IPA NEWS

A TRIBUTE TO WIKTOR JASSEM
ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 90TH BIRTHDAY

Wiktor Jassem's short article on rhythm ('Indication of speech rhythm in the transcription of educated Southern English') was published in 1949 in *Le Maître Phonétique*, the ancestor of today's *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*. The author was a young man aged 27 at the time, who was working on a longer treatment of the intonation of conversational English which was to be published three years later (Jassem 1952), just 60 years ago this year. Despite his youth, and despite the fact that he was not a native speaker of English, Jassem did not hesitate to take on giants, and to suggest in this paper that his treatment of rhythm is superior to that of both Henry Sweet and Harold Palmer, as well, he adds in the 1952 book, as that of his mentor Daniel Jones.

Jassem illustrates here what he considered to be a crucial aspect of English pronunciation which in later work he calls the ANACRUSIS, consisting of any unaccented syllables which are not attached to a preceding NARROW RHYTHM UNIT and which are generally pronounced more quickly than other syllables. Although in the example:

summer dresses /ˈsʌmə ˈdresiz/ vs. some addresses /ˈsʌm əˈdresiz/

the space he introduces as a notational device corresponds to the word boundary, this is not always the case. An example proposed by Scott (1940),

Take Greater London vs. Take Grey to London

could be transcribed, using Jassem's proposal, as

/ˈteɪk ˈgreɪtə ˈlʌndn/ vs. /ˈteɪk ˈgreɪ təˈlʌndn/

where the spaces are no longer identical to those of the orthographic version.

Jassem's notation can even make a distinction which is not made in normal orthography. The sentence

He bought her chocolates.

can be interpreted in two ways, depending on whether *her* is taken to be an indirect object (i.e. *He bought chocolates for her*) or whether it is a possessive determiner (i.e. *He bought the chocolates she was selling*). Jassem's model predicts that in the first of these, *her* will be in the same Narrow Rhythm Unit as the verb *bought,* but that in the second it will be part of the anacrusis, so that the two interpretations would be transcribed respectively:

a. /hiˈbɔːthə ˈtʃɒkləts/   b. /hiˈbɔːt həˈtʃɒkləts/

Jassem's notational device, which he uses in the last paragraph of his article, was unfortunately not generally adopted by English phoneticians, although it was used in O'Connor's (1976) *Better English Pronunciation*, although without reference to Jassem's work. Jassem's distinction between a rhythm unit and an anacrusis makes empirical predictions about English speech which later research (Jassem, Hill & Witten 1984, Hirst & Bouzon 2005) has shown to be largely justified and which are still the subject of ongoing research.

Wiktor Jassem celebrated his 90th birthday on 11th June 2011, and the republication here of one of his first articles is intended as a tribute to this great phonetician, alongside the publication of a collection of articles in his honour (Gibbon, Hirst & Campbell 2010), which

includes a complete bibliography and an updated version of the tribute to him written ten years ago by Jack Windsor Lewis (Windsor Lewis 2003).

Daniel Hirst
Laboratoire Parole et Langage
Université de Provence

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indikeiʃn əv spiːtʃ riðm in ðə traːnskripʃn əv edʒukeitid sʌðən iŋgliʃ

ə nʌmbər əv laŋgwidʒiz, sʌðən iŋgliʃ əmʌŋ ðəm, həv bin traːnskraibd founiːmikli ənd sʌtʃ ə traːnskripʃn, oːlsou koːld " broːd traːnskripʃn ", haz ðə tuːfould ədvaːntidʒ əv bouθ ʃouiŋ ði aktʃul founəlodʒikl strʌktʃər əv ðə laŋgwidʒ reprizentid ənd biːiŋ kənviːnjənt fə ðə pəːpəsiz əv praktikl tiːtʃiŋ. it siːmz hauevə ðat, ət liːst in ðə keis əv edʒukeitid sʌðən iŋgliʃ, ðə kʌrənt " broːd traːnskripʃn " iz, in wʌn rispekt, iŋkənsistənt, neimli, in ðə wei it imploiz speisiŋ. in sʌm keisiz ə speis iz indikətiv əv fənetik ən founəlodʒikl difrənsiz. ðʌs : **'sʌm ə'dresiz** ənd **'sʌmə 'dresiz** ə difrənt fənetikli (ʌ ənd m biːiŋ loŋgə ənd ə biːiŋ ʃoːtə in ðə foːmə koləkeiʃn ðən in ðə latə) and founəlodʒikli (ðə sou-koːld dʒʌntʃə əkəːriŋ in ðə fəːst igzaːmpl bitwiːn ðə founiːmz **m** and **ə**, ənd in ði ʌðə bitwiːn ðə founiːmz **ə** ənd **d(r)**).

