

LISTS AND FRAGMENTS VS. SYSTEM IN STUDYING ENGLISH SOUNDS

Charles-James N. Bailey

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The failures of phoneticians and phon(et)ologists to understand the subsystems of English sounds have been as legendary as have those of morphosyntacticians (Cf. the failure of the latter to categorize what the exochronous modality, the anterior and posterior modalities, modal verbs, imperatives, and infinitives share; [CLICK HERE for How grammars of English have missed the boat](#) and [HERE for other relevant information on English sounds](#)). The failure of those investigating English sound systems has been discussed in various mini-essays linked to the Orchid Land Publications main page; see, e.g., on [nuclear satellites](#), [length mistakes](#), and ["dark-l"](#) as well as essays on [systems and subsystems](#) and [myths among foreigners](#). For example, consonant "l" in certain positions is called "clear l" when it is actually dark; and palatalized [V] is confused with the two kinds of palatal nasals sulcalized and non-sulcalized--themselves even more often confused with one another, although their palatograms differ and their linguistic effects on other English sounds differ. Whether //t// changes to [d] in normal tempos or not depends (in some varieties) on whether //l// in *voltage* and *halter* is [l] or [ɫ]--a nuclear element.

Not only do the diphthongs [aɪ a*] differ respectively from [æ a^] in some languages (e.g. Japanese); the pairs develop differently in linguistic change. Thus, [ɫ a*] yield [ɜ(:) c(:)] in various languages, whereas [æ a^] generally yield [e(:) o(:)]. It is therefore plainly unscientific to disregard the difference. Of course, it's worse to confuse a borrowing with a natural change, as is not seldom done (in some quarters; [CLICK HERE for the instance of \[æ v^\] on Martha's Vineyard and of the restoration of \[ɜ \(ɟ\) in New York City](#)--a subject discussed also in the writer's *Essays on time-based linguistic analysis* [Oxford University Press, 1996].) Though the system of English intonation has been shown to be simple enough in concept (if difficult for non-natives to use), it has been mightily messed up by many authors ignorant of gradient in analysis and ignorant of the principle of reversals in marked environments. (See *Essays on time-based linguistic analysis* p. 198 [and other pages listed in the index to that volume] and further references there to other writings.) Yet, a still greater mess has attended the treatment of syllabization in English, also a tempo-gradient matter in essential respects. One could cite a lot of rules that run aground because of their failure to attend to syllabic boundaries. Anyhow, *Wisconsin* is differently syllabized--with different sounds resulting for //i// and //ɪ// (each preceding an [s])--in different tempos. *Migration* and *migrant* have different sounds for "i" in much Southern States English because of different syllabizations; but the different pronunciations of "i" in *inbribery*, *viper*, in *wiper*, and in *diaper* are the result of other causes.

In other mini-essays in this series (see links at the end), it is related how [ɪ] differs from [i] in English--e.g. by having differing effects on adjacent sounds--and parallelwise how [ɛ] differs from stressed vowel + consonantal "r"--e.g. Scottish English differences from Southern British and North American pronunciations of *bird*, *certain*, and *curve*. Because of the effects of nuclear satellite [ɪ] on a preceding peak vowel, it is to lectal differences in (the English processual rule of) SONORANT-GEMINATION (discussed in many writings by the present author) that lectal differences in *Mary*, *merry*, *marry*, and *Murray* must be attributed. A Northern linguist investigating Southern States English was unaccountably surprised to discover that *Will* and *Willy* do not (in contrast with his own English) have the same vowel in the Southern States, Tidewater States, England, Scotland, Australia, and New Zealand! Had the observer in question bothered to understand the rule just mentioned, it would have been a different matter. And of course *William* drops its lateral

altogether in normal tempos in Southern States English. No speaker outside of the Northern States and Canada that uses dark consonantal [ɪ] in *gule, mule, school, stole, drawl*, and *foul* would confuse these items with others identical except for the final satellite] (from underlying unstressed vowel plus //l/)--viz. *fuel, cruel, bestowal, withdrawal, and towel*, respectively. (Note that Irish English has a clear consonantal "l" everywhere, while the "l" of Scottish English is "dark.") Even the most general (scientific) way of stating where syllabic nasals and even nasalized vowels can occur has been missed by many writers.*

