – and the same is valid for **u** as regards /u:/ and /ʊ/ – does away with a 'true phonemic transcription in the traditional sense' (1995: 78). He weighs this inconvenience against the argument that this is a better rendition of the 'native speakers ... feelings about the language' (ibid, 78). One has to look at the EPD (1997: xiv) and to his *English Phonetics and Phonology* (1995: 78) to have a full picture of the circumstances that regulate the use of **i** –**u**. We shall follow his line of presentation to pinpoint various inconsistencies which he as well as the remaining authors occasionally commit.

Firstly, **i** is found, he writes, in an unstressed word-final position in words spelt with <i> or <ey> after one or more consonants, and in morpheme-final position when the words have a suffix beginning with a vowel. Accordingly, Roach & Hartman transcribe 'hæpi, 'hæpi-ə or 'hæpi-ɪst, but *happiness* appears transcribed as 'hæpi.nəs. Wells views this differently and gives **hæpi.nəs** as the phonological representation for this word. One wonders why he uses /i/ in this case and does not use it consistently in other instances where a consonant follows an end-of-a-stem **i** as in 'hæpi.li, 'redɪ.li, etc., considering that the adverbial suffix is <-ly> and not <-ily>. It seems that from a pedagogical viewpoint this is an awkward solution, for it implies that neutralization is a function of the following element irrespective of whether an identical stem is being represented. Upton et al. do not make things easier for the student. While they coincide with Roach & Hartman and Wells in the

transcription of the final segment of *happy* 'hapi, (notice the change from æ to a on the grounds that in Broadcast RP this vowel has come to be articulated 'in a more open position than the [æ]' (2001: xii), *happier* is transcribed as 'hapɪə as in the EPD-14, but *happily* as 'hapɪli, the composite new symbol standing for both [ɪ] and [ə].

Secondly, **i** is also allowed word-medially in certain compounds (Roach & Hartman mention two as a way of example: 'bɪzi, bɒdi, 'meri, weðə). We do not know, however, why compounds such as 'mɪnɪbʌs, 'mɪnɪskɜ:t, etc., should be written with /ɪ/. This symbol is reserved, we are told, for unstressed positions when <i> is followed by a vowel with which it forms a composite phoneme (which is not the case here), otherwise **i** is used again (e.g. ,mʌlti-'θənɪk). Wells does not adhere to this policy and transcribes compounds like the ones previously exemplified with **i** ('mɪnɪbʌs, 'mɪnɪskɜ:t), which is pedagogically more revealing since the first term of the compound maintains an identical phonological representation as opposed to when it occurs on its own. Upton et al. on their part seem to decline in carrying over their principle of transcribing words that end in <i>/ <y> as [ɪ] to cases where the same word is part of a compound. Thus they write *mini*, *merry* as 'mɪni, 'merri, but *minipill* or *merrymaking* are given as 'mɪnɪpɪl, 'merɪmeɪkɪŋ.

Thirdly, **i** –**u** are employed by Roach & Hartman (also by Wells) word-medially whenever these vowels are not part of a diphthong or a triphthong, otherwise [ɪ]– [ʊ] are used instead. Thus [ɪ] occurs before stressed /eɪ/ (*variation*, *abbreviation*), /e/ (*Oriental*, *siesta*), /æ/ (*piano*, *familiarity*), /ɑ:/ (*patriarchal*, *piazza*), /ɒ/ (*inferiority*, *curiosity*), /əʊ/ (*mediocre*, *symbiosis*), and /ɪ/ (*atheist*, *foliage*). All these words are transcribed with /ɪ/ by Upton et al. (2001). **u**, which according to Roach (1995: 78) is used 'before a vowel within a word' without further qualification, occurs before /e/ and /eɪ/ (*influenza*, *evacuation*), /æ/ (*duality*, *spirituality*), /ɒ/ (*sinuosity*), or /ɪ/ (*casuistry*). These phonotactically straightforward cases are not to be equated with those instances where an /ə/ follows (*spiritual*, *ritualistic*), or those which have to be distinguished from real diphthongs or even triphthongs (is *onion* a diphthong? What about *serious*?). The student must learn that in all these and similar cases, **i** and **u** are not symbols representing the neutralization of /ɪ/– /ɪ/ any longer, but weak elements very much like the symbols /ɪ/ –/ʊ/ used in previous EPD editions, notably EPD-14. Upton et al. do away with this casuistry and transcribe all encounters of <i> or <u> plus vowels – including the stressed ones – with the corresponding short symbol (ɔ:rrɪ'entl, spɪrɪtʃʊ'alɪtɪ, etc.).

