Current British English pronunciation : an observation by a long-time Japanese resident in the U. K.

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When people communicate with each other face to face by means of a language, what is immediately perceptible to and apprehensible by the interlocutors is the outer garment, as it were, of the language. This directly sentient aspect of the language consists in what are generally referred to as "segmental" and "suprasegmental" elements, or what Daniel Jones called "sounds" and "sound attributes". This "outer garment" of the language is also freely available for observation to any person who happens to be in a position that allows him to hear or listen to the on-going linguistic communication. Either of the interlocutors and/or an observer may, if so wished, consciously or subconsciously analyze the segmental and suprasegmental elements of the language according to a set of criteria whereby these elements are identified.

I voluntarily limit myself in the present paper to what linguists as well as the general public simply refer to as "pronunciation". (Incidentally, I am amazed at a good number of native speakers of British English who pronounce the word *pronunciation* [-naʊns-], an obvious mistake.) The pronunciation I am concerned with in this paper is, as its title indicates, *British English* pronunciation, as distinct from American English pronunciation. The qualifier "current" in the expression "current British English pronunciation" should be taken broadly in that the space of time involved is a fairly extensive one.

During my close to forty years' residence in the U.K. as an academic, I have had ample opportunity to observe the progressive or recessive trends on a number of certain points in British English pronunciation. My observation has been facilitated by the fact that I have been by nature particularly interested in and sensitive to phenomena relating to various points of pronunciation all my life.

According to my observation of British English pronunciation in daily life, a few clearly identifiable features of pronunciation which seem to manifest changes over time stand out strikingly again and again while I am listening to British English currently spoken by native speakers of

different age brackets and of different social classes at various localities in the U.K.

In the following pages, I will discuss a number of select salient facts of current British English pronunciation that have been attracting my attention. The list of the points chosen for discussion is not intended to be exhaustive.

(1) The vowel [æ], i.e. Vowel No. 4 in Daniel Jones's (British) English vowel diagram, that used to be widely heard in R.P. is progressively and largely being lost in favour of vowels in the direction of Cardinal Vowel No. 4 [a], i.e. C [a]. The vowel in question is the one heard in e.g. *map*, *hand*, *travel*, *tan*, *marry*, etc. This widespread progressive change makes the diminishing occurrence of [æ] stand out. We may recall [æ] as heard in the speech of the late John Snagge (1904-96) of the BBC or in that of the narrators in British newsreels made in the prewar and wartime periods. [æ] was also abundantly heard in the speech of Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson, John Gielgud and other theatre luminaries. I myself, though not a native speaker of British English, use [æ], which stamps me immediately as a person of an older generation. I remember having an interesting reaction from some young English university students of mine to my pronouncing [æ]. They generally perceived it as [e], not as [æ], simply because, to them, my [æ] is closer than their [a] and is dangerously close to their [ɐ̯], which is generally opener than my [e], which would be posited midway between C [e] and C [ɛ]. The need to maintain the opposition between the vowels in e.g. *bat* and *bet*, on my part and on my students' part accounts for their perceptual reaction.

(2) The use of a half-close back fronted vowel without lip-rounding, i.e. [ɤ̟], for vowel No. 10 (i.e. [ʌ] in Jones's English vowel diagram), which is reputed to be originally a northern trait, appears to be sweeping over the rest of the country. This phenomenon seems to be a case in which a regional feature (say, a northern English feature) is inexorably spreading to many other parts of the U.K. What specially attracts my attention is that even speakers who otherwise manifest no northern phonetic features are heard to use this half-close back vowel, and consequently, make the use of this vowel conspicuous in the flow of

their speech. It is true that there still are a relatively small number of speakers who maintain [ʌ]. Nevertheless my observation leads me to guess that there is a substantial swathe of the U.K. where [ɐ̈] is more and more heard instead of [ʌ]. I should not be surprised if this phenomenon eventually turned out to be a potentially definitive change over time. Faced with the widespread use of [ɐ̈] rather than [ʌ] nowadays in the U.K., I cannot help recalling that Jones unambiguously described [ʌ] as an English vowel whose articulation is such that "The distance between the jaws is wide; the sound cannot be pronounced properly with a narrow opening between the jaws" (*An Outline of English Phonetics*, 9th ed., 1964, Heffer, Cambridge, §334). Essentially the same articulatory description of [ʌ] is maintained by Alfred Charles Gimson (*An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English*, 4th ed., 1989, Edward Arnold, London, §7.9.5) who writes: "The short RP /ʌ/ is articulated with a considerable separation of the jaws...the centre of the tongue...is raised just above the fully open position...". The progressive prevalence of the occurrence of [ɐ̈] thus represents a major movement in articulatory terms from that of [ʌ].

(3) What is particularly striking is the prevalent pronunciation of the word *one* with [ɒ] instead of [ʌ] in the speech of those English people who have otherwise no northern speech traits. This pronunciation occurs also in the speech of rather a lot of newsreaders on television and other presenters on the radio. John Wells, in the 1st edition (1990) of his *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* (Longman, Harlow), i.e. *LPD*, enters the pronunciation [wɒn] as a "British English non-RP", placing it in the second place after [wʌn] which *is* RP. I have been aware of this "non-RP" form [wɒn] for *one* for a very long time. Wells, in his 2nd edition of *LPD* (2000, p. 533) does present, with regard to the pronunciation of *one*, the finding which derives from his 2nd pronunciation preference survey conducted in 1998. He finds that [wʌn] is preferred by 70% of his 1,932 respondents, while [wɒn] is preferred by 30%. One of the two types of graphic presentation accompanying the information given by Wells in terms of percentages clearly shows that younger speakers are definitely for [wɒn]. I am rather surprised by the percentage of a mere 30% being attributed to [wɒn], as according to my own observation, this pronunciation appears to be practised even by speakers of wider age brackets.