The developmental consequences of [ɪ] differ from those of [ɪ̃], respectively. For dark consonantal [ɪ] and [ɪ̃] may become [w] (cf. the frequent change of [ɪ̃] to [y]), [ɪ̃] may become [y], and [ɪ̃] may become [w] (and then [v]), whereas clear consonantal [ɪ] and the diphthongal satellites [ɪ̃] do not undergo these developments. And, as noticed earlier, [æ] becomes [e(:)], whereas [a] becomes [ɜ(:)]; and [Ã] becomes [o(:)], whereas [x̃] becomes [ç(:)]. It is irresponsible of ("synchornic") linguists not to recognize and annotate differences that have different developmental consequences. But then, "synchronic" linguists can have no legitimate concern for past or future developments, or indeed for the kind of deep explanation that can only come from understanding how things have developed into what they've become or any kind of predicting of changes from one system to another--two basic things that every real theory has got to do--rather than observations that "it's no accident that" such and such is so in the minisystem (also very important!). Synchronists are like cosmologists who would reject consideration of the history of the cosmos as a way of explaining certain current phenomena.

The Southern States nucleus [x̃] or [ç] (as in *caught* and *song*, the latter being long when derived from //xr// in the same syllable) heard in many words in which it is followed in a final syllable directly by //g n t f s// (e.g. *hog, wrong, cloth, soft, and cost*) often gets replaced by the context-appropriate variant of "lightθ" when it is in a non-final syllable. (This principle does not work when the final syllable is simply an inflection or a comparative, superlative, or agentive/instrumental formative; cf. *long : longer : longest* and *wrong : wronger* ("one who wrongs"). Contrast *off* with *offic(er)*, *fog* with *foggy* (like *soggy*), and examples like *mahogany, faucet, nautical, automobile/automatic, hydraulic, cognitive, mongrel, intercostal, Moscow, sausage, offer/officer, Laura, Lawrence, aura*, etc. (*foggy* may contrast with *fog*, as *boggy* with *bog*; cf. similar pairs).

Many of the foregoing--and other--failures stem from the "phonemics"* of the thirties (or later forms in later decades), whose initial premise that binary contrasts (never able to be maintained purely) could form the basis of a system is simple-minded and antecedently unlikely. Though psychological tests have disconfirmed the predictions inherent in phonemics, and--worse--though phonetics has little to do with phonemics, phonetic transcriptions of English based on phonemics leave out much information necessary to (1) understanding sound developments and (2) to help foreign learners of a language. (This has proved as baneful as studying dialectology on the basis of areal or social repartitions instead of internal language differences.) One can lay at the door of phonemics the naming of [d] a "flapped allophone" of /t/ in *quota, formative*, and the forestressed noun *substantive* (and in *allegro into* and *intonation*--but of course not the deletion of //t// in *plenty*, etc.). If one will be a phonemist of the thirties, then the glottal stop in *quota* in British lects could be called an allophone of /t/. (In North America, [ʔ] occurs for //t// only when a vowel or stop--[p b t d c f k g] ([p b] also occur in certain environments in English)--precedes and a fricative--[f v t d s z s z] ([P B x g] also occur in limited environments in English)--does not directly follow; though [ʔ] occurs for //t// following an //s// preceded by an unstressed vowel if nothing else follows in the word, as in *artist*--but not in *artists*, where //s// follows //t//. Thus *forest* are *fastest* are *almost t-less* when no vowel follows; *breakfast* can even lose its final //t//, so that the plural becomes, for some speakers, *breakfusses*. (As with *ribband* and *ribbon*, the same would be true--were it not for the spelling and the mental association with *land*--of cultivated *England, Scotland, Ireland, husband, island, almond*, and unstressed *and*.)