Different forms of representation are found in the use of <u> followed by a consonant. Words such as *euphoric*, *euphonious* or *eudora* are transcribed as ju'fɔ:ɪk/, ju 'fəʊniəs and ju 'dɔ:rə by Wells, whereas Roach & Hartman resort to the long phoneme as the only possibility (/ju:/–/) thus departing from Jones and Gimson's policy of representing these words with both /u:/ and /ʊ/. Wells' representation seems to be more congruous with the EPD-14 provided that **i** is used as a neutralization symbol and not as a mere weak element. Deviation from the rule above is also apparent in the way that the EPD-15 transcribes words like

*copulate*, *depopulate*, etc. The options given include schwa and the weak vowel [ʊ], but not [u]. Again, /u/ is used consistently in the LPD-00 in these cases all with schwa as an alternative. Upton et al. (2001: x) adhere to the EPD-15's policy in the way that they represent *euphoric*, *euphonious*, but not so in the case of *eudora*, which they transcribe **jʊ** 'dɔɪrə, **ʌ** standing for either [ʊ] or [ə] in parallel with **ɜ**.

Fourthly, **i** occurs, according to Roach (1995: 78), in the prefixes *re-*, *pre-*, *de-*, also in words ending in *-iate*, *-ious*, when they have two syllables. In the EPD-15, *re-* is transcribed as **ri-** if it is envisaged as a loosely attached element and a vowel follows: **ri**: **i** 'lekt, **ri**: **i** 'edjukert, **ri**: **i** g 'zæmm, **ri**: **i** 'ɪfʊz, etc. As a tightly attached prefix, *re-* is transcribed as **ri-** in an identical context: **ri**: **i** tərert, **ri**: **i** ækt, etc., where **i** is supposedly acting as an archiphoneme of [i:] – [ɪ]. A much neater distinction is introduced when *re-* is followed by a consonant, where the vowel changes from [i:] to [ɪ] depending on its greater or lesser degree of attachment to the following constituent. Accordingly, we find forms like **ri**: **i** tel, **ri**: **i** pei (pay again), **ri**: **i** seip, alongside others such as **ri**: **i** treis, **ri**: **i** pei (pay back), etc. To complicate things further, these last words, as well as others like *reorganise*, *relay*, *replace*, etc., which show a similar degree of detachment from the prefix, have a second pronunciation with [i:] ( [ri-] / [ri:-] ). One wonders why in cases like these where the variation is obvious, no use is being made of the neutralization symbol **i** to cover both phonemes.

Wells, however, does not share this view in its entirety. He does transcribe loose prefixes with /i:/ if the meaning is 'again', but he introduces a further variation. While we find words where the long phoneme is the only option given before a vowel or a consonant (e.g. *re-elect*, *re-establish*, *recycle*), there are other examples where /i:/, given as a first option, alternates with /ɪ/ either before a vowel or a consonant, again with a clearly detachable prefix (e.g. *re-educate*, *remarry*,). There are also instances where [i] appears as a first variant (with [i:] as an alternative) despite *re-* clearly being seen as a detachable element meaning 'again' (e.g. *re-enter*, *re-open*). Wells points out that 'with a vaguer meaning, ri- [is used] before a vowel sound' (2000: 633), but one does not see why *re-enter* is considered as having a vaguer meaning than, say, *re-examination* or *rehabilitate*, both transcribed with [i:] as the only acceptable pronunciation. Before a consonant, *re-* is given as **ri-**, alternating with **ri-** as a second option, in words like *repay* or *retrace*. It is difficult to accept that *repay* and *remarry* should differ in the phonological makeup of their prefixes when in fact both are followed by a consonant. Admittedly, the prefix in the first word may not be as fully productive as in the latter, but it cannot be said that its meaning is as vague as the one we find in a word like *recite* for instance. On the other hand, if there is alternation between [i:]–[ɪ] there is no reason why the archiphoneme **i** should not be used as in our 'leidi example. Finally, there are words where *re-* has **ri-** as the only possibility (e.g. *react*), which conforms to the idea that the prefix here has a vague meaning and is followed by a vowel, but then why is the same principle not extended to *reallocate*? It is obvious that the rule has not been

systematically applied for there are instances like *reanimate*, *reinforce* where [i] is not included even as a second variant.

Upton et al. (2001) simplify the picture somewhat. They represent *re-* as [ri:] when acting as a loose element and a vowel follows (e.g. *re-elect*, *re-engage*, *reanalyse*). A questionable mid position as far as the status of the prefix is concerned is resolved in the alternation between [ri:]/[rɪ:] (e.g. *re-entry*, *re-open*, *reoccupy*), or, less frequently, the other way round (e.g. *reorganise*), whereas a close attachment of the prefix is transcribed with [ɹ] (e.g. *react*). Before a consonant, [i] is kept (*remarry*, *repay* (pay again), *recycle*), although it can alternate with [ɹ] in some cases where it may be seen to present a higher degree of attachment to the following constituent (e.g. *repay* (pay back), *retrace*, *redouble*). Unlike this last word, *replace* is represented as [rɪ:] (not [ɹɪ:])<sup>8</sup>, [ri:] being given as an alternative form. There are also instances where [ɹɪ:] is the only permissible transcription in words such as *refine*, *recite*, *recurrent*, etc.