(4) Variation between [ɪ] and [ə], as in *careless*, *actress, fortunate,* etc. has long been noted by scholars of English phonetics. The use of [ɪ] in such words is increasingly taken over by that of [ə], particularly among young speakers, though it is by no means limited to them.

(5) [iː] is occasionally heard instead of [aɪ] in *either* and *neither*. As the pronunciation with [aɪ] in these particular words is widely thought to be British and the one with [iː] American, the pronunciation with [iː] attracts our attention when it does happen in a flow of British English speech. It may reasonably be conjectured that the pronunciation with [iː] in these words is an imitation of American pronunciation. The use of [iː] in *either* and *neither* could be analogously compared with, in the domain of lexis, the use of the word *guy* (imported from America), now quite widespread in the U.K. in the speech of people of all ages, in place of *chap* or *fellow*, which I do not hear often nowadays, or the use of the word *kid* which is widely used in current British English instead of *child*.

(6) One prevailing phonetic feature that keeps on drawing my attention is the fronting of the vowel as in the word *food* which is traditionally described as "a back close vowel", though less close than and advanced from C [u]. As Gimson says, the fronting of this vowel is possible with many speakers because there is in English no vowel similar to [y], a front close rounded vowel, such as is found in e.g. French and German. Indeed, according to my observation, the fronting is fairly substantial. Besides, in the way many people articulate the vowel as in *food*, there is hardly any lip-rounding, so that it is almost more appropriate to allot to this vowel the notation [ɨː] rather than [ü] which phoneticians generally ascribe to it. I am not averse to an alternative notation, [ɨü], in view of the vowel being a long one. The fronted unrounded close vowel in question appears to occur in the speech of people of all ages, but in that of young people in particular. The peculiarity of this vowel which is the cause for my constant attention when listening to the English is its auditory similarity with what I associate with [iː], or rather [ɪi] in these people's speech. This peculiarity has the result of making me think momentarily that I hear *feed* [-iː-] instead of *food* [-uː-]. Likewise, the auditory distinction is dubious, in the speech of these people, between *boot* and *beat*, *June* and *Jean*, *pupil* and *people*, particularly in contexts where either member of such a pair is

susceptible to occur. I have rarely met young university students of mine who pronounce the "classical" [uː], such as the one certainly heard from the mouth of e.g. John Gielgud. The general articulatory settings of English speakers are well known, including a substantial lack of lip movement, lip rounding in particular (cf. Beatrice Honikman, "Articulatory Settings", in *In Honour of Daniel Jones*, 1964, Longmans, London, pp. 73-84, esp. pp. 74-5), a typical opposite from French speakers' rich lip movement including lip rounding. This characteristic lack of lip rounding is obvious in the articulation of the vowel in *food*, *boot*, *June*, etc. It goes without saying that these same English speakers pronounce an unrounded centralized back vowel which may be noted as [ʉ̟] rather than [ʊ].

(7) Now I turn my attention to variation between [ɔː] and [ɒ], as in *off*, *cross* and *cloth*. The use of [ɔː] in such words is definitely felt to be old-fashioned and therefore attributable to the old generation. One still hears it from time to time, but this clearly stands out. Let it be noted that Gimson (*An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English*, 4th ed., 1989, Edward Arnold, London, p.115) describes the use of [ɔː] in such words as being "typical of conservative RP and had a social prestige value in southern England."

(8) I need to dwell upon the liberal use of [ʔ] (glottal plosive) in British English, which highly typifies much of current British English pronunciation. I leave out of account here the use of [ʔ] for emphasis before a vowel as in e.g. *It's* ***interesting!*** pronounced [...ˈʔɪn-]. The phenomenon of pre-glottalling voiceless consonants, [p], [t], [k], [ʧ] and [ʦ], in well-specifiable positions, has been traditionally described by phoneticians of English and is not particularly surprising. The occurrence of [ʔ] instead of [t] is on the increase. So is the occurrence of [ʔ] as glottal reinforcement, but less so. Glottal reinforcement occurs when *teaching*, *April* and *right*, for example, are pronounced [ˈtiːʔʧɪŋ], [ˈeɪʔprəl], [raɪʔt]. The use of [ʔ] instead of [t] is especially frequent, and more and more so, in the speech of young people. The effect that this phenomenon has on me personally, a native speaker of Japanese, is interference with my immediate comprehension. The articulation of [ʔ] necessarily reduces the length of the vowel that precedes [ʔ], which makes the identification of the word in which these phenomena involving [ʔ] occur less obvious or, at

least, less immediate. The reduction in the ease with which the word is identified is augmented in cases where [p], [t] and [k] are actually *replaced* by [ʔ] in syllable-final or word-final position. The problem confronting me probably does not arise for native speakers of Cantonese, for example, in whose language [ʔ] occurs in syllable-final position. They are thus better equipped to cope with the occurrence of [ʔ] in a similar fashion in British English.

