Typing Simplified Transcription

by

J‌AMES K‌ILBURY

In the on-going discussion of English phonetic notation, attention has recently been redirected by Mepham 1978 to systems of 'simplified' transcription. The principle stems from Daniel Jones and is discussed by James and Westney 1977 and by Windsor Lewis 1972 and 1975. Also see the discussions in *English* 14.69–71 (1979) and *Zielsprache Englisch* 3-1979.9–14.

It is not my purpose here to argue for or against any particular transcription. It should be noted, however, that the typical arguments against simplified transcription on grounds of 'phonetic accuracy' are largely misguided. Any sort of phonemic transcription – including the familiar systems of Daniel Jones, A. C. Gimson, and J. Windsor Lewis – presupposes that the user is familiar with the phonetic principles of the language. A phonemic transcription assigns distinct representations to words that are pronounced differently but often says little or nothing about the nature of the actual phonetic differences. Thus, the customary transcription of *pat, pad, bat,* and *bad* is no less misleading phonetically than a purely quantitative transcription of the English vowels. Advocates of phonetic accuracy should be concerned with phonetic phenomena such as aspiration, compensatory lengthening of vowels, nasalization, glottalization, 'clear' and 'dark' *l,* fronting of the vowel in *too,* and the labial glide between the second and third vowels in *gradual,* to name only a few; cf. Bailey 1977:924. Bailey (in press) presents a detailed system of English transcription that provides a high degree of 'phonetic accuracy'. Scholars who reject a system like the latter as being too detailed for pedagogical purposes and who at the same time criticize simplified transcription as being inaccurate must bear the burden of justifying the individual decisions to include or exclude given phonetic details in their own transcription. My view is that such a justification will prove to be difficult or impossible.

It should be obvious that a normal typewriter is unsuitable for narrow phonetic transcription; Geršić 1972 discusses the problems involved. A simplified transcription, on the other hand, reduces special symbols to a minimum. Whether simplified transcription will be more widely used for certain purposes in the future remains to be seen, but if it is in fact adopted, then I think a notation capable of being typed should be used

– either as the simplified transcription itself or as a transliteration of it. A typable form of simplified transcription would be very convenient for authors who wish to employ a phonemic kind of transcription anyway. It would allow considerable savings in printing expenses and set this money free for better purposes. Bloomfield and Bolling 1927 draw attention to these practical considerations in a paper which still is of general interest.

Finally, a typable transcription should help to reduce the inexcusably large number of mistakes in recent publications using the familiar systems. A summary of Mepham 1978 on p. 69 of *English* 14 (1979) indicates that Mepham wants to replace the wedge symbol for *cut* with a small capital 'A', but comparison with the original reveals this as a phantom of the printing. On p. 37 of *Zielsprache Englisch* 4-1978 Mepham, in turn, uses two different symbols for Gimson's notation of the vowel in *burn;* upside-down forms of alpha and normal 'a' both appear for the symbol used in *pot,* and rightside-up alpha appears for the first vowel of *comrade.* Such misprints are extremely misleading and should be eliminated in careful proof-reading. In some cases it is unclear whether bad printing or simple ignorance is involved; cf. p. 109, last two lines, of *Anglistische Arbeitshefte,* Vol. 1 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1976).

Typing the consonant symbols presents few difficulties. The fricative of *thin* can be typed as 'θ' with a hyphen through capital 'O'. Modern Icelandic practice can be followed with a hyphen through capital 'D' to give 'Ð' for *then.* The use of capital letters for just these two sounds may draw special attention to them and thus fulfill a pedagogical function.

The IPA symbol for the velar nasal of *long* cannot be constructed well on a normal typewriter. The symbol 'н' is visually distinct, graphically parallel to the other constructs with hyphens, and easy to type. For some typewriters the symbols 'Ð' and 'н' with raised underscore may offer better appearance at the price of increased typing difficulty.

The fricative of *ship* may be typed with a raised comma 'š' or with an accent 'ś'; parallelism then demands 'ž' or 'ź' for *measure.* The accent, if available, is easier to type, while the raised comma may offer better appearance.