(Why bother with something as discredited as phonemics? [See, e.g. p. 311 of Bailey *Essays on*

time-based linguistic analysis (1996, Oxford University Press.) Yet, it has only been in recent years that the handbook of the International Phonetic Association dropped phonemes. Phonetic dictionaries often give formal pronunciations rather than normal pronunciations. Among many errors of older phonetic manuals, one can read that, in those kinds of English not lacking aspirated occlusives, that they occur only before stressed vowels, though anyone could have determined the error with minimal observation powers of how aspirators (most speakers of English) pronounce *connection*, *petunia*, and *tomorrow*. English in Northern Britain and in some Southern States areas (at least in certain classes) lacks aspiration of syllable-initial occlusives.)

Phonetic transcriptions usually fail to note nucleamasalization, though this distinguishes *hint* from *hit* in widely spoken varieties of the language. It is certainly a distinction that foreigners need to know about. Many other factors can cause misunderstandings. Lower vowels have got to be longer and more intense to be *heard* to be of the same duration and loudness of the corresponding higher vowels. (What lower and higher vowels are will be clear in the tables below.) Similarly, a high pitch for adult male speech would be low for other kinds of speech. One must not be misled by these "relativities."

"R-less" varieties of English that have long-short vowel and diphthong distinctions (e.g. between *line* and *lion*, between *cop* and *carp*, and between the diphthongs in *bid* and *beard*) also have three degrees of phonetic vowel length (Scottish English has a different three-way phonetic length system) . . . BUT these three *phonetic* length differences realize (a) a difference in all kinds of English between a heavy and light consonant following them in the same syllable and (b) the short and long phonological distinction of vowels and diphthongs in *these* lects. Note that the contrasts in *cad* ['chæ-d] : *cared* ['chæ-d], *bad* : *bared*, *bid* : *beard*--also SS *spa* : *spar*, *laud* and *lord*, and--often in conversational *tempos-brine* : *Brian* as well as *di-* in *diverse* and *dia-* in *diacritic*--are due to length. (The longer vowel in these examples is usually a bit more retracted than the shorter one; the in-gliding is heard in slower and more formal pronunciations of *lia-*. [See the mini-essay on Southern States length.](#)) Note that the [i:] in the gerunds (but not predicative uses in slower tempos) *being* and *seeing* are bimoric, in contrast with the same unlengthened [i] in *bean* and *seen/scene*.) Failure to realize any of this can lead to all sorts of blunders.

To illustrate the importance of a system, we can take the light vowels of Southern States English as the best example, since this system is unknown (so far as can be made out from their writings) to its sociolinguistic and other investigators. The *basic* light underlying vowels, //i e a o u// and historically light 'bo' (in *good* and *put*) are:

	front	central
high	[i] as in <i>sick</i>	[ɪ] as in <i>put</i> and <i>good</i>
mid	[ɜ] as in <i>speck</i>	[e] as in <i>cut</i>
low	[æ] as in <i>sack</i>	[a] as in <i>cot</i>

This differs from the analysis of other varieties, though several other varieties are rapidly moving toward this pattern. (Note that [æ] represents underlying [a]; many varieties in fact exhibit the historical [a]--either everywhere or just before light consonants in the same syllable.) Note that /i/ gets replaced by "ee" [i] before the sound of 'ng' (phonetically [ŋ]) after a tautosyllabic front vowel) in both syllables of *singing*. (While *ink* has a nasalized [i], *Inc.* alone has [i]. *Pinch*, and for some, *inch*, have "ee" [i] in the Southern States.)

