

My phonetics talk on vowels

RP Received Pronunciation 

Transcription taken from

Alex's phonetic thoughts

<http://alex-ateachersthoughts.blogspot.it/2012/04/ma-fnetks-tk-n-valz.html> (visited 22-Aug-12)

Make a phonemic (broad) transcription of the following passage:

1. The reason why I didn't post any article last week was because I was incredibly busy preparing for a talk I was asked to give on Wednesday the 28th of March at the Università degli Studi della Tuscia, Viterbo, where I've been working as a lecturer in English Phonetics since last October.
2. The talk I presented was entitled "The English vowel system: weak forms, smoothings, and compressions". I chose this topic because, as you know, recognising and producing vowels and vowel sequences in connected English speech is a very tricky area for non-native speakers.
3. I started my presentation by illustrating the three categories into which the English vowels are usually divided: checked vowels, free vowels, and diphthongs. I then talked about John Wells's standard lexical sets and the vowels of contemporary Standard British English. Subsequently, I discussed the unstable state of syllables in spoken English and examined weak (or reduced) as against strong (or full) syllables. I also introduced the concepts of stress and accent and the difference between word stress and sentence stress. Finally, I discussed the extremely frequent use of weak forms in English and the total absence of such forms in a language such as Italian.
4. The part of the talk the audience liked most, I think, was when I showed them a series of videos of Italian native speakers whose spoken English contains barely any reductions/weak forms at all. The first clip was that of one Commander Nicastro, interviewed by BBC newsreader Nik Gowing on The Hub soon after the Costa Concordia disaster back in January. The students and teachers present at the talk described his pronunciation as terribly un-English (in particular they noticed the word environment, pronounced as something like **em'virəment**) and also pointed out that Mr Gowing, in order for his interviewee to understand better, 'had to reduce the number of weak forms' in the questions he was asking. Two examples of this can be found in What do you think the danger is now for the ship? (0:55) and What is the forecast now for the weather? (1:31), in which the preposition for is pronounced as **fɔː** rather than the more usual **fə**.



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5. The second video was that of Italy's ex Foreign Minister Franco Frattini being grilled by BBC presenter Jeremy Paxman about the situation in Italy and in Libya before Colonel Gaddafi's death. In this clip he can, for instance, be heard to use the unreduced forms of can, to and that in Nobody can consider him as an interlocutor (0:18), *Nobody can guarantee to him the impunity (1:10), ... *no hesitation to support me... (2:48), and ... the people of Benghazi that we are supporting strongly... (3:25).
6. "What do you think of Mr Frattini's pronunciation?", I asked. ... What do you think their answer was?
7. I then moved onto smoothed and compressed pronunciations and used some of the sound files contained in the CD-ROM that comes with LPD3: flower, flowery, fire department, fire drill, fire extinguisher, and hour hand. Several degrees of smoothing can also be heard in the utterances scientists (00:08), shower (00:42), our (00:52), ourselves (01:05) and scientist (03:35) in this other BBC video which tries to explain the science of the Higgs Boson, the so-called 'God particle'. Teachers and students alike seem to have enjoyed this clip, too.
8. Finally, I wanted to play another video just to recap the main points of my talk, but I realised I had run out of time, so I told the people present I was going to discuss it on my blog. In this last clip with London mayor Boris Johnson, we can hear the phrase youth violence pronounced with a smoothed diphthong in violence at both 02:32 and 03:07. Also noteworthy is the utterance we're, realised by Mr Johnson as the less usual weak form **wə(ɪ)** at 01:31, 03:38, 05:20 and 05:30. It is interesting to note that the ODP is the only pronouncing dictionary to list this reduced form as a variant (see page 1180).
9. My talk was so successful that the students asked me to come again and give another lecture later this month. The next topic will be English intonation.



