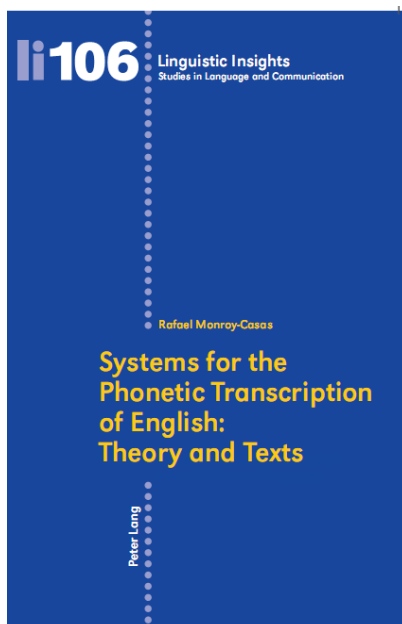




Book Review

Monroy-Casas, R. (2011). *Systems for the Phonetic Transcription of English. Theory and Texts*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang. 280 pages. ISBN 978-3034300599



The history and practice of phonetic transcription of (chiefly British) English, has long been a major interest of mine. So I was very pleased to be able to see a new book on this subject especially as it's been written by my good friend Professor Rafael Monroy-Casas of the University of Murcia in southern Spain.

This book has just appeared as the 106th volume of a series begun in 2001 entitled "Linguistic Insights: Studies in Language and Communication" from the international academic publishing house of Peter Lang of Bern, Switzerland. It's a smartly presented paperback whose 280 pages are well printed with certain very minor exceptions. It's divided into four main sections. The first, *Phonetic transcription systems* deals with the International Phonetic Association's alphabet and the typology of phonetic and phonemic transcriptions. The second section, *From theory to practice*, goes into detail on the transcription of the English consonants and vowels, and describes "English vowel variation as reflected in the so-called strong and weak forms". It's interspersed with some various transcription exercises. Its last few pages have a few items where ill-advisedly-small print is squeezed into presentational 'boxes'.

The third section, *Corpus of oral texts*, provides in ordinary orthography eighteen passages, a varied mixture of monologues and dialogues in length ranging from a half to a

whole page. They are mostly quite interesting and some even quite entertaining. Nothing is revealed about their sources but the names are given of the two male and two female readers who recorded them very effectively for the very useful accompanying CD which is, as is now customary, conveniently attached inside the book's back cover. This whole set of texts is used for each of the six types he selected for illustration in the fourth section *Transcription systems for English*, the major final division of the book. These are termed by the author: 1. **EPD** pp. 88ff [ie Jones's 'Simplified' type]; 2. **Edinburgh** pp 119ff [ie Abercrombie's type]; 3. **Windsor Lewis** pp 141ff; 4. **EPD-14** pp 167ff; 5. **EPD/LPD** pp 191ff; 6. **OPD** pp 226ff. Comparing one version with another would've been much easier if at each page of a transcribed passage the corresponding page numbers had been given for each of the other five and for the corpus texts. At each of the six sections the transcribed passages are preceded by often detailed discussions and exercises.

This ambitious work is in effect three books in one: a historical record, an account of the diverse current practices and an instructional manual. Its content is full of interest though at times a few matters perhaps might've been more felicitously expressed. Certain mainly minor items will be relevant to the interests of so few of its likely readers that they might well have been omitted. One such is a complete set of the eighteen passages transcribed into the computer-readable SAMPA notation. The most widely welcome material will probably be its lively selection of passages with their well-recorded accompanying CD. This part of the book has a few aspects which tend to cause certain misgivings. The proud announcement by the publishers "Each volume of the series is subjected to a double peer-reviewing process" would have one expect that the notoriously difficult jobs of checking and proofreading of texts full of phonetic symbols would be performed with very great care but that's not quite the impression one gets. Despite the book's scrutiny in turn by the reviewers, the printers and the author and his 'collaborator' (named but not given any detailed credit) various lapses from accuracy are to be noticed.

Many of what a reader may easily take initially to be mistakes turn out to be due to the peculiar decision of the author on a procrustean policy of replacement of what the speakers actually said with versions considered more suitable models for the learner. This is clearly so for example at p.209 where *suppose* is shown with a schwa but a note remarks that the word is 'often pronounced' without one: which in fact is the way it is pronounced by the reader. Various Northern-type pronunciations of the readers have been converted to the corresponding General British forms e.g. /pa:st/ is shown where /pæst/ is used, a procedure also employed at *advantage*, *nasty* and *telegraph*. Linking /r/ is occasionally inserted where no link was made. Various unused consonants are shown at e.g. *only*, *lands*, *seconds*, *districts*, *prospects* (tho' at *hands* on p. 208 an 'optional elision' is allowed to be unamended). An extra unused /n/ is inserted into five utterances of *government*. *Pessimistic* has its less orthodox /z/ replaced by /s/. Similarly, perfectly idiomatic stronger forms of *the* and *to* may be converted to their regular values in some situations. The adverbs *actually*, *obviously* and

seriously are uttered with the currently normal non-diphthongal medial syllables but they're shown in somewhat more old-fashioned forms so often still suggested to be their most usual ones in dictionaries.

This very unusual procedure may be considered by some to be pedagogically desirable but it's of potential disadvantage to the most advanced students and rather problematic in that its employment is acknowledged on so very few occasions. One wonders whether it was actually approved of by the publishers' advisers. Aside from these anomalies, there are rather more misprints than one expects from a leading academic publishing house. The controversial diphthong [ɒʊ] (not admitted to any other dictionary than LPD3), referred to by the author as "a variant of /əʊ/ used by Wells", appears in places where the speaker clearly used the normal [əʊ] e.g. for *cold* three times at p. 207. There are many noteworthy points raised in the numerous notes added below the transcriptions. It's not been possible in this short account to do justice to all the good things that this book offers but I've certainly found it fascinating. I expect many colleagues in the EFL world will share my reaction.

J. Windsor Lewis

(<http://www.yek.me.uk/archive37.html#blog364>)