Review of  A Handbook of Pronunciation

Reviewer: Beatrice Szczepk Reed
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SUMMARY
Canepari's book is part of the author's own all-encompassing approach to the description, representation and analysis of phonetics. The book represents the application of Canepari's method, as detailed in his simultaneously published handbook of phonetics, _Natural Phonetics and Tonetics: Articulatory, Auditory, Functional_ (Canepari 2007) _A Handbook of Pronunciation_ covers the phonetic description of twelve languages: English, Italian, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Arabic, Hindi, Chinese, Japanese and Esperanto; and their most widespread variations. In doing so, it uses Canepari's own version of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), referred to as can-IPA, and the author's own manifold transcription notations and diagrams for the representation of articulatory events.

The Foreword and Prelude of the book set the scene for the descriptive chapters that follow. Here, the author presents his approach as new and better suited to the study of phonetics than previous approaches, and introduces his methodology. In the Foreword the author makes a strong argument against the traditional bias in linguistics towards written representations of language, and for a linguistic approach that prioritizes spoken over written language as its object of study. He argues for a representation that takes phonetic detail seriously, and is clearly separate from the graphic representations of the spelling system. The author introduces a variety of new forms of phonetic representation, all for the purpose of enabling readers to 'see' sounds (p. VIII; X). One is a modified version of the IPA script; another is the author's use of figures depicting...
articulatory settings, such as orograms, labiograms, dorsograms, palatograms, vocograms and tonograms; a third is a wealth of tables and diagrams for phonetic and intonational classification. All representations are briefly introduced in the first chapter. The final pages of the introductory part of the book provide a list of can-IPA symbols and their corresponding symbols in IPA, or off-IPA.

The remaining twelve chapters each describe the pronunciation of one language. Chapter two on English is by far the longest chapter in the book. First, all vowels and consonants are introduced, transcribed in can-IPA symbols with references to traditional IPA transcription and their occurrences in the Longman, Cambridge and Oxford pronunciation dictionaries. The chapter continues with sections on American and British monophthongs, diphthongs and diaphonemes. Consonants are introduced as nasals and stops, with a variety of stop realizations, such as the American /t/, 'unexplosion', the laryngeal stop and glottalization of /p, t, k/. Affricates are introduced as 'stop-strictives' and fricatives as 'constrictives'. A section on approximants is followed by a list of over 100 'interesting cases'.

In a second part of the chapter, the author turns to connected speech, and provides sections on weak forms and simplifications, taxophonics, stress and intonation. He then goes on to describe other accents, such as neutral international accents and standard British and American accents as they are used in the mainstream media. A short text is transcribed for these accents. The appendix to the chapter offers brief descriptions of Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, RP and Cockney English.

The subsequent chapters follow the same basic structure, introducing vowels and consonants, and the structure of connected speech. Chapter 3 on Italian covers modern and traditional Italian pronunciation, Milanese and Roman accents, and British and American pronunciations of Italian. Chapter 4 on French describes a modern neutral accent, international and media accents, and the French spoken in Marseilles and Quebec, Canada. Chapter 5 on German covers mainly standard German, but also describes North-eastern German, Austrian, Swiss and South Tyrol German. Chapter 6 on Spanish describes neutral Iberian and central-southern American Spanish. Chapter 7 on Portuguese analyzes Brazilian and neutral Lusitanian Portuguese. Chapter 8 on Russian distinguishes between modern and traditional Russian pronunciation. Chapter 9 describes modern Arabic, chapter 10 modern Hindi. Chapter 11 analyzes standard Mandarin Chinese, including tones. Chapter 11 on Japanese focuses on neutral Tokyo Japanese. Chapter 12 covers the pronunciation of Esperanto, followed by samples of foreign pronunciations of Esperanto from all the language backgrounds covered in the book.

EVALUATION

The book under review represents an impressive achievement in its phonetic description and analysis of twelve languages, and in many cases their main regional accents. Particularly in its representation of vowels, the author's can-IPA script allows for a remarkable amount of phonetic detail. With regard to regional accents, however, the book takes a prescriptive approach. Regional accents are referred to as "extremely distasteful" (p. 22), and readers are encouraged to commit themselves to their eradication.

In its approach to phonetics and pronunciation analysis the book under review is highly idiosyncratic, with a strong and frequently expressed wish to distance itself from traditional linguistics. In spite of the author's desire to analyze phonetics 'naturally', without recourse to previous theories or representations, the book is at times a challenging read because of the wealth of new terminology and unique representations. Therefore, the book cannot be recommended to non-phoneticians, or undergraduate students of phonetics. As teaching material it may accompany a language teaching course in any of the languages covered, although the terminology and original transcription may cause some confusion in learners and teachers who are used to the traditional IPA script and standard phonetic terminology.

Students of phonetics will find this publication helpful for the large number of languages covered, however its self-imposed distance from any other phonetic approach makes it difficult at times to put claims made by the author into perspective. The book is permeated by evaluative comments on un-named linguistic approaches and publications, such as: "It would be better still if certain books were not produced at all" (p. 28) or "if something like Hell really existed, those who are guilty of should be severely punished" (p. ix). The IPA script is criticized particularly heavily as "an off alphabet!" (p. 24, emphasis in the original), and as "approximate and vague" (p. 41).

The strong criticisms made against existing approaches to phonetics seem at times unjustified. For example, the argument that traditional linguistics is not aware of the difference between spelling and sounds is difficult to follow, as
the random relation between the two is commonplace in both language teaching and linguistic theory (Ladefoged 2001:24). Nevertheless, the author claims that "As a matter of fact, even, in particular, teachers (either school or university teachers, even!) […] and intellectuals in general (who use and abuse language), lack this simple and basic awareness of the need to separate the phonetic level from the graphic one" (p. viii, emphasis in the original). Evaluative statements continue into the bibliography, where some entries such as Labov, Ash, and Bobberg (2006) and Upton and Kretzschmar (2003) receive several paragraphs of commentary from the author.

As a pronunciation handbook the book under review is an extraordinary accomplishment in its coverage of such a large variety of languages. Furthermore, it is characterized throughout by the author's acute awareness of phonetics as based in the practice of speaking, rather than in the theory of language. This combination of detailed analysis and practice-based approach to phonetic events and their classification represent the book's most significant contribution.

REFERENCES


ABOUT THE REVIEWER
Beatrice Szczepek Reed is research fellow at the Centre for English Language Education, at the University of Nottingham, UK. Her research focuses on the phonetics and prosody of natural conversation, prosodic turn-taking cues in intercultural communication, and spoken language teaching. She regularly teaches courses in English pronunciation and conversational skills.

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