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maɪ fəˈnetɪks tɔːk ɒn vaʊlz

1. ðə riːzən waɪ aɪ dɪdŋ pəʊst eni aːtɪkəl laɪs wɪk wəz bɪkəz aɪ wəz ɪŋkredəbli bɪzi prɪpeːrɪŋ fər ə tɔːk aɪ wəz aɪs tə ɡɪv ʊm wenzdeɪ ðə twenti-eɪθ əv maːtʃ əʔ ði Universit‡ degli Studi della Tuscia, Viterbo, wɛːr aɪv bɪm wɜːkɪŋ əz ə lektʃərər ɪn ɪŋɡlɪʃ fəˈnetɪks sɪnts laɪst ɒktəʊbə.
2. ðə tɔːk aɪ prɪzentɪd wəz ɪntaɪtld “ði ɪŋɡlɪʃ vaʊl sɪstəm: wɪk fɔːmz, smuːðɪŋ əŋ kəmprefŋ”. aɪ tʃəʊz ðɪs tɒpɪk bɪkəz, əzu nəʊ, rekəɡnaɪzɪŋ əm prədzuːsɪŋ vaʊlz ən vaʊl sɪːkwəntsɪz ɪŋ kənektɪd ɪŋɡlɪʃ spɪːtʃ ɪz ə veri trɪki ɛːrɪə fə nʊn-neɪtɪv spɪːkəz.
3. aɪ stəːtɪd maɪ prezŋteɪfŋ baɪ ɪləstreɪtɪŋ ðə θrɪː kætəɡərɪz ɪntə wɪtʃ ði ɪŋɡlɪʃ vaʊlz ə juːzəli dɪvaɪdɪd: tʃekt vaʊlz, frɪː vaʊlz, ən dɪfθəŋz. aɪ ðen tɔːkt əbaʊʔ dʒɒm welɪz stændəd leksɪkəl sets ən ðə vaʊlz əv kəntempri stændəd brɪtɪʃ ɪŋɡlɪʃ. sləbsɪkwəntli, aɪ dɪsklɑːs ði ʌnstəɪbl steɪt əv sɪləbəlz ɪn spəʊkən ɪŋɡlɪʃ ənd ɪɡzæmɪnd wɪk (ɔː rɪdʒuːst) əz əɡenst strɒŋ (ɔː fʊl) sɪləbəlz. aɪ ɔːlsəʊ ɪntrədʒuːs ðə kɒnsepts əv stres ən æksent ən ðə dɪfrənts bɪtwɪːn wɜːd stres ən sentəns stres. faɪnli, aɪ dɪsklɑːs ði ɪkstriːmli frɪːkwənt juːs əv wɪk fɔːmz ɪn ɪŋɡlɪʃ ən ðə təʊtəl æpsənts əv slɪtʃ fɔːmz ɪn ə læŋɡwɪdʒ slɪtʃ əz ɪtæljən.
4. ðə paɪt əv ðə tɔːk ði ɔːdʒənts laɪk məʊst, a θɪŋk, wəz wen aɪ ʃəʊd ðəm ə sɪərɪz əv vɪdɪəʊz əv ɪtæljən neɪtɪv spɪːkəz huːz spəʊkən ɪŋɡlɪʃ kənteɪm beːli eni rɪdʌkʃŋz/wɪk fɔːmz ət ɔːl. ðə fɜːs klɪp wəz ðæt əv wʌŋ kəməːndə nɪkæstrəʊ (=Nicastro), ɪntəvjuːd baɪ bɪːbɪsɪː njuːzrɪːdə nɪk ɡaʊɪŋ ʊn ðə hʌb suːn aɪftə ðə kɒstə kəŋkɔːdɪə dɪzɑːstə bæk ɪn dʒænjʊri. ðə ʃtʃuːdŋts ən tɪːtʃəz prezənt əʔ ðə tɔːk dɪskraɪbd ɪz prənʌntsɪeɪfŋ əz ‘terəbli ʌn-ɪŋɡlɪʃ’ (ɪm pəːtɪkjʊlə ðeɪ nəʊtɪs ðə wɜːd environment, prənaʊnst əz slæmpθɪŋ laɪk **emˈvɪrəment**) ən ɔːlsəʊ pɔɪntɪd aʊʔ ðəʔ mɪstə ɡaʊɪŋ, ɪn ɔːdə fər ɪz ɪntəvjuːɪː tu ʌndəstænd betə, həd tə ‘rɪdʒuːs ðə nʌmbər əv wɪk fɔːmz’ ɪn ðə kwɛstʃənz ɪ wəz aɪskɪŋ. tuː ɪɡzɑːmpəlz əv ðɪs kəm bɪ faʊnd ɪn What do you think the danger is now for the ship? (0:55) ən What is the forecast now for the weather? (1:31), ɪm wɪtʃ ðə prepəzɪfŋ for ɪz prənaʊnst əz **fɔː raɪðə** ðən ðə mɔː juːzəl **fə**.