The prefix *pre-* appears transcribed in the EPD-15 with [i:] whenever it is not semantically bound to the following word and keeps its meaning of 'before' (e.g. **pri:'medɪfai**). When attached, it is pronounced with an [ɪ] or [ə] in British English as in **pri:'sentɪmənt**. Roach & Hartman (1995: 78), however, do not seem to follow their own rule according to which *i* is used whenever the prefix is unstressed and a vowel follows (e.g. **pri:'eminəns**, **pri:'ɒkjəpaɪ**). Or to be more precise, the *i* option is given as a second variant, which is unfortunate, for such an *i* does not stand for [i:] any longer, otherwise the latter would not appear in the dictionary as an alternative and a more preferable option. Wells' transcription of this prefix provides some further possibilities, but does not clarify things any better. He too, represents *pre-* as **pri:** when it acts as a productive prefix, and **pri-** or **prə-** when it has a vaguer meaning. However, he also gives **pre-** and **pri-**, the former occurring if 'stressed through the operation of a stressing rule' (LPD: 598) and the latter in other cases. Obviously, **pri-** is not the result of neutralization for there are entries where both forms alternate (e.g. **pri:'æmbl/'pri:**). Thus it has to be considered a weak vowel, in which case it is difficult, if not impossible for the learner, to tell it apart from **pri-** the other weak form. Nor is neutralization adhered to in either of the other instances where [ɪ] alternates with [i:] in cases where one would expect an *i* (e.g. **pri:'ses/pri:**, **pri:'kluzɪn/pri:**), etc. In the ODP-01 *pre-* is transcribed with an [i:] in those instances where it is considered a productive prefix as in *prepay*, *pre-school*, *prearrange*, otherwise there is an alternation between [i:] – [ɪ] (e.g. *pre-eminence*, *pre-empt*) or [ɪ] – [i:] (e.g. *preoccupy*). Carrying a vaguer meaning, the prefix is represented with an [ɹ] (e.g. *predate* (pray upon), *presentiment*, *prevision*).

A greater consensus appears to take place in the phonetic representation of the prefix *de-*. Wells gives only two variants for the high phonemes under entry *de-*: [**di:** –] if it is fully productive, and [**dɪ:**], alternating with [**də:**], in those cases where the prefix is weak. However, there is no mention of *i*. The student soon discovers that, before vowels, the new variant [**dɪ:**] is given as the preferred option in words like *deactivate*, *deactivation*, *deodorant*, etc. Still,

there are other words where [ɪ] can alternate with [i] as in *deoxygenate*, *depressurise*, *deregulate*, *destabilisation*, etc. The EPD-15 provides us with identical information for *de-* to that given in the LPD-00, and likewise no mention is made of the variant *i* used before vowels (*deactivate*, *deodorant*) thus leaving aside the rule mentioned above where *i* neutralises [ɪ] and [i]. This is all the more disturbing for the foreign student when s/he comes across words where the prefix is represented with an *i*, [ɪ] being a second option as in *deoxidise*, *deanimate*, etc., or those cases where [ɪ] alternates with /ɪ/ as in *deglutinate*, *destabilisation* (*depressurize* and *deregulate* appear just with [i:]). Upton et al. are more systematic in this respect in the sense that they make use of the [i] – [ɪ] distinction in the transcription of all manifestations of *de-* as a loose prefix. Accordingly, the prefix can alternate between [ɪ– ɪ]– [ɪ– i] in words like *deactivate*, *deoxygenate*, or it may have [ɪ] as the only option when less semantically bound to the following word, as in *deregulate*, *destabilisation*, etc.

The way suffixes *-iate*, *-uate*, *-ious*, *-uous*, are represented is an extension of Roach's rule c) in that the initial segment is followed by a vowel with which it does not form a diphthong. While the endings *-ious* / *-uous*, appear identically transcribed in the LPD and the EPD, one cannot say the same about the other pair. Here, the initial element – the orthographic <i> – is transcribed with [i] by Wells, and Roach & Hartman who appropriately indicate with a vertical bar the morpheme boundary before *-ate* in the standard orthography (*viti/ate*, *vari/ate*, */infuri/ate* ('vi:fiert, 'veəriert, in'fjuəriert). An identical policy is followed when <u> precedes *-ate* (*fluctu/ate*, 'fluktʃuert, graduate 'grædʒuert). However, [i] becomes [ɪ] if a consonant intervenes, which of course breaks up the suffix structure under analysis as does a controversial morpheme division before the consonant preceding *-ate* (*fluori/date*, 'flɔ:riɪert; fasci/nate, 'fæsniert). One would assume that the same applies to <u>, but Wells is not fully consistent in this respect: he transcribes with [u] words like *gesticu/late* (schwa given as an alternative form, first option in the EPD-15), or [ə] (*accurate*), but he also resorts to [u] as a first option (schwa as a second one) in *matricu/late*, *regu/late*, *articu/late* (v), etc. Incidentally, one does not see the point of establishing, in the case of *articulate*, a distinction between the verb (with [u]) and the adjective (transcribed with [u]) as Wells does if the two forms are considered to be weak elements. Nor his policy of changing [u] into [ʊ] in words related that share an identical stem such as 'kælkjuleɪt vs. 'kælkjələbl, kəʊ'ægjuleɪt vs. kəʊ'ægjuleit is easily understood, considering that they have [ə] as an alternative and that just one high back symbol, whether it be [u] or [ʊ], would do. Upton et al., and to a lesser extent Roach & Hartman, are more consistent in the representation of the aforementioned. In the ODP in particular, the policy followed in the transcription of the four suffixes is identical to the one found in the EPD-14. Similarly, they resolve all instances of high vowel plus consonant plus *-ate* by means of [ɛ] (e.g. 'fasɪnert) or [ʊ] (e.g. ɔ:'tɪkjələt).