The affricates in *chain* and *join* may be typed as 'tš' or 'tś' and 'dž' or 'dź', respectively. An attractive alternative with unit symbols is provided by 'č' or 'ć' and 'ǰ'. Further simplification to 'c' and 'j' (with 'y' for *yes)* is possible but probably undesirable for practical reasons.

Syllabic sonorants 'm̩ n̩ l̩' can be typed with the single quotation mark lowered one and one half turns.

Capital 'R' can be used as a "watch out" symbol to represent linking *r.*

The real problem lies with the vowels. The shwa of *ago* can be typed 'ə' with a hyphen through 'o'; this is convenient and graphically suggests the conventional symbol. One should note that the typed symbol 'ə' is nearly identical with an existing but infre-

quently used IPA symbol for a central rounded vowel. Although rounding does not fit, the symbol can be justified as being the nearest appropriate letter that can be typed.

The wedge for *cut* can be typed 'v' with a hyphen through 'v' or, as a departure from the general pattern presented here, as 'v̂' with acute and grave accents giving a circumflex. Both symbols are easy to type and retain the graphic association with the conventional symbol. Even capital 'A' could be used, although the small capital – which would fit better with the other vowel symbols – is not available on normal typewriters.

Finally, the '*æ*' *for pat* – if it is to be used at all – is constructed with 'a' plus 'e' set back a half space; this is difficult to type if equal spacing is to be maintained within a word.

Besides 'ə' for the unstressed vowel of *ago* the variety of Southern British English customarily represented requires nineteen symbols for vowels and diphthongs. The key words may be grouped as follows:

group 1		group 2		group 3	
pit	put	bean	boon	peer	poor
pet	putt	bay	no	pair	burn
pat	pot	buy	now	barn	born
			boy		

The simplified system of Jones 1960: 347–348 can easily be typed using the symbols 'ə' and 'v':

i	u	i:	u:	iə	uə
e	v	ei	ou	eə	ə:
a	o	ai	au	a:	o:
			oi		

The system of MacCarthy 1944 eliminates length marks in favor of doubling; here the symbol 'əu' has been added:

i	u	ii	uu	iə	uə
e	v	ei	əu	eə	əə
a	o	ai	au	aa	oo
			oi		

While there is little chance of a return to its use – least of all for Southern British – the system of Trager and Bloch 1941 retains a certain elegance from the perspective of simplified transcription:

i	u	ij	uw	ih	uh
e	ə	ej	əw	eh	əh
a	o	aj	aw	ah	oh
			oj		

The symbol 'ɵ' for the stressed vowel of *putt* faithfully represents the Trager-Bloch analysis, which, however, has recently been questioned by J. Windsor Lewis on factual grounds; cf. James and Westney 1977:48, fn. 48.

Qualitative transcriptions of the English vowels appear to present the typist with an insurmountable obstacle. The use of commas, as in /pit/, is not entirely satisfactory graphically and makes for disagreeable typing. Both the MacCarthy and the Trager-Bloch systems (the latter stemming from Leonard Bloomfield in its early form) offer viable alternatives for phonemic transcription. Anyone who rejects such transcriptions of *bit* and *beet* on phonetic grounds must also be able to justify the transcription of *pit* without aspiration or instead adopt a truly accurate phonetic transcription.

Again, my purpose here is not to advocate a particular simplified transcription or phonemic transcription in general; the choice of a broad transcription for practical purposes is likely to remain largely a matter of the practitioners' personal or collective preference. Instead I have attempted to show how a simplified transcription may be typed.

The following sample passage uses the modified MacCarthy system, including stress marks. The consonant symbols are as follows:

```
        p    b    t    d    č    ɟ    k    g
        f    v    θ    Ð
                  s    z    š    ž
             m         n                   ŋ
                       l
                       r
             w              j         h
```

The text was written by H. E. Palmer and is taken from Abercrombie 1964. The transcription shows Abercrombie's pronunciation.