Basic to understanding the system is that following tautosyllabic //w// as well as before (/ and /_ the front vowels move back to the central position or (in the case of the non-high front vowels) at least toward it, while the basic central vowels retract to a back tongue position:

central	back
[ɪ] as in <i>wick</i> , <i>beer</i> , and <i>hill</i>	[y] as in <i>wood</i>

[e] as in <i>twenty</i> and retracted [ɜ] in <i>sell</i> ***	[v] as in <i>once</i> and <i>dull</i>
retracted [æ] in <i>thwack</i> and <i>pal</i>	[A] as in <i>wand</i> , <i>car</i> , <i>forest</i> , and <i>doll</i>

Note that [A] in *wand*, *forest*, and *doll* is from underlying /k/, still rounded in British types but not in North American English. But in lects having [A] for "a" in *car*, [A] is from //a//; the vowel is long (sometimes rounded and/or in-glided) in 'r-less' types--only only when //r// follows in the same syllable in Southern States English. (Tidewater English has got [a:].) Note also that Southern lects have [i] not [ɪ] in *spring*, *bring*, and *sing*, as well as in the second syllable of formally pronounced *singing*; the "oo" sound of *good* gets replaced in Scotland by the "oo" sound of *food* and is indicated by the spelling 'ui'--as in the name *Cruickshank* (cf. "ui" as [u^] in *Louisiana*).

Light "oo" has several positional variants. But before mentioning particulars, note that where the light "oo" sound is followed in the same syllable in Southern American, English, Australian, and New Zealand lects, it is pronounced as [ɪ:], as in *wool*, *pull*, and *bull*; this is also true (because of GEMINATION) in northern North American *English woolly*, *pulley*, and *bully* and (unless the middle syllable drops out) *bulletin*--but not in the Southern types, other than in *bull'tin*. In the environments illustrated by *bush* ['bʊs] and *push*, [ʊ] is heard instead of /ɪ/; and, in a few words like *woman* and *woof* (as well as some pronunciations of *room*, *broom*, *coop/Cooper*, and/or *roof*), the high central vowel is heard as back [ɪ].

Note that *doll* and the first syllable of *balsam* do not rhyme with *ball* in Southern types. Various northern and western kinds of Northern States English merge the vowels of *cot* and *caught* as [A]; others have non-diphthongized [a] in *bat* but [æ~] in *bad*. Otherwise, [æ] often gets replaced by [a] in many kinds of non-Southern English. See further on for [æʃ] in place of [æ] in *language* (it is nasalized in *flank*) and *lag* in most kinds of English. The contrast between [ɜ] (= "r-less" [e: ɜ: o: v: 4ə oə], etc.) in *cur* (also, in Northern American *curry* and *hurry*) and in *fur#ry* and the [e] heard in the Southern States and the [v] or [a] heard in other Southern and "Keltic" varieties in *curry* and *hurry* is due to GEMINATION ([CLICK HERE for GEMINATION](#))--as is [ɪ] of Northern States English in *fury* and the [y:] of Southern British in the same example. GEMINATION is of course fundamental to understanding the preceding differences. A less cultivated pronunciation of *pretty* ("purty") in the USA exhibits [ɪ]; this sound is found for [ɪ] in the Northern States in *sure*, *your*, and increasingly in many environments, including that of *fury* just mentioned.

That it is necessary to begin the way we have can be shown by elaborating on J.Sledd's early investigations of Southern States vowels showed similar changes before grave (labial and velar) consonants in the same syllable and--less definitively in the case of non-high front-to-central retractions--when directly followed by an tongue-tip (apical) consonant, or an apical cluster like //st// plus a non-front unstressed vowel. The retraction in the latter environment is usually less than a full-scale change of front to central position. The pattern Sledd discussed is shown in the following table, which parallels the foregoing; note that the low and mid light front vowels are less retracted than others in the environments of *cattle*, *better*, and (for some) *middle* and *sister*.

central	back
[ɪ] in <i>liquor</i> and <i>slipper</i> ; [ɪ~] in <i>slip</i>	[U] as in <i>look</i> , (and, for some, in <i>coop/Cooper</i>)
retracted [ɜ] in <i>better</i> ; [ɜ~] in <i>slept</i>	[v] as in <i>butter</i> , <i>luck</i> , and <i>cup</i>
retracted [æ] in <i>saddle</i> , [æ~] in <i>cap</i>	[A] as in <i>bottle</i> , <i>lock</i> , and <i>cop</i>