In connection with the use of [ʔ] in the manners described above, I must express my own view here that from the point of view of teaching English as a foreign language, it is unwise to get Japanese students (for that matter, French, Italian and Spanish students as well) to deliberately acquire pre-glottalized voiceless plosives or replacement of [t] by [ʔ] in certain well-specifiable positions in English, as proposed by Gillian Brown (*Listening to Spoken English*, 1st ed., 1977, Longmans, London & New York). I am of the opinion that it is totally unnecessary.

(9) The occurrence of the so-called "intrusive *r*" in English is traditionally well described. This phenomenon surprises no-one, particularly when the first of the two successive vowels is [ə], as in *China and Japan*. On the other hand, the occurrence of an intrusive r when the first vowel is [ɔː] or [ɑː], as in *the Shah of Iran* or *the law of England*, was supposed to be "less frequent" (cf. Jones, *An Outline of English Phonetics*, 9th ed., 1964, Heffer, Cambridge, §760). However, it is my observation that examples like *drawing* [-ɔːr-] (which also occurs in *drawing-room* [-ɔːr-]), *withdrawal* [-ɔːr-], and *Panama* [-ɑːr -] *is* occur very frequently. They are particularly noticeable when we are listening in a quiet room to news bulletins or journalists' reports on the radio or television, as the acoustic conditions are quite favourable. In these examples, the second vowel ([ə] or [ɪ] as in the above examples) occurs in an unaccented syllable. However, one example, viz. *...to draw act...*, which attracted my attention recently, has the second vowel in an accented syllable and the second vowel itself is [æ] which is sometimes described as a "strong" vowel.

(10) I have been of the opinion for a long time that in British English pronunciation in which progressive assimilation is said to be characteristically common (unlike in French, for example), regressive assimilation (which is common in French, for example) appears to occur

more frequently than is generally believed. I should cite *absurd* [-z-], *a previous day* [-ʂ-], among other cases that I have noticed (cf. Tsutomu Akamatsu, "On the /s/-/z/ Opposition in Contemporary British English", in *La Linguistique* Vol. 19/2, 1983, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, pp. 129-33). It is true that regressive assimilation is a common feature in French. For example, *tasse de thé* 'cup of tea' is to be pronounced [tɑʂ də te], where [s] is assimilated by the voicedness of [d] that follows, and not [tɑs ɖə te], where [d] would be assimilated by the voicelessness of [s] which precedes, a very common mistake made by speakers of English when speaking French.

(11) In a pair of words like *decease* [-s] and *disease* [-z], the difference between [s] and [z] is maintained by any speakers of British English. But what is very common is that a number of words traditionally pronounced or at least thought to be pronounced with [s] (e.g. *crescent*, *chrysanthemum*) have either [s] or [z], depending on individual speakers. To take the example of *crescent*, this word is prevalently pronounced with [s], but it is also pronounced with [z] by other speakers. I first noticed this fact many years ago when I heard *crescent* pronounced with [z] in the expression *Red Crescent* (a philanthropic organization operating in Muslim countries; cf. Red Cross) in a news bulletin on television. As the word *crescent* occurs in many street names, including some in my neighbourhood in Leeds, I thereafter pricked up my ears and actually confirmed the occurrence of the pronunciation with [z]. The reason why the alternative pronunciations, one with [s] and the other with [z], can exist and do exist is not far to seek. Unlike in the case of *decease* and *disease*, where the difference between [s] and [z] must be well maintained, there is no necessity to maintain the difference between [s] and [z] in the case of *crescent*, as there is no other such word as could be distinguished from *crescent* by virtue of the difference between [s] and [z] while the rest of the sequence of the sounds is identical. In other words, the functional difference between [s] and [z], valid in some words (e.g. *decease*, *disease*; *sue*, *zoo*), does not exist in other words (e.g. *crescent*, *chrysanthemum*, *disorder*, *instrinsic*, *dismay*, *forensic*, etc.) A speaker is, in present-day British English, allowed to vacillate between [s] and [z] without jeapardizing communication. Such can be understood as an instance of linguistic economy. It is interesting to note that for the word *crescen*t, Wells puts the pronunciation with [z] first and the pronunciation

with [s] second in his *LPD* (2nd ed., 2000, p. 187).