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5. ðə sekən vɪdiəʊ wəz ðæt əv ɪtəlɪz eks fɒrəm mɪnɪstə fræŋkəʊ frætɪːni (=Franco Frattini) bɪːɪŋ grɪld baɪ bɪːbɪsɪː prɪzɛntə dʒerəmi pæksmən əbaʊ? ðə sɪtʃueɪfŋ ɪn ɪtəli ənd ɪn ɪbɪə bɪfɔː kɜːŋl̩ gədəɪfɪz deθ. ɪn ðɪs klɪp hi kən, frɪnstənts, bi hɜːd tə juːz ðə ʌnrɪdʒuːst fɔːmz əv kən, tə ən that ɪn Nobody can consider him as an interlocutor (0:18), *Nobody can guarantee to him the impunity (1:10), ... *no hesitation to support me... (2:48), ənd ... the people of Benghazi that we are supporting strongly... (3:25).
6. “wɒ? dʒu θɪŋk əv mɪstə frætɪːnɪz prənʌntsɪeɪfŋ?”, aɪ aːskt. – wɒ? dʒu θɪŋk ðeɪr aːntsə wɒz?
7. aɪ ðen muːvd ɒntə smuːðd əŋ kəmprest prənʌntsɪeɪfŋz ən juːzd sʌm əv ðə saʊŋ faɪəlz kənteɪnd ɪn ðə sɪːdɪːrɒm ðə? kʌmz wɪð LPD3: flower, flowery, fire department, fire drill, fire extinguisher, ənd hour hand. sevrəl dɪgrɪːz əv smuːðɪŋ kən ɔːlsəʊ bi hɜːd ɪn ði ʌtrəntsɪz scientists (00:08), shower (00:42), our (00:52), ourselves (01:05) ən scientist (03:35) ɪn ðɪs ʌðə bɪːbɪsɪː vɪdiəʊ wɪtʃ traɪz twɪkspleɪn ðə saɪənts əv ðə hɪgz bæʊsən, ðə səʊ kɔːl gɒd pɑːtɪkl̩. tɪtʃəz ən stʃuːdnts əlaɪk sɪːm twən ɪndʒɔɪ ðɪs klɪp, tuː.
8. faɪnli, aɪ wɒntɪd tə pleɪ ənʌðə vɪdiəʊ dʒʌs tə rɪːkæp ðə meɪm pɔɪnts əv maɪ tɔːk bət aɪ rɪəlaɪzd aɪd rʌn aʊt əv taɪm, səʊ aɪ tɒʊl ðə pɪːpəl̩ prezənt aɪ wəz gənə pəʊst ɪt ən dɪskʌs ɪt ɒm maɪ blɒg. ɪn ðɪs ʌs klɪp wɪð ʌndən meɪ bɒrɪs dʒɒntsŋ, wɪ kən hɪə ðə freɪz youth violence prənaʊnst wɪð ə smuːð dɪfθəŋ ɪn violence əp bæʊθ 02:32 ən 03:07. ɔːlsəʊ nəʊʔwɜːði ɪz ði ʌtrənts we're rɪəlaɪzd baɪ mɪstə dʒɒntsŋ əz ðə les juːzəl wɪːk fɔːm wə(z) ət 01:31, 03:38, 05:20 ən 05:30. ɪts ɪntrəstɪŋ tə nəʊ? ðə? ði ODP ɪz ði əʊnnɪ prənaʊntsɪŋ dɪkʃənri tə ɪst ðɪs rɪdʒuːs fɔːm əz ə pɒsəbl̩ vɛːrɪənt (sɪː peɪdʒ 1180).
9. maɪ tɔːk wəs səʊ səkseɪfɪ ðə? ðə stʃuːdnts aɪst mi tə kʌm əgen əŋ gɪv ənʌðə lektʃə leɪtə ðɪs mʌntθ. ðə neks tɒpɪk wɪl bi ɪŋglɪʃ ɪntəneɪfŋ.