Of course, the vowel of *coop* and the first vowel in *Cooper* is often pronounced with [u^]--or even with the [Y(^)] that is currently replacing (or has replaced) [u^], especially among males, in North

America, Australia, South Africa, and elsewhere. Note, however, in connection with the preceding table that in a stressed syllable *not immediately followed by a weakly stressed syllable* the front light vowels are in-glided (without lengthening) with satellite [ɪ] before //p b f v t d t d s z// (with various positional variants; [t] is heard in *ether* and [d] is heard in *either*). But this in-gliding (or gliding to the satellite [ɪ]) does not occur when the nucleus in question is directly followed in the same syllable by a palatal consonant--[ç f s z ʃ =] (which respectively concludes *speck, big, fish*, (no example with [z] is forthcoming), *catch*, and *wedge*). Note that in Southern States English, /æ/ becomes [æʃ] or its nasalized equivalent before //f t s// (heavy fricative consonants) in the same syllable (in *laugh, traffic, blasphemy, bath, mathematics, last* and *blaster*; for older speakers, even before heavy fricatives in the same syllable). Southerners in the USA have anasalized form of [æʃ] before //nt nt ns nɔ mp mf// (the last = [mpʃ], where [m] and [p] are made, like [f], with the bottom lip against the upper teeth, and where [m] is normally replaced by nasalization on the preceding diphthong) in the same syllable (as in *slant, lantern, anthem, dance, branch, camper*, and *camphor*, respectively).

In Southern States English, both /æ/ and /ɔ/ diphthongize (to [æʃ] or [ɔʃ]) before [f] in the same syllable (in *sag* and in *beg* and *egg*); and light //i// also becomes [ɪʃ] before [n] (in *thing*) in casual speech--though [i] is heard in *thing* and both syllables of *singing* in more formal speech. In fact, [æʃ] is heard before [f n s] in the same syllable (in *sag, sang, sash*; note *language* and *fashion*) not only in the Southern States and Northern Ireland but increasingly in England, the Northern States, and elsewhere. But, like [ɔ] and [i], [æ] remains undiphthongized before [ç] (as in *back*); the same true of [i] before [f] in *big*, though, as already said, //e// is often [eʃ] in *beg*. West of the Mississippi--in various lects, Northern and Southern--[eʃ] (or some local variant) represents //e// before [ç] in *treasure* and *pleasure*--and even before /s/ in *special* and *precious*. Before //m// or /h//, older less-educated speakers changed /ɔ/ to /ɪ/ (nasalized when the nasal consonant was tautosyllabic); but educated speakers did this only in *any, many*, and *engine(er)*. (The "i" for "e" in uneducated *get* in many varieties is the result of *re-stressing* the unstressed form of this word. It is possible that "i" in educated *any, many*, and *at the beginning of engineer* is due to an older *re-stressing*.) *Pinch* and (among some) *inch* have the sound "ee" instead of light *i*--the result of generalizing the situation before palatalized 'hg' to the position before the laminopalatal nasal in these words.

Some front heavy vowels are retracted before the [ɪ] and [ɪ] satellites--cf. the peak vowels in *seal* and *sale* and in *Ayre, they're*, and *naysay#er*. (Southerners typically do not rhyme *Ayre* : *heir* or *e'er* : *air* or *they're* : *their* : *their*; various foreign borrowings and abbreviations rhyme with *heir*, while *gay#er* rhymes with *they're*.) Incidentally, all diphthongs ending in [ɪ] are long unless the [ɪ] is (in Northern North America) the result of geminating a following [l].