Finally, *i* is used in the unstressed versions of *he*, *she*, *we*, *the* + vowel, *me* and *be* (Roach, 1995: 78), thus echoing Jones' statement in his *Outline* (1976:



470–1). Both the EPD-15 and the LPD-00 resort to using this symbol to represent the weak versions of the first four words, but in the case of *me*, Roach & Hartman depart from the rule and offer /**mɪ**/ as the only weak form. *Be*, on the other hand, presents two weak forms according to the EPD-15: /**bɪ**/ before consonants, and /**bi**/ before vowels, whereas the LPD-00 makes no such distinction and gives just /**bi**/ for both. Notice that in these forms, **i** is no longer an archiphoneme, as it does not seem to represent a change of timbre. Rather it stands for quantity, being the weak form of /**hi:**/ in the LPD as well as in the EPD. It may be argued that it reflects quality as well, but quantity is certainly involved. Now, if this is true, we have here a symbol performing two different functions, which creates an awkward situation from a transcriptional point of view: if the symbol represents quantity, there is then no reason why it should be restricted to just those words. Further disagreement is apparent in Upton et al. who give [**hi:**] /[(**h**)i:] as the strong – weak forms for *he*, whereas [**ʃi:**] – [**ʃɪ**] are the corresponding forms given for *she*. *We* and *me* have [**ɪ**] as a weak form, not envisaged on the other hand in the case of *be*, transcribed as [**bɪ**]; *the* + vowel is represented as either [**ði**] or [**ði:**].

Comments linked to the behaviour of close back rounded vowels have been made above in conjunction with certain endings, but some further remarks are much needed here. As <u> plus vowel has been dealt with above and diphthongal sequences will be discussed below, we shall now focus on those words where **u**, a vowel that apparently shares the characteristics of [**u:**]– [**ʊ**], is most frequently used: *to*, *do*, *you*, *into* and *through*.

Roach & Hartman practice what they preach in the case of *do*, thus they use **u** whenever the word precedes a vowel (e.g. ,**wai du** ,ɔ:l-), the other weak form, [**də**], occurring before consonants. Wells considers [**du**] as one of the three weak forms of *do*, but he does not specify their context of occurrence. In fact, in the first edition of the LPD [**du**] was not listed, [**dʊ**] appeared instead. The ODP just gives us [**du:**] as the only form.

The pronoun *you* has one strong form and different weak options. Among the latter, [**ju**] is given in the EPD-15 as the choice found before vowels and in final position. Similar information is provided by Wells who, nonetheless, recommends foreign learners of British English not to use weak forms other than [**ju**] (2000: 865) in clear contradiction with Upton et al. who put forward schwa as the only possible weak form.

As for *to*, the EPD-15 lists three weak forms ([**tʊ**], [**tu**], [**tə**]). We are told that the second occurs before vowels, and the third before consonants, but nothing is said about the possible context of occurrence for [**tʊ**]. Wells provides an identical context to that used in the EPD-15 for [**tu**], [**tə**], but he does not give [**tʊ**] as an alternative weak option. Upton et al., on the contrary, highlight this possibility in their representation of weak *to* as [**t-ʊ**]. For once, the LPD and the EPD concur in the representation of *into* when it occurs in a weak position, both transcribing [**u**] before a vowel and [**ə**] before a consonant. The ODP does the same when a consonant follows, but it opts for [**ʊ**] alongside a vowel.

### 3. Diphthongs /ʊə/ - /ɪə/

One of the main characteristics of English diphthongs is the greater duration of their first element (Gimson–Cruttenden, 2001: 129). In the case of the centring diphthongs, the EPD-14 makes a clear distinction between /ɪə/ – /ʊə/ when under primary stress and in an unstressed position. Length was reflected in the former, thus differing from those unstressed occurrences characterized by a shorter duration.