There is more to it than what has been said so far. The case of the alternative pronunciations of the word (or should I say words?) *crescent* is interesting enough for me to dwell upon in what follows. (See Appendix 1.) The 1st edition (1917) of *An English Pronouncing Dictionary* (Dent, London, Toronto & Paris) compiled by Daniel Jones has two separate entries, i.e. *crescent* (*moon, shape*) with [z] as the first choice and with [s] as the second choice and *crescent* (*growing, when applied to objects other than the moon*) with [s] as the first choice and [z] as the second choice. The two separate entries survive in the 10th ed. (1949) of *EPD* in which, however, *crescent* (*moon, shape*) is shown with [s] as the first choice and with [z] as the second choice – thus reversing the information previously given in the 1st ed. – and *crescent* (*growing, when applied to objects other than the moon*) with [s] as the *only* choice. The 11th ed. (1956) repeats the same information except that the pronunciation with [z] of *crescent (moon, shape*) is described as "old-fashioned"; this shows that of the two former pronunciations, the one with [z] was on the way out, leaving the pronunciation with [s] for both *crescent*'s. The 12th ed. (1963) and the 13th ed. (1967) repeat the same information as in the 11th ed. As for the 14th ed. (1977) and the 15th ed. (1997), they show *crescent* (*moon, shape*) with [s] as the first choice and with [z] as the second choice and *crescent* (*growing, when applied to objects other than the moon*) is shown with [s] as the only choice (with [z] having been dropped altogether). I have had no access to the 2nd to 9th eds. inclusive and therefore cannot say in which of the intervening editions the information given in the 1st ed. was first reversed. But this is of little importance. What *is* important to us is the very fact that the reversing of the two pronunciations, i.e. with [z] and with [s], for *crescent* (*moon, shape*) did occur, thereby establishing the preference of the pronunciation with [s] over that with [z] for *crescent* (*moon, shape*). This signifies *a change* in the preference; this is what interests us. When we move from *EPD* (Jones, Gimson, Peter Roach/James Hartman) to *LPD*, and if we regard them as a continuum for convenience for the sake of the present discussion, we note that not only is the distinction between the two *crescent*'s abandoned but also the preference between the pronunciations with [s] and [z] is reversed, thus [z] as the first choice and [s] the second for the single entry, *crescent*. Whereas *EPD* has ended up showing the pronunciation with [s] as the preferred form, *LPD* shows [z] as the

preferred form. Does this mean that there has been a further change in the speakers' preference? Is this extrapolation valid? I cannot tell for sure. Possibly the latest preference of [s] or [z] is pretty inconclusive, to judge from the percentages that Wells gives in *LPD* (1st ed., 1990: 2nd ed. 2000), i.e. 55% for [krez-] and 45% for [kres-] in his 1988 pronunciation preference survey.

Incidentally, I should note that there is a strong tendency for speakers of British English to develop pronunciations with [z], as alternative pronunciations, in words which are originally pronounced with [s]. Here are a few examples of the words in whose pronunciation the alternative pronunciations with [z] appear to have developed : *Asda* (an English supermarket), *ASLEF* (= Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen), *Asmara*, *Ainsley* (a bakery chain store), *absurd*, *inclusive*, *conversation*, etc.

(12) I now turn my attention to a phonetic phenomenon which involves a "suprasegmental" element, i.e. accent, whose different placements in a word give rise to different accentual patterns in English. There are a number of words whose accentual patterns have been changing over time in such a way that the use of one of the alternative accentual patterns is preferred over the other or others by different speakers of English. In other words, a progressively larger number of speakers have been favouring one of the alternative accentual patterns over the other or others. I will cite some of such words with the indication of the competing alternative accentual patterns for each word. I will indicate by means of an arrow the direction in which the speakers' preference appears to be shifting over the years.

formidable '- - - - > - '- - - ; *applicable* '- - - - > - '- - - ;
controversy '- - - - > - '- - - ; *necessarily* '- - - - - > - - '- - - ;
exquisite '- - - > - '- - ; *decade* '- - > - ' -

Indeed, it is rarely that I hear nowadays the first of the two alternative accentual patterns of such words as cited above, on the radio and television as well as normal daily discourse around me.

(13) Another type of phonetic phenomenon which involves a "suprasegmental" element in English is what is generally called

"intonation", which I would prefer to refer to as "speech melody"; I reserve the term "intonation" to designate a different pitch phenomenon. Traditionally, the speech melody on which the parting expression *Good-bye* is pronounced is said with a "low rise" on *-bye*. (*Good* is normally pronounced, unaccented or accented, on a high level pitch (cf. Roger Kingdon, *The Groundwork of English Intonation,* 1958, Longmans, London, New York & Toronto, pp.238-9). The use of a low rise on *-bye* in such an expression is known to create a genial, non-threatening effect. The same also applies to another expression like *All right* when pronounced with a low rise on *right*, which produces a soothing and friendly effect. The same further applies to an expression like *Open the door*, depending on whether a low rise occurs on *door* (implying more of a request than a downright command) or a fall does (be it a low fall or a high fall). Indeed it is my experience that *Good-bye* is said with a low rise in day-to-day discourse in which I am involved. The same low rise occurs in *Bye-bye* as well. It so happens that over many years I have been aware that, at the end of a radio or a television programme, the expression *Good-bye* is said by the presenter with a "low fall" on *-bye* practically every time, and occasionally even with what could be perceived as a growl, as the voice on *–bye* is so low-pitched. It is hard for me to interpret *Good-bye* said with a low fall on *-bye* as being short for *I bid you good-bye* where *good-bye* may be a noun or an interjection. Said on television, it can well sound genial if the presenter's face smiles, but this is not quite so when it is said on the radio as the presenter's face is invisible to the listener.

(14) Another phenomenon of speech melody which appears to be a fairly recent "fad" and therefore attracts my attention occurs on both radio and television when making announcements. I first observed this on a commercial classical music station in the U.K. and subsequently on different television services in the U.K. A very idiosyncratic speech melody takes the form of "high pitch" on the penultimate syllable followed by "low pitch", so that one hears, for example, *on BBC One* [ɑn ˌbiː ˈbiː ˉsiː ˌwʌn], that is, [ˉsiː ˌwʌn] instead of [ˉsiː ˌwʌn] or [ˉsiː ˋwʌn]. To me it sounds very outlandish and reminds me of a basic tune in French for certain types of utterance in which the last two syllables are said with a high level pitch (for the penultimate) followed by a low level pitch (for the final), as in *Je suis content de vous voir* [...-də ˉvu ˌvwaːr]. Used in

English, however, it sounds like a commercial trick.