Heavy-*u* is fronted to [u]--followed outside of Scotland by [ʊ]. But Irish, Welsh, and Black speakers in North America do not exhibit this fronting. The fronting is more pronounced--to [y], made like [i] but with the lips rounded--among many younger Southern States White males and among Australian males. But one hears speakers in various parts of North America saying [y] for [u^] in *too* and even *rude*. Note that the diphthong just shown for *too* is change to the vowel [u] after //w//, as in *woo*. Though Southerners in North America typically distinguish [y] in *cue* or *dute* (and, in the case of older speakers, *due* or *dew*, and *new*) from [y^] in *view, few*, and *mute*, many in Britain and in the Northern States erase the distinction in favor of [y^] in all such items. Unlike speakers in the Southern States, most others lack [y] following laminopalatals in the same syllable (i.e. in *youth, shoot, chew/choose*, and *juice*), preferring whatever vowel or diphthong they have in *goose*. Where young and middle-aged White Southern States speakers have [æ&] for heavy-*o* in *show* and *goat*, Black speakers and many older White speakers of Tidewater English and Southern States English have a retracted, over-rounded [w(ɔ)] here.

Though the present writer has not made an exhaustive search, he is aware of only one

dictionary that shows *w*-INSERTION between a rounded vowel or satellite and a following vowel. Phonemics, of course, doesn't care for such "redundant" or predictable notations; but think of how foreigners sound when they omit [w] in *insitu[w]ation*! The failure of some analysts to note [ʃ] "sh" and [z] "zh" before palatals is certainly reprehensible-- though some analysts do not [ʃ] for the first "s" in *horseshoe* and even the "s" in *inmisuse, misjudge, and disunite*. It should be noted for the "s" in *Miss* when this stands before *Universe*. The BBC financial program will let you know that [z] ends *Japanese* when this word precedes *yen*. Actually /sy/ and /zy/ become long laminopalatals ([s:] and [z:])--even when a word boundary intervenes--as the examples just given will show.

Foreigners get confused by the sloppy descriptions of English sounds. They don't know to elide *th(e), d(o), and infinitival t(o)* before vowels, as in *th'apple, d'you, and t'eat*. ([CLICK HERE for additional information](#)) And think of the problems with "th"! Besides not realizing that these are fronted stops--not dissimilar to their own "t" and "d"--when not preceded by stop or a plain vowel or satellite, they are unaware of the mutual assimilation of 'ths' to [q(:)] or [l(:)]--not unlike their own "s" and "z" except for the lengthening in slower tempos--in *faiths* and *bathes*. (When [t d s z n] have a plus sign over them, the tongue tip is against the edges of the upper row of teeth, not against the upper gums, as normally in English; the more fronted articulation of these sounds is usual in most languages.) Note that *Englishface* and *faiths* differ essentially on whether the final sound is [s] or [q]; *sixths* differs from *six* in the same way--though, as in *faiths*, the final sibilant is longer in *sixths* in slower tempos. Since *fifths* omits "f" (underlying //v//) and ends in [ʃ(:)], it differs only in respect to where the tongue tip is from *fists*--which ends in [s(:)]. The noun *clothes* sounds just like the verb (not the noun or adjective) *close*.

No one is "doing one's best" till one masters one's subject. It is as pointless to study English vowels without understanding the relevant system as it is to try to knit a mitten without a pattern (at least in one's mind). Trying to study these vowels in terms of another system is of course beyond the pale; but then, so is studying them without *any* system. The list mentality has been a bane to Southern States English in particular, as can be seen in studies by both Northerners and even Southerners themselves. A little study would obviate the worst problems, at least among such as are capable of systematic thinking.

It is just not true that a sound is a sound is a sound, as some think. Just as a piece of iron may be a bolt for this machine or something else in other piece of equipment, so a given phonetic vowel may represent an underlying sound in one system and another in another system. The absence of light in the sky is a datum, meaningless till we relate it to other data to determine whether it's a black hole or something else. And, obviously, an adult male's high tone can be lower than some females' low tone! (Often we find studies that mix apples with oranges, so to speak: Thus, a number of studies of English stress [segmental] length, not the *suprasegmental* length of emphasis, etc.] have not filtered out the heads of intonational units and indeed generally studied only stresses that coincide with unit heads--and thus erroneously tell us that (segmental?) pitch is a part of English stress when they have really measured suprasegmental pitch! When ancient Greek lost bimoric vowels and diphthongs, its accents merged in one accent of higher pitch, as it--cf. that of Spanish--remains to this day.)