Unlike the representational simplicity found in the EPD-14, where words like *real*, *ideal*, *Ian*, etc., were transcribed with [ɪə] and [iɪə] as a second option, the student now has to be aware of the different ways of representing these and similar words. Under primary stress, both the LPD-00 and the ODP follow the EPD-14 policy. Consequently, these words appear transcribed with [ɪə] alternating with [iɪə].<sup>9</sup> The EPD-15, however, records just /'riəl/ as the British variant, presenting both realizations for *ideal*, but only the long one in the case of *Ian*. Given that the long and the short high phonemes are apparently in free variation in these contexts, a much more coherent solution would have been to transcribe these and similar words making use of the neutralization symbol: **ai** 'diəl', 'riəl, etc.

A second possibility arises whenever a morpheme boundary intervenes after /ɪ/, as in *seer* (one who sees), transcribed as [iɪə] as the first option in the EPD-14 thus keeping the value of the stem. The EPD-15 follows suit, but Wells, somewhat counter-intuitively, gives priority to ['sɪə]. On the other hand, he does keep the value of the stem in words like *familiar*, *colonial*, *serial*, all transcribed with [-i ə-] in his dictionary as well as in the EPD-15 (the EPD-14 and the ODP show preference for [ɪə]). Incidentally, such a possibility (i.e. [i ə]), typical of unaccented syllables, is not contemplated in the Gimson–Cruttenden's manual, the standard textbook *de facto* for RP where we read that 'In unaccented syllables ... the [ɪ] element may be the weaker of the two ... being almost equivalent to [j] ...' (2001: 142). Accordingly, words like *period* or *serious* are transcribed either [ɪə] or [jə] ('sɪəriəs /-jəs). If we compare this transcription with the one found in the EPD-15 or in the LPD-00 (i.e. 'sɪəri əs), it is evident that the student is led to believe that (s)he must interpret this sequence not as a diphthong, which we find in the EPD-14 and the ODP, but as a hiatus of two vowels, this often being the case when /ə/ stands for a suffix with morphemic status. It is true that Gimson–Cruttenden point out that 'increasingly, a closer vowel is to be heard in such words' (ibid), but this contradicts the advice they give to foreign learners in that they 'should avoid using a first element which is too close' (2001: 143). To complicate things further, the student may come across words transcribed with a [-jə] in an unstressed position, which is given as the main or only option in Roach's and Wells' dictionaries (e.g. *onion*, *opinion*, *companion*, *champion*, *dominion*, etc.), as if this compressed version was the only acceptable form in these words or *i* would not do for both (cf. Wells, 2000: 165). Upton et al. also employ [-jə], except in the last two words previously cited where [-ɪə] is used instead. There are cases, like *accordion*,

*bastion*, *postilion*, *scorpion*, etc., where [-jə]–[ɪə] are disallowed by Roach & Hartman and Wells – all with [ɪə] in the ODP. There are also instances in the LPD where [-i ə] alternates with [-jə] as in *union*, *trillion*, *pavilion*, and cases where Wells transcribes a word like *theological* with [iə] in contrast to Roach & Hartman who give both ([iə]–[ɪə]) instead of resorting to the expected neutralization symbol **i**.

The suffixes *-ier*,<sup>10</sup> *-eer*, *-ia* also deserve a mention. The first appears in words of French origin, where the stress is usually placed on the last syllable, as in *cashier*, *cavalier*, *brigadier*, etc. There are a number of words, however, which do not follow such a stress pattern (e.g. *frontier*, *croupier*, *glacier*). In the EPD-14 a distinction was made between the first group, represented by [ɪə] (**kæ'ʃɪə**, **kævə'liə**) as the only option, and the second where [ɪə] is alternated with [-jə] (**'frʌn,tɪə/-jə**; **'kru:piə/-jə**). This policy has not been implemented by any of the most recent dictionaries on pronunciation. Thus, while Wells and Upton et al. provide us with an identical transcription for both groups of words (**kæ'ʃɪə**, **kævə'liə**; **'frʌn,tɪə**, **'kru:piə**), Roach & Hartman show their preference for [-i ə] as the only representation in words belonging to the second group<sup>11</sup> (**'kru:pi ə**, **'glæsi ə**, **fɑr'nænsi ə**, as well as in a handful of cases). A higher degree of consensus is reached in the representation of the suffix *-eer*. Wells, Roach & Hartman, and Upton et al., in accordance with the EPD-14 transcribe [ɪə] in words like *career*, *engineer*, *volunteer*. However, differences are again evident in *overseer*, a word ending in an unstressed *-eer*, given as [-ɪə] in the LPD-00 and the ODP, but as [iə] in the EPD-15.