1   ɵt 'wot 'taim ɵ ju 'gɵuiŋ tɵ Ðii eksi'bišn̩?

2   ai 'θoot ai 'hɵɵd ju 'tel joo 'brvÐɵ Ðis 'mooniŋ

3   Ðɵt ju iks'pektid tɵ 'miit im 'Ðeɵr ɵt ɵbaut 'tuu.

4   'jes. wud 'ju laik tɵ 'ɟoin ɵs Ðeɵ?

5   ai 'wud, wiÐ 'pležɵ, bɵt ai m 'not 'šuɵ weÐɵr

6   ai 'kan. in 'eni keis ai mɵst 'liiv 'ɵɵli tɵ

7   'kač Ðɵ 'foo 'trein. ai 'dɵunt 'liv hiɵ 'nau;

8   ai 'liv in Ðɵ 'svbɵɵbz ɵnd ai 'wont tɵ get 'hɵum

9   bifoor its 'daak.

10   'aa ju 'riɵli in svč ɵ 'hvri tɵ get 'hɵum?

11   'mvst ju? if its 'sɵulli on 'Ðat ɵ'kaunt, wii

12   kɵn 'teik ju 'bak in auɵ 'kaa.

13   'kan ju? 'Ðat l̩ bi 'splendid! 'ool 'rait.

Finally, the same passage is transcribed using the Trager-Bloch notation with 'R' for linking-*r*:

1   ət 'wot 'tajm ə ju 'gəwiɐ tə Ðij eksi'bis̩n̩?

2   aj 'θoht aj 'həhd ju 'tel joh 'brᵥÐə Ðis 'mohniɐ

3   Ðət ju iks'pektid tə 'mijt im 'ÐehR ət əbawt 'tuw.

4   'jes. wud 'ju lajk tə 'ɟojn əs Ðəh?

5   aj 'wud, wiÐ 'pleże, bət aj m 'not 'ṡuh weÐəR

6   aj 'kan. in 'eni kejs aj məst 'lijv 'əhli tə

7   'kaċ Ðə 'foh 'trejn. aj 'dəwnt 'liv hih 'naw;

8   aj 'liv in Ðə 'səbəhbz ənd aj 'wont tə get 'həwm

9   bifohr its 'dahk.

10   'ah ju 'rihli in səċ ə 'həri tə get 'həwm?

11   'məst ju̓? if its 'səwlli on 'Ðat ə'kawnt, wij

12   kən tejk ju 'bak in awh 'kah.

13   'kan ju? 'Ðat ḷ bi 'splendid! 'ohl 'rajt.

References

Abercrombie, David. 1964. *English Phonetic Texts.* London: Faber and Faber.

Bailey, C.-J. N. 1977. Review of J. Windsor Lewis, *A Concise Pronouncing Dictionary of British and American English. Language* 53.923–925.

Bailey, C.-J. N. (to appear). *English Phonetic Transcription for Teachers.* Arlington, Va.: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Bloomfield, Leonard, and George M. Bolling. 1927. "What symbols shall we use?" *Language* 3.123–129.

Geršić, Slavko. 1972. "Suggestions for a golfball typing-head with phonetic symbols." *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 2.40–47.

James, Allan R., and K. J. P. Westney. 1977. „Transcription and the consumer: a guide to RP notation for German use." *Neusprachliche Mitteilungen* 30.40–49.

Jones, Daniel. ⁹1960. *An Outline of English Phonetics.* Cambridge University Press.

Lewis, J. Windsor. 1972. "The notation of General British English segments." *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 2.59–66.

Lewis, J. Windsor. 1975. "The undesirability of length marks in EFL phonemic transcription." *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 5.64–70.

MacCarthy, Peter A. D. 1944. *English Pronunciation.* Cambridge: Heffer.

Mepham, Roy. 1978. "Why not simplify our phonetic transcription?" *Zielsprache Englisch* 4-1978.8–11.

Trager, George L., and Bernard Bloch. 1941. "The syllabic phonemes of English." *Language* 17.223–246.