from one section of the country or from one period of time, other readers throughout the United States are similarly occupied; and that when all the thousands of slips from all these readers are alphabetized, the history of any given word in its pilgrimage of usage may be readily determined.

Professor W. A. Craigie, editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and director of the plans for the new American dictionary, is ready to make suggestions to and receive contributions from voluntary readers. Such communications may be addressed to Professor Craigie at the University of Chicago.

ENGLISH PHONETICS FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS

H. M. BALDWIN

There are at this moment from seven to eight thousand foreign students in the universities and colleges of the country.[1] This estimate does not, of course, include thousands who, though not strictly classified as foreign, are nevertheless much in need of special training in English phonetics. As the professor of English glances over his class and notes here and there an oriental visage or as he catches some unmistakable accent that betrays the none too long established contact with English speech, he is likely to feel a distinct obligation, as a specialist in English, somehow to help the young strangers who are wrestling with our language. He realizes that foreign or foreign-tinged individuals are in a fair way to remain strangers among strange folk, so long as either they find it difficult to understand us or we find it laborious to try to understand them. Although their writing of English is an immensely important consideration, it is not the first. First of all comes the question of speech: the lecture must be understood; the recitation must be understood. The foreign student may be able to work out a fairly acceptable written report at home without being able to engage in oral exchange of thought to any advantage at all.

But although the teacher of English may realize all these things, he naturally hesitates to take upon himself the extra burden

[1] See *The Foreign Student in America* (New York: Association Press).

of tutoring in English phonetics. Furthermore, if he has never had occasion to go very deeply into phonetics, he quite reasonably judges that merely to say to his protégé, "Now say it in *this* way—now *notice!*" and then to give the correct pronunciation, is not likely to get far enough. On the other hand, if he has gone rather deeply into phonetics, he fears that with too much theory he will confuse the student. The consequence is very likely to be that he will evade the issue, correct the papers of the man in question, and let it go at that.

I believe that the phonetics employed to set a foreign student straight on certain essential features of our spoken language can be of a sort not very technical and yet effective.

Of course, if the enrolment of foreign students is sufficient to warrant a special course for them, an elaborate phonetic foundation can be laid for speech practice—and that is the ideal situation. But, in the numerous schools where such a course is not possible, much can be done by the individual instructor in a few half-hour conferences supplemented by a few moments' work now and then after class, the instructor taking the point of view of the foreign-born, and concentrating on those things which make English peculiar among the languages.

Here let me mention a thing which has nothing to do with phonetics. It is often necessary at the very beginning to set the foreigner right on *yes* and *no*. For instance, if the instructor says to an oriental student, "You will not neglect to practice these words, will you?" he may reply, "Yes." To us, of course, that means, "Yes, I shall neglect to practice them," whereas the idea he intends to convey is, "Yes, that's right; I shall not neglect them." Foreigners have often been thought to be pert or stubborn on account of just that sort of confusion in usage.

Once on a footing of friendly understanding with a foreign student, the instructor will find, I believe, no better method of attacking the phonetics problem than that of simply sitting down with the student over his English dictionary and going through the pronunciation key with him. This method may possibly appear too simple, too obvious, but the point is that it covers the ground quickly. Then, if the student is a reasonably earnest one, he can

apply the key. After that, the instructor can simply jot down words which the student fails to handle well in speech and turn them over to him for study. The dictionary should be at least of collegiate size; in such dictionaries a fairly usable treatment of phonetics will be found.

It is really surprising how many of the key-words the average foreign student will pronounce either unintelligibly or with a considerable degree of accent. Why is this? I should say that it is because the foreign student's teachers have been so busy with the stupendous task of acquainting him with grammar and idiom that they have had no time to take up phonetics; or they have made no practical study of English sounds themselves; or, through long association with foreign-born students, they have become so familiar with the foreign accent that they have come unconsciously to disregard it. Or perhaps they may have accustomed themselves to speaking very distinctly to their foreign charges, and thus may have acquired a false idea as to the ability of these students to understand unpremeditated, rapid-fire English.

Or, naturally, the student himself may have been negligent: it is the easiest thing in the world, when living in a foreign country, to cease definite self-coaching just as soon as one is half-understood. But whatever the cause of the difficulty, the conscientious teacher of college English wants to help. And supposing that he calls in a foreign boy for conference, what are the outstanding difficulties that are likely to arise?