An [a:] may be *segmentally* long, or just the result of *suprasegmentals*--open-syllable position at the end of a word, intonational emphasis, or whatever. We cannot tell till we place it in *systematic relation* with other sounds. Note further that a *phonetically* half-long vowel followed in the same syllable by an obstruent (an occlusive or fricative consonant) can represent either (a) a phonological short vowel in a lengthening environment (i.e. before a light consonant in the same syllable) or (b) a phonological long vowel in a shortening environment (i.e. before a heavy consonant in the same syllable); see Bailey, *English phonetic transcription* (1985), p. 77. If the fricative sound [x] represents //k// in *allegro locker* and in *mosques*, just as [p] (made with both lips) represents //p// in *allegro supper* and in *lisps*, this fact does not mean that either could not represent other sounds in other environments--though in this instance neither does do so in English, unless [p] is analysed as representing //f// in *nooph*! Note how "v" becomes "b" in *haven't, government, etc.*; the same rule

changes "th" to "d" in some varieties in *hasn't, wasn't, isn't, business, and Disney*. Contrast [D]: It represents both //d// in *width* and *allegro heathen* and //d// in *though* (when no vowel directly precedes). Or take [ɰ]: It represents both //t// in *intenth* (where it is epenthetic, i.e. intruded between //n// and //t//, though //h// is subsequently deleted in favor of nasalizing the preceding vowel in the same syllable) and *eighth* and //t// in *thin, anthem, esthetic, and synthetic*. Further, [d] can represent //t// in certain environments as well as //d//, since in normal tempo *little* and *middle* rhyme (the final vowel is [ɪ]), except in regions where //t// in *little* is [ʃ] or [ʒ]; [d] represents //t// in *seventy* and *sovereignty*. Moreover, //d// is deleted at the end of *and, Ireland, island, husband, etc.*; we say *Scotlan' [e]n Englan'*--though unstressed *and* would be a syllabic 'n or 'm (see below) in some situations. In most kinds of English, the output of //t// can be a glottal stop, [ʔ], as already observed, in sentence-final *bet*; zero in *plenty*; and [d] as noted earlier--even for //t// in North American *better, formative, and substantive*. The segment [t] is aspirated for most speakers outside of "Keltic" areas in *tick* but not in *stick*; "t" is long--or rather, given the syllable boundary--geminate in *thirteen, fourteen, and eighteen*, but not so in *seventeen* and *nineteen*. In some Irish English lects, *city* has got [ʃ] for //t// (and *lady* has got [ʒ]), while [ʃ] is heard in *city* in some lects in Britain. Again: It is not true that a sound is a sound is a sound.

The matters taken exception to in the preceding are all part of the astonishingly illogical approach adopted by no few workers in the vineyards of language analysis and teaching. On the latter front, one thinks of the maximally wrong-headed way of teaching morphology--e.g. teaching the conjugations of Latin and the declensions of Greek and Latin in the order of their traditional numbering! On the analytical front can be mentioned analyses of the English verb in terms of Latin or Greek tenses, modes, diatheses, etc. ([CLICK HERE for my view of proper analyses of the English verb and personal pronouns](#)) when English verbs are not amenable to this analysis.