(15) I wish at this point to diverge from discussions about some chosen individual traits of pronunciation and make a remark of somewhat general nature. It should be emphasized that in present-day U.K., gone are the days now when one expected that immigrants to the U.K. from the Indian Subcontinent or from African countries (there were very few then from the Middle East or Eastern Europe) *necessarily* speak with heavy foreign accents. This is simply no longer the case because nowadays the offsprings of the original immigrants, i.e. the second generation or even the third generation, are conspicuous by their presence in the U.K., many of them having been born in the U.K., acquired British citizenship and settled in the U.K. These people speak English natively. Their parents or grandparents, on the other hand, who were original immigrants, are largely the ones who still speak with foreign accents. The demographic change in the U.K. in recent few decades has made its influence clearly felt in spoken English heard nowadays in the U.K. One need only to walk into the streets of the U.K. to be convinced of this fact.

(16) It may be apposite at this juncture to say a few words about the term "RP" which has been well known in the literature on English phonetics. The term "RP" has recently been out of favour with a number of English phoneticians, who propose to use some other term which they think is more appropriate. One of such terms is "BBC English" which is advocated to suitably supplant the term "RP". I shall not go here into a discussion of the academic point concerned. All I want to say is that the term "BBC English" is a misnomer for what is heard on the BBC, overseas service as well as domestic service. The two co-editors of *EPD* (15th ed., 1997, p. v) write as follows.

> The time has come to abandon the archaic name *Received Pronunciation*. The model used for British English is what is referred to as *BBC English*; this is the pronunciation of professional speakers employed by the BBC as newsreaders and announcers on BBC1 and BBC2 television, the World Service and BBC Radio 3 and 4, as well as many commercial broadcasting organisations such as ITN. [...]

I believe that the two co-editors' characterization of the types of

English pronunciation heard on the various BBC sound and television services as BBC English is misleading, particularly to non-English speaking foreign learners of English abroad who have little or no chance to actually listen to or watch those services to verify the truth or half-truth of what the two co-editors say above. The fact is that the BBC has been adopting a fairly "broad-minded" policy in recruiting professional speakers on BBC services. This policy is apparent even on the BBC's World Service. I have been listening to the BBC's World Service for many years (from the time it was still called the BBC's General Overseas Service) and have been impressed by the progressively lax policy in recruitment, so far as the types of spoken English ascribable to the professional speakers employed are concerned. One would be gravely mistaken if one thought of, for example, Peter King, Frank Norris, Michael Ashby, Elizabeth Frances, John Tooey, etc., all of them being formerly among the veteran newsreaders in the General Overseas Service of the BBC, as the kind of newsreaders to be regularly heard on the present-day World Service of the BBC. For my critique of the two co-editors' proposed adoption of the term "BBC English" to supersede "RP", see Akamatsu ("On the occasion of the publication of *EPD*15" published in *Contextos*, Vol. XVI, 1998, Universidad de León, Spain, pp. 13-54, esp. pp. 16-18).

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In the previous parts of my present paper, I have raised and discussed a small number of select points of current British English pronunciation that have come to my notice over the years.

Some of the various phonetic phenomena I have discussed so far result in the existence of two or more alternative pronunciations of individual English words concerned. Note, however, that, irrespective of whether the word *food*, for example, is pronounced with vowels [uː] or [ɨː] or [ɨü], there is no question of there occurring two different English words or two alternative pronunciations of one and the same word. I now turn my attention to some other phonetic phenomena in current British English pronunciation that do result in the existence, more correctly, the *co*-existence in competition of two or more alternative pronunciations of individual words. It is for this reason that I now wish to turn my attention specifically to John Wells's two pronunciation preference surveys

conducted in 1988 and 1998, respectively, which bear appreciable significance to the subject of my present paper. I have touched on these surveys, albeit obliquely and briefly, in the foregoing parts of my paper. I will now give these surveys some sustained attention they deserve.

I begin with some prefatory remarks. It is incontestably agreed among linguists that a language is constantly changing. A language is never static, stable or homogeneous, at any given stage, but dynamic, as exhibited in the linguistic behaviour of a speech community. Even when the linguist observes the state of a language at a given time, i.e. in terms of "synchrony", it is essential not to forget that we operate, not with "static synchrony" (such as is suggested by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) in his *Cours de linguistique générale*, 1916, Payot, Lausanne), but with "dynamic synchrony" advocated by André Martinet (1908-99) and his associates such as Henriette Walter, Anne-Marie Houdebine, Christos Clairis and others including myself. When observed at a given time, any state of a language incorporates elements of change that have been occurring over time. Besides, some of such elements may represent progressive trends because their use is associated with speakers of a younger generation while other elements may represent recessive trends because their use is associated with speakers of an older generation. Let me quote how Martinet conceives of dynamic synchrony. He writes as follows in his *Éléments de linguistique générale* (4th edition, 1996, Armand Colin, Paris, section 2.2):

> ...il est même recommandé, dans une étude synchronique de relever les tendances évolutives de la langue en opposant les usages de différentes générations en présence. On dira dans ce cas qu'il s'agit d'une *synchronie dynamique*. On parlera de *diachronie* lorsqu'on confrontera les synchronies dynamiques successives de chaque langue. [...it is even recommended, in a synchronic study, to note the evolutionary tendencies of the language by contrasting with each other usages of different co-existing generations We shall say in this case that we are concerned with a *dynamic synchrony*. We shall speak of diachrony when successive *dynamic synchronies* of the same language are compared wih each other (my translaion).]