Since a very large number of our students are from the Orient, we may well consider our student in question to be an Oriental, say a Chinese, whom we may call Mr. Sing. As we start down the column of key words in the front of Mr. Sing's English dictionary we come almost at once to the word *father*. As we note Mr. Sing's pronunciation of the vowel *a* in this word, we must see whether he is making it as open as we do. (I am using the word *open* to mean, simply, "open, so far as vertical distance between upper and lower teeth is concerned." I do this because actual checking on that distance can be done very readily with the finger or a pencil, or by looking into a mirror.) For in general the Chinese appear not to open their jaws so much as we do—that is, the *amplitude* of their

jaw-action is not so great as ours. We speak both with jaws quite open and with jaws nearly closed. They speak apparently only with closed or nearly closed jaws. (In some parts of the Orient, I am told—notably in Japan—it is considered bad manners to make any great display of jaw-action in talking.) Therein lies the most general and the most important, perhaps, of all the considerations which may arise in connection with Mr. Sing's oriental accent. I think I am not generalizing with too great haste when I say that practically all his difficulties grow out of the habitual unwillingness of his oral apparatus to assume various open-jaw positions, which positions allow the freedom necessary for the production of the type of sound to which the native American ear is attuned.

It is, then, practical to establish the *a* in *father* as representing the type of vowel made with the jaws at the most open position, and really to check up Mr. Sing's performance with him, either using hand mirrors or gauging the opening between the front rows of teeth with the finger or a pencil point. Next let us establish the *uh*-sound (the sound of *u* in *but*), as being the same sound but produced with jaws practically closed. To do this is important—because once having learned the *ah*-sound, Mr. Sing may overdo it and say *baht* for *but,* and because our reduction of vowels in unaccented syllables to an *uh*-sound—a point we shall take up later—is an extremely important consideration. Now, having demonstrated the effect of the closed and open positions on vowel quality, we may sketch in other vowels. Thus we may build up a tentative scale of sounds beginning with those made with jaws practically closed, and working up to those made with jaws quite open, as follows: the *uh*-sound, the "long" sounds of *e, a, oo,* and *o,* the *ah*-sound, and the *aw*-sound.[2] It is, of course, important that the action of lips and tongue be observed.

In the short space at our disposal we cannot do more than touch on representative points. The next vowels in the key which offer particular difficulty to Mr. Sing are likely to be the *e* in *get* and the *a* in *fame*. It is probable that he has settled upon a compromise

[2] Roughly, the division between closed and open vowels comes between the "long" *a* and the "long" *oo*. The reader will recall the special use in this article of the terms *open* and *closed*.

sound—a sound natural to him—and the result is that his word *get* sounds considerably like *gate,* and his word *fame* considerably like *fem.* (He is often embarrassed when he attempts to handle the words *letter* and *later.*) The correction of this difficulty is not baffling. Let us simply point out to Mr. Sing that in English the amplitude of jaw-action, conjoined to a general freedom of all moving parts of the oral mechanism, makes for a surprising number of unsuspected diphthongal vowels—I say surprising because in our language a diphthongal vowel is often spelled with a single letter and is often one of those vowels called "short." The *e* in *get* and the *a* in *fame* are diphthongal.[3] They both begin with the same sound (likely Mr. Sing's *a*-sound); but the former slides into an *uh,* and the latter into an *ee.* And yet we sometimes speak of one as "long" and the other as "short"—no wonder Mr. Sing is puzzled. They are both long inasmuch as they are diphthongal, and are both short inasmuch as they *can* be pronounced so rapidly as practically to conceal the fact that they are diphthongal in nature. Mr. Sing will understand the point almost at once if we ask him to consider a pair of words like *met* and *mate.* By drawing out the vowels—singing or intoning, or merely sustaining, or whatever our particular vocal ability may suggest—we can readily show him that the two words start out alike, the word *met* ending in an *ut* and the word *mate* in an *eet: "may—ut"* (met) and *"may—eet"* (mate), approximately.[4]

Next come *i* as in *hit,* and *i* as in *machine* (or *e* as in *heat*). The problem runs almost exactly parallel to the one just finished; for Mr. Sing's word *hit* may approach *heat,* and vice versa. Now, although the vowel sound in *heat* is not diphthongal, it is double, i.e.,

[3] What any sound is, of course, depends to a considerable degree on its phonetic environment. "Short" *e* may not always be diphthongal; in fact, it is advisable to work for a real or psychological amalgamation of the components, so that the student finally feels but one sound. The reader will bear in mind here and in the following passages that the effort is to hit upon that phase of the truth which is most effective in producing practical results.