Finally, a brief comment should be made with regards to the suffix *-ial*, *-ia(n)*. In the EPD-14 terms like *biennial*, *colonial*, *parochial*, *testimonial*; *librarian*, *pedestrian* or *utopian*, were represented using [-jə], [-ɪə] as a second option (the first in the ODP-01). This policy has changed in the LPD-00 as well as in the EPD-15, where all such words are transcribed with an [i ə] (**kə'ləʊniəl**, **pə'rəʊkiəl**, **pə'destriən**, **ju'təupiən**, etc. – see Roach's point three above).

The diphthong /uə/ is similar to /ɪə/ in that it has different renderings depending on whether or not it is affected by the primary stress or whether it is the result of a morpheme boundary. Thus words like *cure*, *curious*, *furious* are all transcribed with [ʊə] ([ɔ:] as a second option). In this respect there is no departure from the EPD-14's policy. There is a second group of words, though, where the nuclear syllable undergoes a lengthening of the first diphthongal segment. This is the case of terms such as *dual*, *dualism*, *jewel*, *fluent*, *fluently*, *renewal*, etc., transcribed with [uə] as the only option in both the LPD-00 and the EPD-15.<sup>12</sup> A quick glance at the EPD-14 tells us that both possibilities coexist. If this is so, a good pedagogical solution might have been to transcribe them with the neutralization symbol **u**.

This differs from those cases with a morpheme boundary where the stem ends in a long vowel followed by schwa as in *truer*, *fewer*, *rescuer*, etc. Here the representation with the long phoneme [uə] seems to be justified, although the parallelism with [iə]–[ɪə] (e.g. *seer*) is broken up since no equivalent [ʊə]

alternative is envisaged. Again, [iə]–[uə] would have covered both possibilities more elegantly in these and similar cases.

A third possibility takes place in unstressed syllables like the ones we find in *casual*, *visual*, *usual*, *ambiguous*, *superfluous*, etc. As with [–iə], the morpheme-boundary or phonotactic reasons would justify the representation of these words with [–uə]. Once again the foreign learner is bewildered, for while (s)he finds these words transcribed in Wells, and Roach & Hartman as the only option given, in Gimson–Cruttenden (s)he can read that ‘the sequence transcribed with [u]+[ə] may also, in unaccented syllables, have the prominence on the second element ... the first element often weakening to [w]’ (2001: 145), a variant not recorded by any of the current British dictionaries on pronunciation.

#### 4. The case of the diphthongal glides /ju/ – /wi/

Although the official doctrine does not consider these sequences as diphthongs in the proper sense of the word on the grounds that the inclusion of /w/ and /j/ ‘would add enormously to our inventory of basic vowels’ as stated in Gimson–Cruttenden (2001: 94), the fact is that from a phonetic viewpoint they may constitute a rising diphthong, a characteristic captured in the pronunciation dictionaries in different ways as we shall see below.

The palatal approximant /j/ occurs initially in a word (e.g. *you*, *union*) in stressed syllables beginning by the voiceless consonants /p, t, k/ either on their own or preceded by /s/ (e.g. *tune*, *stew*), after /h/ (e.g. *hue*), and following voiced consonants (e.g. *duty*, *residue*) (Gimson–Cruttenden, 2001: 211). Apart from *you*, which has [ju:] as a strong form and [ju] as a weak one ([jə] it is not recommended by Wells to foreign students when in fact it is the only form given by Upton et al.), words with an accented [ju] (e.g. *union*, *infusion*, *music* ... ) are transcribed with [u:] in the three dictionaries under analysis, in line with the EPD-14’s transcriptional policy. If an <r> follows, as in *curious*, *furious*, the diphthong /ʊə/ results in alternation with /ɔɪ/. Nevertheless, discrepancies arise when this syllable occurs in an unaccented position in the cases of *musician*, *utility*, *congratulations*, etc. Wells gives [ju] here. Roach & Hartman, and Upton et al. show their preference for [ju:], except in the last word where the first two use [–ʊ] and Upton et al. [–ʊ]. There are other cases like *value*, *argue*, *continue*, where, contrary to the idea of neutralization operating in word final position – in parallel to the close front unrounded vowel i – Wells prefers the long phoneme /u:/ . Equally upsetting is the presence of [ju:] and [ju] (does the latter not stand for the former?) in words like *value*. One is ready to consider [ju] as a weak vowel neutralizing the long and the short high phonemes, but the last example where both phonemes are given inhibits such an interpretation. So much so that such a distinction ‘carries virtually no functional load in this environment’ as Wells writes (*Accents*, 1982: 119). Roach & Hartman, on their part, prefer [ju:] in all of these cases,<sup>12</sup> even in final position, despite the fact that [in such a final position and parallel to the final /i/] ‘in the

unstressed case it is often not possible to draw a clear line between ... /uɪ/ and /u/ (1997: xiv). Again, if this is so, **u** might have been a more commendable option considering the parallelism that the authors draw between the high front and back phonemes in word-final position.