kəmpeəriŋ hauevə ðə natʃrl prənʌnsieiʃn əv sʌtʃ peəz əz *can form* ənd *conform, offence* ənd *a fence, in tense* ənd *intense*, wi faind ðət ðə kʌrənt traːnskripʃn : kən foːm ənd kənfoːm, itsetrə, əpiəz tə sədʒest difrənsiz ðət duː not igzist. *Can form* ənd *conform* ə fənetikli aidentikl ən ʃud oːlsou bi kənsidəd founəlodʒikli aidentikl.

nau, ðə spelt foːm : *an old English grammar* miːnz : " ən ould hanbuk əv iŋgliʃ gramə " ənd : *an Old English grammar* miːnz : " ə gramə əv ould iŋgliʃ." in ə traːnskripʃn witʃ imploiz stres-maːks ðə difrəns in prənʌnsieiʃn kən bi ʃoun ðʌs : (1) ən 'ould 'iŋgliʃ 'gramə, (2) ən 'ould iŋgliʃ 'gramə. ðə lak əv riðmikl stres on iŋgliʃ koːziz oːl ðə siləblz əv ðə siːkwəns 'ould iŋgliʃ tə bi ʃoːtə ðən in 'ould 'iŋgliʃ. similəli ði ʌnstrest siləblz əju koːz kənsidrəbl ʃoːtɳiŋ əv ðə strest siləbl **weə(r)** in **'weər** əju 'gouiŋ əz kəmpeəd wið **bət 'weə** ? it mait əpiə ðət eni ʌnstrest siləblz ʃoːtn ə prisiːdiŋ strest wʌn, weðə in ðə seim " wəːd " oː not. bət ðis iz not sou. aː iz 'ʃoːtə in tə 'haːdn 'stiːl ðən in 'haːd n 'veri 'hevi. in fakt wʌn oː moː ʌnstrest siləblz mei oː mei not influəns ðə leŋkθ əv ə prisiːdiŋ strest siləbl. ðei duː if ðei biloŋ tə ðə *seim riðmikl juːnit* ; ðei duː not if ðei biloŋ tə ðə *folouiŋ riðmikl juːnit.* in ðə sentns **ai 'həːd ə moust pi'kjuːljə 'saund** (wið hai pitʃ on **həːd**) ðər ə θriː ʌnstrest siləblz aːftə həːd and jet ðat siləbl həːd iz noutisəbli loŋgə ðeə ðən in ðə sentns : **ai 'həːd im 'siŋ**, weə its ounli foloud bai wʌn ʌnstrest siləbl. ðə riðmikl dʒʌntʃə əkəːz aːftə həːd in ðə foːmə ənd aːftə **im** in ðə latə keis. ðə riðmikl juːnits aː : (1) ai 'həːd | ə moust pi'kjuːljə | 'saund, (2) ai 'həːd im | 'siŋ. if speisiŋ in ðə traːnskripʃn iz tə hav sʌm founəlodʒikl implikeiʃn it mʌst, ai sədʒest, bi juːzd fə ðə pəːpəs əv ə kən'sistənt indikeiʃn əv riðmikl dʒʌntʃə. ði əbʌv menʃnd sentnsiz mait ðeəfoː bi traːnskraibd : (1) ai'həːd əmoustpi'kjuːljə 'saund, (2) ai'həːdim 'siŋ. sʌtʃ ə traːnskripʃn

wəd bi bouθ saiəntifikli strikt ənd praktikl in ðə tiːtʃiŋ əv iŋliʃ tə
forinəz huːz oun laŋgwədʒiz mei bi gʌvənd bai difrənt ruːlz əv spiːtʃ
riðm. ðə ləːnə haz tə riəlaiz ðət : (1) ʌnstrest siləblz prisiːdiŋ riðmikl
stres wiðin ə juːnit (if ðər aː eni) məs bi prənaunst əʒ ʃoːt əz posəbl,
(2) ði əmaunt əv taim teikən fə ði ʌtrəns əv iːtʃ əv ðouz paːts əv riðm
juːnits ðət kʌm bitwiːn stres ən dʒʌŋtʃə iz əproksimətli ðə seim θruːaut
ə pasidʒ əv spiːtʃ prənaunst ət ə səːtn spiːd, (3) ðər iz ə stroŋ tendənsi
fə ðət əmaunt əv taim tə bi iːkwəli divaidid bitwiːn eni nʌmbə əv
siləblz ðət mei əkəː bitwiːn stres ən dʒʌŋtʃə, sou ðət ðə leŋkθ əv sʌtʃ
siləblz tendz tə biː invəːsli prəpoːʃnit tə ðeə nʌmbə.

it ʃəd bi noutist ðət ə traːnskripʃn laik ðə wʌn ai sədʒest iz difrənt
frəm bouθ ðət ət wʌn taim advəkeitid bai *henri *swiːt huː, in sʌm
əv hiz praiməz, liŋt təgeðə eniθiŋ ðət əkəːz bitwiːn tuː stresiz ənd ðət
ət ə leitə deit prəpouzd bai *harld *paːmə, huː wəz wʌns in feivər əv
liŋkiŋ oːl wəːdz təgeðə ðət əkəː wiðin ə breθ-gruːp.