[4] It is of course hardly possible to represent the first component of these diphthongal sounds without using the international phonetic symbol, since it is a question whether it exists alone in English.

it is the simple sound *plus itself*;[5] the *i* in hit is the simple sound plus *uh:*

he—eet = heat
he—ut = hit.

Both vowels begin the same—the former goes on and repeats itself; the latter slides into the *uh*-sound.[6]

We have covered the vowels that cause the greatest trouble, although it may be valuable to mention the point that the American "long" *o* is something like a pure *o* plus *oo*, whereas the British is something like "short" *e* plus *o* or *w* (note Bernard Shaw's return to the spelling "shew"); and we might just mention the facts that "long" *i* = *ah* plus *ee*, and that "long" *u* = *ee* plus *oo*—facts that need merely to be mentioned to be understood.

In summing up this consideration of the diphthongal aspect of vowels we are tempted to make a categorical statement to Mr. Sing: *Practically every vowel in English, whether classified as "long" or "short," is diphthongal in nature and requires movement of jaws and other oral parts.* The psychological analysis is this: although willing to open our jaws, we are unwilling to hold them solidly at any position of openness until we have finished a vowel. The result is that practically all of our vowels tend to slide into the two vowels pronounced with jaws nearly closed—*ee* and *uh*—and the former may slide into the latter, to form *i* in *pin*, as we have seen. The principal sounds which Mr. Sing should be warned *not* to slide are the sound of "long" *e* and the sound of *oo* as in *boot*.

In unaccented words and syllables, we are unwilling to form the first element at all—the great mass of us seem perfectly satisfied with simply an *uh*, as for instance to represent the second letter *o* in *bottom*, or the letter *a* in *have:* "shouldn't huhve gone."

It must now be apparent to Mr. Sing that English vowels involve widely varying degrees of openness and that although there are times when he must hold to his natural closed-jaw positions, yet

[5] Certainly the sound is much longer in actual time than the average Oriental conceives it to be.

[6] The reader is warned that if the letter *l* follows the "short" *i*, as in *ill*, trouble may follow. The feeling for the vowel should first be firmly established by practice on such words as *it*, *is*, and *if*. Then *ill* may be studied.

in the main *he must open up and loosen up a bit.* He will also begin to understand that an overwhelming majority of English vowels are diphthongal.

One very beneficial result of the opening up process is that it gives the tongue a chance to handle the *r* and *l* sounds. The root of Mr. Sing's difficulty with these sounds appears to be that since his language contains a sound which partakes of some of the qualities of both *r* and *l,* he uses it for both. The result—a bad one—is that Mr. Sing's word *little* sounds to us like *ritter,* and his *written* like *litten.* (The hearing of different sounds from the same sound may perhaps be compared to the sensing of different degrees of heat from the same water, when the two hands are plunged into it, one coming out of very cold water and the other out of very hot.) The most efficacious method of achieving a clear differentiation here is to insist that in *r* the tongue tip is free, whereas in *l* it definitely touches above. In each case the sound needs room: the *r* needs room for the rounding done by tongue and lips; the *l* needs room for free passage of air around the tongue. The opening up of the jaws gives the space necessary for the production of these sounds.[7]

It is to be noticed that the dictionary key very naturally gives no key-words for *r* and *l,* since either letter always represents the same phonetic image to any English-speaking person. For Mr. Sing, however, these letters must be taken up carefully. This can be done in connection with any of the key words which happen to contain the sounds. For example, the word *burn* offers an opportunity to study the *r*-sound. In this word, as Mr. Sing must be warned, the sound of the *u* is often lost entirely in favor of the *r*-sound, with a resultant pronunciation *brn.* At this point we can catch up such pronunciations as *geerl* for *girl* and *woe-rld* for *world.* The *r*-sound can best be taught as a self-sufficient vowel in such words, actually replacing what appears to be the vowel.

Going to the nasal sounds, we may find that Mr. Sing has been pronouncing *n* like *ng*—the word *son* like *sung.* With jaws closed

[7] This is an instance illustrating the general fact that if one set of muscles involved in a complicated action is properly trained, correct movements are induced in other sets of muscles. The fact is noticeable in athletics: for example, if a beginner in tennis is told to hold his racket near the end of the handle, certain undesirable wrist movements are automatically made less frequent.

this is nearly inevitable; with jaws open the tip of the tongue has a chance to produce a distinctly differentiated sound for *n*.