Like [ju], the sequence [uɪ] is not granted diphthongal status by most English phoneticians. Jones is perhaps the only one who considers that a 'rising diphthong /uɪ/ is not uncommon'<sup>14</sup> (*Outline*, 1976: 125) and transcribes it accordingly. Gimson does not include it in the phonemic inventory given in the EPD-14, and yet he acknowledges it *de facto* in the way he transcribes words such as 'suisaid, 'dʒesjuɪt, etc.).

Three possibilities are foreseen in the representation of this sequence depending on whether both elements are under primary stress, whether both occur in unstressed position or whether primary stress affects only the second. The first is rejected by Jones (1976: 125) who clearly states that [uɪ] 'is always unstressed', although he acknowledges that 'when stressed **u**: is followed by **i**, the sequence is sometimes reduced to a falling diphthong **ui**' (1976: 85). Thus he transcribes words such as *ruin*, *fewest* or *annuity* with [uɪ]/[uɪɪ] as does Gimson in the EPD-14. Wells, Roach & Hartman, and Upton et al., are not fully in agreement with this view for they transcribe all these words with just [uɪ-]. In unaccented positions, their policies differ once again. Words like *Jesuit*, *issuing*, *ruination*, all with [uɪ] in the EPD-14, are now transcribed differently. Wells, and Roach & Hartman represent the first lexical item with [u ɪ] ([uɪ] in Upton et al.) and the second with [uɪɪ] (also Upton et al.). As for *ruination*, Wells uses [uɪɪ], Roach & Hartman [uɪɪ]–[uɪ] and Upton et al. show a preference for [uɪɪ]. Once again the use of **u** as a neutralization symbol would simplify things considerably for a learner puzzled by the apparent anarchy of symbols displayed. Jones' idea of considering these and similar cases as examples of a rising diphthong would be an even better pedagogical solution. Minor discrepancies are noticeable even in those cases where the second segment of the sequence is affected by primary stress. Thus, while the EPD-14 transcribes *tuition* or *fluidity* with both [uɪ'ɪ]–[u'ɪ], a feature captured by Wells and Roach & Hartman by means of the neutralization symbol [u'ɪ], Upton et al. choose [uɪ'ɪ] without entertaining the possibility of introducing a rising diphthong as an alternative.

## 5. Conclusions

Compared to the past, where Jones's dictionary of pronunciation became the norm for English RP, the new dictionaries by Wells, Roach & Hartman, and Upton et al. provide a wider and richer representation of the reality in terms of pronunciation. Syllabification principles, phonological processes and the inevitable changes in speech habits are much more systematically taken into consideration nowadays. In contrast, the foreign learner of British English, who undoubtedly was used to a neater transcriptional system, in the sense that what appeared in Jones' EPD was taken as *the* truth, is now confronted with different

transcriptional offerings that in varying degrees depart from the standard established by the EPD-14.

Despite the use of new composite symbols (ɶ – ʊ) in unstressed positions and the breaking up of a ‘hard-won uniformity’ as Wells rightly points out referring to Upton et al.’s innovations in the representation of /æ/ and /aɪ/, one has to recognize the advantage that the maintenance of the traditional symbols for representing high vowel segments word-medially has for the foreign learner. Wells’ as well as Roach & Hartman’s concern with a more congruous phonetic representation of the high vocalic elements leads them away from the phonemic principle set up by Jones in the representation of the high front and back monophthongs which, with all its deficiencies, has proved to be most helpful in a foreign language learning context. Indeed, these ‘minor tweakings’ in Wells’ words (2001: 3) or ‘minor exceptions’ as he states under the entry ‘Phoneme and allophone’ in LPD-00 represent an added burden to those who are not phonetically sophisticated. The changes introduced do not add much to the overall phonetic makeup of the words in the sense that the foreign reader other than the professionally interested may benefit from a better target pronunciation. This applies especially to Wells’ and Roach & Hartman’s treatment of those forms recorded as diphthongs in the EPD-14 where the *i* does not have the value of a tense [i]. The symbols chosen are not very helpful either, despite their apparent straightforwardness: in the advice given by both Jones and Gimson to foreign learners they systematically emphasize the difficulty most people have not with [i], which is a variety found in many languages, but with [ɪ]. Using the former as a symbol to cover the latter in cases like the ones previously analysed means running the risk of fostering just one type of pronunciation, one with a close, tense short *i* at the expense of the half-closed, lax and short *i* option which is acknowledged as entailing greater difficulty. There is nothing wrong with the use of such a symbol of course, just as there is nothing wrong with the use of /ɪ/ which, if ill-targeted, will result in a more tense *i*. Moreover, it still has the added benefit of reflecting the phonetic habits of many RP speakers. Admittedly, all phonological systems are in a flux and they need to be constantly adjusted and updated. However, by reversing Wells’ comment on Upton’s innovations one has to strike a balance between the gains of such innovations in terms of phonetic appropriateness with pedagogical efficiency, which demands information faithfulness without leaving aside, however slightly, a basic principle in a foreign language context: simplicity. Such variations may not have a serious stigmatizing effect upon the learner, but they do contribute to the students’ puzzlement when confronted with different symbols to represent an identical phonemic reality.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Published in 1917, it went through four revisions carried out by Jones himself (1937, 1956, 1963 and 1967). The so-called 14th edition was undertaken by Gimson in 1977 and revised in 1988. The EPD was not however the only British English pronunciation dictionary available. Windsor Lewis’ *A Concise Pronouncing Dictionary of British and*

*American English* (1972) was a popular and handy dictionary meant specifically for students of British and American English as a second or foreign language.