ətraːnskripʃn ˈjuːziŋ ˈspeisiŋ fəðəˈpəːpəs əvˈindikeitiŋ ˈriðm
ənˈdʒʌŋtʃə meiˈwiːkn ðiəˈsousi ˈeiʃn bitwiːnˈtraːnskript əndisˈtorikl
ˈspeliŋ bətitsˈveri ˈlaikli tuiŋˈkriːs əˈforin ˈləːnəz kəˈpasəti əvˈrekəg
ˈniʃn əvˈaktʃul ˈspiːtʃ ˈjuːnits əŋˈkonsikwəntli iŋˈkriːs izəˈbiləti
əvˈimiteitiŋ ðəpiˈkjuːljə ˈriðm əvˈiŋliʃ ˈspiːtʃ.

W. Jassem.

Indication of speech rhythm in the transcription of educated Southern English

A number of languages, Southern English among them, have been transcribed phonemically
and such a transcription, also called 'broad transcription', has the twofold advantage of both
showing the actual phonological structure of the language represented and being convenient
for the purpose of practical teaching. It seems however that, at least in the case of educated
Southern English, the current 'broad transcription' is, in one respect, inconsistent, namely, in
the way it employs spacing. In some cases a space is indicative of phonetic or phonological
differences. Thus *some addresses* ˈsʌm əˈdresiz and *summer dresses* ˈsʌmə ˈdresiz are different
phonetically (ʌ and **m** being longer and ə being shorter in the former collocation than in the
latter) and phonologically (the so-called juncture occurring in the first example between the
phonemes **m** and **ə**, and in the other between the phonemes **ə** and **d(r)**).

Comparing, however, the natural pronunciation of such pairs as *can form* and *conform*,
offence and *a fence*, *in tense* and *intense*, we find that the current transcription: **kən foːm**
and **kənfoːm** etc. appears to suggest differences that do not exist. *Can form* and *conform* are
phonetically identical and should also be considered phonologically identical.

Now, the spelled form: *an old English grammar* means: 'an old handbook of English
grammar' and: *an Old English grammar* means 'a grammar of Old English'. In a transcription
which employs stress-marks the difference in pronunciation can be shown thus: (1) **ən ˈould
ˈiŋgliʃ ˈgramə**, (2) **ən ˈould iŋgliʃ ˈgramə**. The lack of rhythmical stress on **iŋgliʃ** causes all
the syllables of the sequence **ˈould iŋgliʃ** to be shorter than in **ˈould ˈiŋgliʃ**. Similarly, the
unstressed syllables *are you* cause considerable shortening of the stressed syllable w*here* in
Where are you going? as compared with *But where?* It might appear that any unstressed
syllables shorten a preceding stressed one, whether in the same 'word' or not. But this is not
so. **aː** is shorter in *to harden steel* than in *hard and very heavy*. In fact one or more unstressed
syllables may or may not influence the length of a preceding stressed syllable. They do if they
belong to the same rhythmical unit; they do not if they belong to the following rhythmical
unit. In the sentence *I ˈheard a most peˈculiar ˈsound* (with high pitch on *heard*) there are

three unstressed syllables after *heard* and yet that syllable ˈ**hɔːd** is noticeably longer there than in the sentence *I heard him sing*, where it's only followed by one unstressed syllable. The rhythmical juncture occurs after *heard* in the former and after *him* in the latter case. The rhythmical junctures are (1) **ai ʲhɔːd | ə moust piˈkjuːliə | ˈsaund**, (2) **ai ai ʲhɔːd im | siŋ**. Such a transcription would be both scientifically strict and practical in the teaching of English to foreigners whose own language may be governed by different rules of speech rhythm. The learner has to realise that: (1) unstressed syllables preceding rhythmical stress within a unit (if there are any) must be pronounced as short as possible, (2) the amount of time taken for the utterance of each of those parts of rhythm units that come between stress and juncture is approximately the same throughout a passage pronounced at a certain speed, (3) there is a strong tendency for that amount of time to be equally divided between any number of syllables that may occur: between stress and juncture, so that the length of such syllables tends to be inversely proportional to their number.

It should be noticed that a transcription like the one I suggested is different from both that at one time advocated by Henry Sweet, who, in some of his primers, linked together anything that occurs between two stresses and that at a later date proposed by Harold Palmer, who was once in favour of linking all words together that occur within a breath-group.

A transcription using spacing for purposes of indicating rhythm and juncture may weaken the association between transcript and historical spelling but it's very likely to increase a foreign learner's capacity of recognition of actual speech units and consequently increase his ability of imitating the peculiar rhythm of English speech.

<div align="right">W. Jassem</div>