Thus we continue with Mr. Sing until he is thoroughly convinced of the necessity of opening up. If then we urge upon him the value of actually looking up word pronunciations—really putting the key into use—and if we can get him to observe and imitate our ways of speech, checking up at times with a mirror, he is in a fair way to work out a majority of his problems for himself. That is the final aim. No one can be made to learn an accent; he must want to learn it, he must be alert to catch details of it, and he must drill himself in it. The teacher can only inspire him and clear away difficulties which have confused his ear and tongue. As a matter of fact, most foreign students *are* interested in any practical phonetics which will help them speak better English.

English phonetics presents different problems to different foreign peoples. Spanish-speaking people, for example, find our *d* quite an obstacle; Germans and French have trouble with our *th*, and so on. Furthermore, the English language, having a distinct genius of its own, presents many universal difficulties. It seems to me that our way, mentioned before, of weakening our vowels in unaccented syllables, or reducing them to an *uh*-sound, or allowing them to be absorbed entirely by *l, m, n,* or *r* (as in *uncle, bottom, rotten, river*), is the trait of our speech most confusing to the foreigner in general. Through his mistaken zeal in pronouncing distinctly all the vowels in a word of several syllables he produces results which may entirely deceive the ear of his American listener. To us it is extremely confusing during an ordinary conversation to hear *able* pronounced *"ayble"* in a word like *usable*. Accent is disturbed, and we feel the suffix to be an independent word. Even the article *a* pronounced "long" may throw us off the line of thought.

Another general difficulty lies in our letter *s:* the foreigner may fail to notice that it must sometimes be pronounced exactly like *z*. His language may not contain a *z*-sound, or he may be discouraged by such discrepancies as the fact that the *s* is voiced in *is* but not in *this,* or by the extraction of voice from *s* in *is* when it is thrown next the *t* in *it's*. Likewise the difference between the voiced and aspirate *th,* as in *these* and *think,* causes general trouble.

I have dwelt at some length on the confusion caused by our representation of dipthongs by single letters; the reverse—representation of a single vowel by two different letters—also makes trouble, as the spelling of the *ee*-sound in *cease*. As to single consonants represented by two letters, one is astounded to find how many foreigners attempt, in pronouncing *ph, sh,* or *th,* to produce *p* plus *h, s* plus *h,* and *t* plus *h,* instead of making homogeneous sounds.

But none of these difficulties which English presents to the foreigner is insurmountable; and after some experience, one can handle them with considerable dispatch.

There are two selfish reasons why a teacher in any university, even outside the language departments, should consider these matters: first, practical phonetics is a most satisfying hobby; second, coaching foreign students in phonetics furnishes a natural and sensible means of making intimate friendships with them. They are often really brilliant fellows, and knowing some of them is as good as a voyage to their native lands—in some respects better, for it is not always easy as mere tourists to gain entrée into foreign households in such a manner as to make bosom friendships.

I have touched on a few outstanding points, purposely exaggerating some phonetic facts, just as they will have to be exaggerated when presented to a foreign student. I have furthermore purposely avoided any great use of technical phonetic terms, since they will have to be avoided in rapid coaching. My effort has been to suggest methods which can be checked quickly, by teacher or student, at the very front of the mouth. I should have no heart in defending the absolute scientific validity of all statements in this article; but I have found that to assume the validity of these statements will actually induce the correct reactions quickly—and that is what is wanted. The three fundamental traits of our vowels, expressed in terms of mechanical action, I have indicated as these: comparatively large amplitude of jaw action (which implies comparatively wide range of action for tongue and lips); very frequent sliding movement of oral parts when forming vowels (result: diphthongs and diphthongal vowels); and an unusual tendency in pronouncing unaccented syllables to use the easy-going, unenergetic closed position (resulting in the vowel *uh*).

I hope that a great many American teachers will experiment with ways and means for presenting our spoken language to foreigners, and that serious thought will be brought to bear on the value of such work in connection with the general Americanization movement.

If we can help a foreigner to talk as we do, we have done immeasurably more toward establishing mutual respect than we could do if we were actually to make him over to *look* like us. He who speaks our language *in our manner* is by that token one of us.

METAMORPHOSIS

LOIS A. CUGLAR

Where are the stiff, brown, teasel teachers gone?
At summer sessions and at conferences
I see young girls like daffodils,
Crocus, peach, and fragrant apple blossoms;
And older ones resembling zinnias
Or autumn leaves or gorgeous red sumac;
More advanced in age are those choice spirits
Who bear a stately wealth of snowy petals
On tender sprigs of everlasting youth.
Please answer me my foolish question:
Where *are* the stiff, brown, teasel teachers gone?