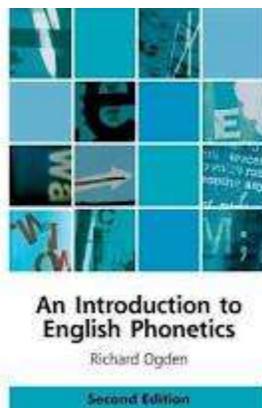


## Book Review

### An Introduction to English Phonetics



**Author:** Richard Ogden

**Book:** An Introduction to English Phonetics(2nd ed.).

**Publisher:** Edinburgh University Press

**Year of Publication:** 2017

**Place of Publication:** Ltd, Edinburgh, UK

**Pages:** P.ix-221

**Reviewer:** Khalid Ahmad Siddiq

### Unbiased Phonetics Descriptions of English: “Not” of a Single Variation

As an English teacher, I have always struggled to find a book which thoroughly describes phonetics alone not phonology. Often I would choose some chapters from books such as Ladafoged and Johnstone’s “A Course in Phonetics 7th Ed.” In fact, I liked the exercises from that book, but the text gets a bit phonological in nature which makes students question many things since the course offered at our university is primarily leading learners to pronounce the language, so knowing how to produce sounds – consonants and vowels – is very crucial for them. Recently, I found another textbook which is based on American English pronunciation entitled “Pronouncing American English: Sounds, Stress and Intonation 3rd Edition” by Gertrude F. Orion. This book is also more of a pronunciation nature as the title entails; however, it provides enough information about articulatory phonetics based on American English. Nevertheless, Ogden’s book really provides a accumulative ground for phonetics of English based on articulation, transcription, and visualization through acoustic representations. In addition, this book is among the first ones that does not focus on a particular variation and provides description of English phonetics allowing the readers to come up with their own dialectal variations as they acquire skills of doing so through this book.

“I realized that describing the phonetics of ‘English’ is problematic because English is so phonetically heterogeneous” (Ogden, 2017, p. xi). Richard Ogden referring to the process and intention of drafting an auspiciously comprehensive book asserts that there are various varieties of English pronunciation and banking on one may interrupt the learning/teaching of phonetics to a diverse population of English speaking world. Although by saying so he primarily means the native varieties of English, he had done an extraordinary job of maintaining the descriptive notion of all native variations. In other words, he undertakes a more “descriptive phonetic framework” (Ogden, 2017, p. xi) rather than following a certain ‘model’. This perspective is quite in-line with the concept of “pragmatism” Kachru (1986, p.30) proposed while challenging the very prescriptivist or so purist perspectives (p. 30). By means of that, as

he states, students (although Ogden refers to his audience as “readers”) can look into their specific variety. Thus, this book introduces the general phonetics of English avoiding majorly sticking to one variation and somehow banking on the data from International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA) for transcription; articulatory and acoustic phonetics to illustrate and visualize the sound production, pattern and representations.

The book has 12 chapters most of which is not much different from its first edition in 2009. The book has one extra chapter placed as chapter 11 titled “Sounds and Structures.” The books “To Readers” section does not mention about this chapter and its use for the students. Furthermore, in the introductory chapter of the book, the author does not talk or even does not point out anything specifically about the new chapter. More in-depth details of this chapter is provided below. In addition to that the book provides a table of content, and table of figure which guides the readers to necessary sections of the book. Furthermore, the book has a glossary for the main terminology and provides reader-friendly definitions. The exercises are very carefully designed which gives a very hands on experience to the reader/learner/students. Later, Ogden provides “Discussion of the exercises” in which answers to the exercises where applicable are discussed. In addition, Ogden have provided a list of further reading suggestions. However, this list is not that different from the book’s first edition except for ten added references and a couple references were deleted and plus one of the reference was mention 2003 in first edition while in the second edition, it is mentioned 2002. Finally, a very reader friendly “Index” ends the book.

First, the book starts with language and linguistics description; and bridges phonetics and other branches of Linguistics proving the vitality and significance of phonetics in understanding spoken language. Then, as almost every introductory chapter have to do, this chapter talks about “what this book covers” in which Ogden summarizes the further chapters. Later, he exemplifies the fact that English is not “spelt phonetically” (p. 4).