Martinet, in his *Évolution des langues et reconstruction* (1975,

Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, p. 9) says as follows:

> ...une synchronie dynamique où l'attention se concentre, certes, sur un seul et même état, mais sans qu'on renonce jamais à relever des variations et à y évaluer le caractère progressif ou récessif de chaque trait [...a dynamic synchrony in which we, of course, concentrate our attention on one and the same stage, but in which we never give up noting variations and evaluating the progressive or recessive nature of each feature (my translation).]

The first investigation conducted in the spirit of dynamic synchrony to my knowledge is the one attributable to Martinet in 1941; the results of the investigation were published in his *La prononciation du français contemporain : témoignages recueillis en 1941 dans un camp d'officers prisonniers* (1945, Droz, Geneva). Other researches in the spirit of dynamic synchrony, have since been conducted, principally in France, by a number of associates of Martinet.

In the U.K. a large measure of significance should be attributed to the two *LPD* pronunciation preference surveys conducted by John Wells, in 1988 and 1998, respectively, thus with an interval of ten years. The findings from his 1988 survey have been published in the 1st edition (1990) of *LPD*, and those from his 1998 survey in the 2nd edition (2000) of *LPD*. A small part of his findings from his 1988 survey is reproduced in the 2nd edition of *LPD*. Part of his findings from both surveys have also been shown in some of his published articles as well. The special significance of Wells's two surveys is that he is concerned with *change* in British English pronunciation ascribable to speakers' *age*, or, in Wells's own words, "evidence of *pronunciation changes in progress in different age groups* [the emphasis is mine]" (in "Which pronunciation do you prefer?", an article by Wells which appeared in *IATEFL Issues* 149, June-July 1999, "The Changing Language", pp. 10-11). It is legitimate to assume that Wells is interested to find out both the progressive trends associated with a younger generation and the recessive trends associated with an older generation. The pronunciation preference surveys conducted by Wells in the U.K. with regard to British English can be regarded as another exercise in the spirit of dynamic synchrony initiated by Martinet with regard to French. In fact, in one of his papers (Wells, "Pronunciation research by written questionnaire": paper presented at

Peter Ladefoged's Symposium on Phonetic Fieldwork at the International Phonetic Sciences, Barcelona, August 2003), Wells explicitly refers to Martinet's afore-mentioned work. However, it should be noted that whereas Martinet's 1941 survey was to seek and identify the phonological systems and function in the then current French, Wells's two surveys can be considered, in my view, to be ultimately an attempt to find out the morphology of a number of selected English words, even though that was clearly not his own intention. (I hasten to clarify that by "morphology" is to be understood a study of formal variants of monemes, in the practice of functionalists.) That Wells's surveys are into what I understand as morphology is uncontestably evident since his surveys are concerned, exclusively and avowedly, with the alternative pronunciations of the selected individual English words. Wells, in his two surveys, operates with the sounds and accentual patterns. As these sounds are phonetic realizations of phonologically distinctive units, i.e. phonemes, of British English, they ultimately relate to these distinctive units in terms of which the sequential elements of variants of monemes (or words in case of Wells's surveys) are conceived. Accentual patterns of a number of polysyllabic English words are also part and parcel of the morphology of such words in that they pertain to the formal variants of the words, ultimately the alternative pronunciations of such words.

The preponderant majority of instances of pronunciation change in current British English as revealed by Wells's two surveys boil down to the question of the "alternative pronunciations" of a number of individual English words. These alternative pronunciations on which Wells's surveys focus co-exist in competition with each other in current British English and are ascribable to speakers of different age brackets, i.e. coexisting different generations. Wells's conception and presentation of the alternative pronunciations in terms of various degrees of preference on the part of English speakers of different generations are in the spirit of "dynamic" synchrony, not "static" synchrony. This is an important merit attributable to Wells's surveys.

My observation of current British English pronunciation and Wells's pronunciation preference surveys have been conducted independently of each other. There are three specific differences between my observation and Wells's. Firstly, my own observation has been going on since 1967 onward up to the present, while Wells's two surveys were conducted in 1988 and 1998. Secondly, Wells' findings are based on his two well-

organized and well-thought-out pronunciation preference surveys which have afforded numerically demonstrable results and are therefore more credible than mine which lack such an advantage. Thirdly, Wells is exclusively concerned in his two surveys with the alternative pronunciations of individual words (ultimately, as I see it, the morphology of selected words), while I am interested in phonetic phenomena which include, but not comprise, alternative pronunciations. However, when I compare the results of my observation with the findings of Wells's pronunciation preference surveys, I am pleased to say that his findings essentially agree with mine with regard to the cases we both have observed.

Wells's two pronunciation preference surveys, conducted in 1988 and 1998, respectively, represent a step in the right direction, in my view, in showing the trends, both progressive (with a younger generation) and recessive (with an older generation), in respect of the alternative pronunciations of individual words. Laudable as Wells's investigative principle is, I have reservations when going through the results of his two pronunciation surveys presented in the 2nd edition of *LPD*. Note that the 2nd edition not only shows the results of his 2nd survey but also reproduces a limited number of the results of his 1st survey.