Probably the worst confusion over the English sound system (I'm speaking only of non-"Keltic" subsystems of English) lies in the failure to recognize that [_ + 2 ()] function as vowel segments in several rules--never as syllabic consonants (though the liquid satellites can be thought of as semivowels). On the other hand, a logical analysis of English requires treating as syllabic consonants [, .] in *bitten* and in *open* or *happen* ([ʔ] and other syllabic nasals are rarer in English; cf. [ʔ] in *allegro heathen*--preceded by [D], as noted above. One should not write [] in *possum* or *blossom*, let alone in *bottom*; but [] occurs after //s// in *handsome* and a few other examples. Note further that [] does not follow //k// or //g//--or any non-obstruent (i.e. sonorant); while a very rapid pronunciation of *taken* has [ʔ], usually [eɪ] is heard at the end of *taken* and *bacon*, while [ɪn] is heard at the end of *bargain* and *robin*. But [b] may be heard for /ven/ at the end of *oven, seven, eleven, heaven, etc.*, in very rapid pronunciation. A syllabic form of [m] would be expected to follow [v], but this doesn't happen very often. When it does, a preceding //b// is heard as [b]--both this and [m] being made with the lower lip against the upper row of teeth. Otherwise, [b] is pretty much limited to positions in which non-sibilant fricatives like //v// are occluded in English; e.g. at the beginning of *very* when it is not preceded by an vowel or occlusive. After an obstruent, we hear [v] in *obvious*; after a nasal, we hear [b] for //v// in *invent*. At the end of *open* and *happen* in normal conversational tempo, one hears [p̚] ([p̚] is a glottalized "p"; a stop articulated with the lower lip against the upper row of teeth, [p], is heard for //f// in *first* under conditions similar to those in which [b] is heard for //v//--word-initially when no nuclear (vowel-like, i.e. vowel or satellite) segment immediately precedes as well as when a continuant (including a nasal) does immediately precede. (Note that nasal consonants are orally occluded and nasally unoccluded: They classify with occlusives in only a few English rules; with continuants, in various rules. A three-valued feature system makes this problem and the the difference between "nasal" and "nasalized" notatable with multiplying features, as in a binary feature system.) The rules for all of these phenomena are found in the writer's *English phonetic transcription*

Get 'em can represent "get him" for some speakers as well as "get them"; but for other speakers, it indicates only the latter. The final syllable of *problem*--and, in the pronunciation of

older speakers, the middle syllable of *spectacle* --can be annotated with [F]. The change of unstressed /i/ to [ɛ] in final syllables is thorough-going for some speakers, though it occurs in phased environments among others. Phonemics has got no way to say such things about different styles or subvarieties of English speakers; in fact, the virtues of phonemics appear to be nil. Two styles need to be recognized for the pronunciation of many words in English, viz *normal* (N), which is *lento*, and *formal* (F), which is conversationally *allegro*; a few words have a pronunciation in-between these; and at either extreme, we hear (not in common usage) *slang* and *solemn* styles.

[See also this link](#)

[Click HERE for "Systems, Listing, and Bean-counting"](#)

[CLICK HERE for more on sonorant sounds; look especially at the NOTE appended to this page](#)

[CLICK HERE for BACKWARD GEMINATION](#)

[CLICK HERE for length in Southern States English](#)

[CLICK HERE if you imagine that a "subjunctive" exists in English!](#)

*See Ch. 4 of the writer's *Essays on time-based linguistic analysis* (Oxford University Press, 1996); other chapters of this volume make the various points of this mini-essay over and over. See "phonemics" in the index for related comments.


**The transcriptional matters, including syllabization and intonation, just discussed are treated in detail in Bailey, *English phonetic transcription* (Summer Institute of Linguistics and University of Texas at Arlington, 1985) and in Bailey & Maroldt, *Grundzüge der englischen Phonetologie = Arbeitspapiere zur Linguistik 16* of the Institut für Linguistik der Technischen Universität Berlin [1st ed., 1983 ; 2d ed., 1988], as well as in numerous writings published in different journals and books. Those seeking to understand English SONORANT-GEMINATION will find it treated in the works mentioned and various others.

***In many Southern States varieties, these triplets are not confused: *Ayre* : *heirle'er* : *air*; *they're* : *their* : *there*.



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