Second, Ogden (2017) such meticulously gives heads up to the readers about the complexity of sounds and how “speech involves the careful co-ordination of lips, tongue, vocal folds, breathing and so on” (p. 7). He starts with the description of “breathing” and how most of the English sounds are pulmonic egressive. In addition, he categorizes “in-breaths” as turn-takers or floor keepers (although the terms are not used by Ogden) during a conversational discourse. Later, he describes the voicing quality and its anatomical location in the larynx in a quite detail. Furthermore, he describes all eleven places of articulation including a very distinctive feature of sound production “Coronal” (originally in quotes) pertaining the significance of tongue movements. Through this, he criticizes IPA for describing sounds based on the location of them in the mouth while ignoring the vitality of tongue. This observation pedagogically is very valid because while teaching, we have to demonstrate the tongue position for every sound in order to make the sound easy for students to acquire the necessary movements. Later, he conventionally describes the manner of articulation.

In contrast to other phonetics books (e.g., Ladafoged and Johnstone, 2015), Ogden categorizes stops majorly in two ways, (1) “the kind of airflow (oral vs. nasal)” and (2) length or duration of obstruction. For example, plosives and nasals are sounds that for the former there is a complete closure and the air escapes through mouth while the velum is raised and for the later the velum is lowered letting the air flow or escape through nose with an abrupt release. In addition to them, Ogden puts trills and taps (in some books flaps) as part of stops, but with partial closure in the oral tract. Further, he describes fricatives, resonant articulations to end the chapter with. As Ogden mentioned in the “to the reader” section that transcription will be one of the primary goal of this book, he introduces transcription and its types in a carefully exemplified manner in chapter three using the IPA alphabets. Then, after explaining the transcription and IPA, Ogden introduces the “acoustic representations” (p. 32). He asserted that his approach in this book regarding the acoustic representation of sounds and their patterns will be shown through – waveforms and spectrograms. Later until the end of this chapter, he provides ample number of acoustic phonetics examples through waveforms and spectrograms. He describes them very neatly providing each and every aspect of the waves and graphs which represent a target sounds.

Chapter four describes solely the voicing and voice quality of English sounds while maintaining the notion of not following any particular English variety. Ogden provides a very considerable amount of details about the voicing including – the Bernoulli effect, fundamental frequency and its effect on pitch and intonation, voice quality and its types – breathy voice, creaky voice, whisper and falsetto. He ends the chapter with calling voice quality “as a sociolinguistic marker” (p. 56). He brought up Glaswegian identity in Scotland effecting largely on the Glasgow

English. In addition, citing Stuart-Smith from Foulkes and Docherty 1999, Ogden explained that Glasgow variety of English is distinctive by the “age, gender, and [social] class” (p. 56).

The rest of the chapters (five to nine), greatly in details, discusses the properties of segments i.e., vowels and consonants. Ogden starts with vowels and justifies it with calling them the most significant building blocks of syllables and words. Later, he starts describing consonants – approximants, plosives, fricatives, and nasals respectively – both their articulatory and acoustic features in great details.

In chapter ten, Ogden pulls out examples from the spoken English of different varieties and shows that besides pulmonic egressive airstream, glottalic and velaric ingressive sound production is also possible not in conventional English but in conversational one. In addition, he illustrates the clicks, ejectives and implosives in spoken English the first one being a velaric and the latter two being a glottalic set of sounds.

Chapter eleven is a newly added one from the book’s first edition in 2009. In this chapter, Ogden analyzes the conversational or running speech of two female speakers from Slaford, a city in North West of England. Majorly the exemplification of this conversational analysis paved the ground for readers to identify the differences in conventional and conversational English. Meanwhile, it enables the readers to capture the minute phonetic details of spoken conversations. Ogden carefully describes the data and transcription conventions and slides into first broad transcription of the conversations, then narrow. In addition to the phonetic details, he captures the phonological features i.e., assimilation, and observes the effects of syntactic or structural co-occurrence on the phonetic data.

In conclusion, the book ends with a comprehensive conclusion providing a substantial amount of general overview on the entire book. Ogden, as implied and previously illustrated, banks on the idea that it does not want to teach the phonetics of a single variety of English, provides a very productive way of utterance (spoken English sample) analysis of various inner circle (Kachru and Smith, 2008) dialects of English. In the meantime, the book’s chapter eleven provides a firm ground for phonetic data analysis which, as Ogden targeted, will increase the readers (in our case ‘students’) ability to look into their own variety of English in “reasonable details” (p. xi). In addition, the author encourages the readers to explore new phonetic horizons in their community (p. 3). The book in its totality is quite rich in terms of its exposure to the English language variety spoken in the inner circle and it also widely provides a sample for data analysis and data visualization.

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