Wells's findings in his 1st survey conducted in 1988 were based on the information gained from 275 respondents and the different degrees of preference for the alternative pronunciations were calculated in terms of the different percentages on 67 lexical items. (See Appendix 2.) For example, for the item *chrysanthemum*, the alternative pronunciation pronounced with [s] scored 61%, and that pronounced with [z] 39%. This result was entered for *chrysanthemum* in the 1st edition of *LPD* (1990, p. 129). The two above-mentioned percentages are noted again in the 2nd edition of *LPD* (2000). In addition, the 2nd edition of *LPD* also shows the results of Wells's second survey in connection with the same words, *chrysanthemum*, i.e. 63% for [s] and 37% for [z]. We are thus shown that there was a slight rise in the preference for the word pronounced with [s] as against a slight decrease in preference for the word pronounced with [z], over the period of ten years from 1988 to 1998. So far so good.

Unfortunately, this sort of information is not available for 61 out of the 67 items whose pronunciation preferences were investigated in the 1st

survey. In other words, Wells does not give in the 2nd edition of *LPD* any results on 61 out of the 67 items (these 67 items having been investigated in his 1st survey and reported in the 1st edition of *LPD*) and we do not know if he actually included these 61 items in his 2nd survey itself. All this means that, so far as these 61 items are concerned, we cannot find any information about any possible change, progressive or recessive or even stationary, in pronunciation preference over the ten-year period from 1988 to 1998.

Wells's findings in his 2nd pronunciation preference survey conducted in 1998 were based on the responses from 1,932 respondents. We are told that a far larger number of lexical items were investigated, but not necessarily the 67 items which were targeted in his 1st survey; in fact, as will have been already gathered, only 6 items out of the 67 items are included in the 2nd edition of *LPD* among all the items investigated in his 2nd survey, and all the rest are newly selected items. I have yet to find out what is exactly the whole list of the items that were investigated in the 2nd survey and, furthermore, that are actually presented with the results in terms of percentages in the 2nd edition of *LPD*. When we look at Wells's presentation of his two surveys in *LPD* (1st ed.) and *LPD* (2nd ed.) in conjunction with each other, we cannot help saying that what we see is less than satisfactory if we are to know how the pronunciation preferences for the lexical items investigated may well have changed (if so, in which direction, progressive or recessive) or not, over time, during the period of ten years between the two surveys. The 1st and 2nd surveys were most probably not conducted with the same respondents, which is perfectly understandable. We appreciate that this would have been nothing short of ideal, but in fact impractical in the event. It is more than likely that the 1,932 respondents involved in the 2nd survey were largely different people from the 275 respondents involved in the 1st survey. I nevertheless feel strongly that the same lexical items (in the present case, all 67 items in particular) should have been investigated, even with different respondents, in both surveys and the relevant findings reported in *LPD* (2nd ed.) as well, as it would have most clearly revealed any evolutionary shift, if this occurred, which would have taken place during the ten years.

To end my present discussion about preferences for alternative pronunciations of English words as they relate to speakers of different

generations, one may legitimately ask why they happen in the first place. I think of a couple of major factors. First, there is the principle of "accommodation". Speakers do not, in general, opt to go on maintaining too distinct a way of speaking from their peers, as this would be feared to alienate them eventually. They tend to accommodate their speech to bring it nearer to that of peer members they find themselves close to. But this principle naturally operates in every language. Secondly, there is the fact that the British people have been exposed to American programmes on British television in an inexorably constant way, day in and day out. Numerous are those Britons who watch these American programmes abundantly. It would of course be an idle speculation to imagine that the British might end up speaking like the Americans, but it is at least feasible that small corners here and there of British pronunciation may be succumbing to tiny disparate bits of American speech.

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Appendix 1

Crescent

***EPD* (1st ed, 1917)**

crescent (moon, shape)
with [z] (first choice)
with [s] (second choice)

crescent (growing, when applied to objects other than the moon)
with [s] (first choice)
with [z] (second choice)
.....
.....

***EPD* (10th ed., 1949)**

crescent (moon, shape)
with [s] (first choice)
with [z] (second choice)

crescent (growing, when applied to objects other than the moon)
with [s] (sole choice) ([z] dropped altogether)

***EPD* (11th ed., 1956)**

crescent (moon, shape)
with [s] (first choice)
with [z] (second choice ; "old-fashioned")

crescent (growing, when applied to objects other than the moon)
with [s] (sole choice)

***EPD* (12th ed., 1963)**

Same as in ***EPD* (11th ed.)**

***EPD* (13th ed., 1967)**

Same as in ***EPD* (11th ed.)**

***EPD* (14th ed., 1977)**

crescent (moon, shape)
with [s] (first choice)
with [z] (second choice) ("old-fashioned" dropped altogether)

crescent (growing, when applied to objects other than the moon)
with [s] (sole choice)

***EPD* (15th ed., 1997)**

Same as in ***EPD* (14th ed., 1977)**

***LPD* (1st ed., 1990)**

crescent (no distinction between the two *crescent*'s)
with [z] 55%
with [s] 45%

***LPD* (2nd ed., 2000)**

As in ***LPD* (1st, ed., 1900)**

(My remark : presumably not investigated in the second survey.)