<sup>2</sup> In the Preface to the dictionary the authors warrant their contribution by resorting to their wide experience with variation. They attempt to create 'pronunciation models which avoid slavish imitation of the dictates of self-appointed arbiters of taste or style in language, in favour of patterns which reflect the actual speech of real people'.

<sup>3</sup> Thus Wells complains about Upton et al.'s way of representing diphthong /aɪ/ as /ʌɪ/ on the ground that it breaks a 'hard-won uniformity'. He considers Upton's choice 'really very unsuitable' (2001: 5).

<sup>4</sup> Cambridge University Press launched a second edition of D. Jones' *English Pronouncing Dictionary* edited by P. Roach, J. Hartman and J. Setter (2004) during the process of producing this paper, no changes have been made that have possibly been introduced in the new issue.

<sup>5</sup> Jones was indeed aware of more open as well as closer varieties of /ɪ/. In his *Pronunciation of English* ((1967: 32) he writes that 'In final position, as in 'siti (*city*), 'hevi (*heavy*), 'twenti (*twenty*) an opener variety of *i* is commonly used in RP'. Then he goes on to say on the following page, 'In many forms of English the final short *i* of RP in such words as *city*, *heavy*, *twenty* is replaced by the long and closer *iː*, thus 'sitiː, 'heviː, 'twentiː'. And in the next paragraph, 'Another, not uncommon pronunciation of words like *heavy* is with a closer *i* but short'. So the tensing of the final vowel in words like *happy* is not a 'recent trend' as occasionally one reads. See also Windsor Lewis (1990) where he quotes Gimson's remark about the tendency of young people to use a short variety of /i:/ in an unaccented word-final position.

<sup>6</sup> As Ramsaran (1990: 186) writes, 'if one is going to retain a traditional phonemic approach to the classification of contrastive units, then one must reject a solution which allows the [i] to exist independently belonging to neither phoneme, but one should acknowledge that there is neutralization in this context'. And Gimson (1981: 258) too, writes in this respect 'unless the notation is to become unwieldy, only the phonemes of a language can be represented'. He considers the use of /ɪ/-/ə/ in the representation of endings like *-less*, *-ness* or the use of symbol <i> to account for the quality of final /ɪ/ as 'unnecessary complications' (ibid) that could be resolved by means of a general rule.

<sup>7</sup> Wells (2001: 3) regards the final -y in *happy* as 'another weak vowel restricted like schwa to unstressed syllables'. This use of /ɪ/, adopted by him in his LPD and Roach in the EPD-15, allows for different interpretations: 'traditionalists could think of it as identical with /ɪ/, whereas users of the tensor vowel might want to identify it with /i:/'. (2001: 3).

<sup>8</sup> Upton et al. (2001) resort to ɹ only in the case of attached **re-** followed by a vowel (e.g. *react*), but not in other representations where a short element may alternate with a long one (e.g. *re-open*). In the case of **re-** plus consonant, however, they envisage two possibilities: ɪ-i: (e.g. *replace*) and ɹ-i: (e.g. *repay* (pay back), or vice-versa (e.g. *retrace*).

<sup>9</sup> In the case of *real*, /i:ə/ is preferred by the 1998 poll panel with a slight margin over /ɪə/ according to Wells.

<sup>10</sup> We do not consider here those forms derived from nouns and adjectives ending in -y like *windier*, *carrier*, etc., where the /i/ of the stem is maintained (e.g. /'kæri ə/).

<sup>11</sup> Not in the case of /'frʌn,tɪə/ for they change the stress pattern representing this word as /'frʌn'tɪə/ thus falling within the first group.

<sup>12</sup> In the case of *renewal*, the EPD-15 gives also the variant /uə/.

<sup>13</sup> I am referring to the three examples given, not to all instances in general. Words like *circulate*, *population* and others alternate between schwa and /u/ in the EPD-15. Wells, on the other hand, transcribes them with /u/-/ə/.

<sup>14</sup> Jones (1975: 125) in a sense contradicts himself. He considers that /ʊɪ/ is not uncommon, and at the same time he discourages the foreign students to learn it arguing that 'it is always replaceable by the disyllabic sequence u i ...' to recognize a line below that '... the distinction is hardly perceptible'.

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