Appendix 2

RESULTS OF J. C. WELLS'S SURVEYS OF ALTERNATIVE PRONUNCIATIONS (BrE poll panel preferences)

(N.B.1. Some of the original indications by Wells of the alternative pronunciations are simplified by me here and there, without doing any violence to his own indications.
N.B.2. The remarks within parentheses are Wells's, if not necessarily verbatim.)
N.B.3. The percentages shown in the first column are those given in the first edition of *LPD* whereas those shown in the second column for some of the lexical items are those given in the 2nd edition of *LPD*.)

accomplish
ʌ 92%
ɒ 8%
(*In AmE, however,* ɑː *clearly predominates.*)

again
ge 80%
geɪ 20%
(*Many speakers use both pronunciations.*)

applicable
ˈ- - - 77% 16%
- ˈ- - 23% 84%

ate
e 55%
eɪ 45%
(*In America, however,* et *is considered non-standard.*)

auction
ɔː 87%
ɒ 13%

bath
ðz 50%
θs 50%
(*Surprisingly, half the panel prefer* θs, *traditionally considered non-standard. Some differentiate between 'acts of bathing', with* θs, *and 'bathtubs, bathhouses', with* ðz.)

bedroom
uː 63%
ʊ 37%

been (strong form)
iː 92%
ɪ 8%

bouquet
- ˈ 83%
ˈ- 17%

brochure
ˈ- 90%
- ˈ 10%

casual
ʒ 77%
z 23%

caviar
ˈ- - 77%
- - ˈ 23%

chrysanthemum
s 61% 63%
z 39% 37%

cigaret(te)
- - ˈ 85%
ˈ- - 15%

clandestine

-ˈ-	61%	
ˈ--	39%	

contribute

-ˈ-	73%
ˈ--	27%

controversy

ˈ----	44%	40%
-ˈ---	56%	60%

covert

ˈkʌ	54%
ˈkəʊ	37%
ˌkəʊ	9%

data

eɪ	92%
ɑː	6%
æ	2%

début, debut

eɪ	69%
e	31%

decade

ˈdek eɪd	86%
-ˈkeɪd	14%

deity

ˈdeɪ	80%
ˈdiː	20%

delirious

ˈlɪr	54%	≈ 45%
ˈlɪər	46%	≈ 55%

dispute (n)

-ˈ	62%
ˈ-	38%

distribute

-ˈ-	74%
ˈ--	26%

drastic

æ	88%	(southerners 92%)
ɑː	12%	(southerners 8%)

economic

ˌiːk	62%
ˌek	38%

envelope

en	78%
ɒn	22%

exasperate

zæsp	54%	(southerners 33%)
zɑːsp	46%	(southerners 67%)

exit

eks	55%
egz	45%

exquisite

-ˈ-	69%
ˈ--	31%

formidable

ˈ----	46%
-ˈ---	54%

graph

ɑː	59%	(southerners 77%)
æ	41%	(southerners 23%)

harass

ˈ-	68%
-ˈ	32%

homosexual

ˈhəʊ	59%
ˈhɒ	41%

hospitable

-ˈ--	81%
ˈ---	19%

ice cream

-ˈ-	66%
ˈ-	34%

increase

ˈ- (n) - ˈ (v)	85%
- ˈ (n, v)	7%
ˈ- (v) - ˈ (n)	3%

inherent

her	66%
hɪər	34%

issue

ʃuː	49%
sjuː	30%
ʃjuː	21%

kilometre

ˈ- - -	52%	43%
- ˈ- -	48%	57%

lather

ɑː	72% (southerners 88%)
æ	28% (southerners 12%)

luxury

k	96%
g	4%

maintain

(ˌ)meɪn	90%
men	6%
mən	4%

masquerade

ˌmæsk	62% (southerners 48%)
ˌmɑːsk	39% (southerners 52%)

nephew

f	79%
v	21%

patriotic

pætr	79%
peɪtr	21%

plaque

æ	61%
ɑː	39%

plastic

æ	92% (southerners 94%)
ɑː	9% (southerners 6%)

poor

ɔː	57%	82%
uə	43%	18%
		(born since 1973)

presume

zj	77%
zu	16%
ʒuː	8%

primarily

ˈ- - -	49%
- ˈ- -	51%

privacy

ɪ	88%
aɪ	12%

research

(v, n)

-ˈ	80%
ˈ-	20%

(university teachers)

(v, n)

-ˈ	95%
ˈ-	5%

(others)

room

uː	82%
ʊ	19%

sandwich

dʒ	54%
tʃ	47%

schism

skɪ	71%
ʃɪ	29%

spectator

-ˈ-	91%
ˈ--	9%

stereo

-e-	90%
-ɪə-	10%

submarine

ˈ--	42%
ˌ-ˈ	58%

subsidence

-ˈ-	47%
ˈ--	53%

substantial

æ	93% (southerners 90%)
ɑː	7% (southerners 10%)

suit

uː	72%
juː	28%

transistor

æ	86% (southerners 84%)
ɑː	14% (southerners 16%)
zɪ	63%
sɪ	37%

transition

zɪ	63%
sɪ	16%
sɪʒ	9%

year

jɪə	80%
jɜː	20%

zebra

e	83%
iː	17%