

**Book review:**

Lecumberri, M. Luisa Garcia & John A. Maidment. *English Transcription Course*. London: Arnold, 2000. 156pp. Paper.

*English Transcription Course* is a programmed series of lessons in representing spoken RP English in IPA symbols, for both phonetics and ESL students and teachers. What distinguishes this book is its emphasis on connected speech processes, rather than just citation forms, which is all that many ESL learners are taught. The book offers two basic methods of giving the student practice: by providing passages written in (1) regular orthography, for transcription into IPA; and (2) IPA transcription, for reading aloud.

Each chapter introduces the student to a different type of allophonic variation that speakers tend to be little aware of, such as sandhi *r*. The student must learn to “hear” these processes and then to incorporate them into increasingly narrow transcriptions of the practice passages. The processes are described by the titles of Chapters – or “Lessons” – Three through Eight: Stress, rhythm and weak forms (concentrates on reduced forms of function words [*and, there, can*]); Sandhi *r* (both regular linking *r* [*car of my own*] and intrusive *r* [*draw it*]); Consonant syllabicity (syllabic *n* [*listen*] and *l* [*little*]); Elision (alveolar plosive elision [*can't think*], schwa elision [*history*]); Assimilation ([*is she, red book, don't you*]); and Glottaling (replacement of *t* with a glottal stop [*not now*]). Lesson One introduces “Symbols and terminology”, Two gives “Transcription hints”, and Nine offers “Further practice”. There is also an introduction, an appendix with answers to all the exercises, a glossary, and a short bibliography of textbooks, workbooks and pronouncing dictionaries.

Anyone who has assembled a book like this knows about the difficulty of finding suitable practice texts, mainly due to copyright restrictions. The authors solved this by writing all of their own material, a formidable task. They sidestepped a weakness of many practice books, i.e. insipid texts, by producing passages with interesting content, a necessity in maintaining student motivation. Although students can easily find texts on their own for transcription, and the authors encourage this, the key is getting help with transcriptions, which is where these self-produced texts with answer keys come in. They include personal anecdotes, descriptions of nature and places, and some surprisingly successful examples of creative writing, e.g. science fiction and household drama. Below follows an excerpt (p. 51) from an anecdote about a group of Italians on a train who were puzzling over the author's IPA transcription work:

...the man said, ‘It’s him! He’s doing it again! I wonder what that funny lettering is.’ They all collected around me, peering over my shoulder.’ I couldn’t resist the challenge. When I got off the train, I said in Italian, ‘I hope you all have a pleasant day.’ I wish I had had a camera to take a picture of the expressions on their faces.

One drawback is that the content is mostly narrative in nature, a story told by a single person, though there is one dialogue towards the end of the book. More examples of interactive speech, typical of what one would work with, for example, in discourse analysis, would be welcome.

The most difficult transcriptions to read with understanding (by this native speaker of US English) are those in Lesson Seven, Assimilation. This lesson contains some very valuable information on, for example, assimilation of /t/ as in ‘next summer’ [ˈnɛks ˈsʌmə]. In some of these cases, the sound may in fact just be masked auditorily even though the speaker may have their articulators in place for it; it might be useful to point this out in the text.

The absence of one allophonic process puzzles me – the pronunciation of /dj-/, /tj-/, /dr-/, and /tr-/ initials as in *due*, *tube*, *drink*, and *train* as [dʒj], [tʃj], [dʒ], and [tʃ]. There is not a single mention of this in the book and no evidence of it in the transcriptions. Colloquial RP would sound rather odd without this allophonic process, and perhaps the authors may consider including it in a future edition. On the other hand, maybe they felt the need to focus on a small number of processes and teach them thoroughly rather than overwhelm the reader.

Another area that could perhaps be addressed in a future edition is the linking of final consonants to initial vowels in the following syllable. This is something many foreigners (particularly in the Far East) are not taught; instead they tend to begin every vowel-initial word or syllable with a glottal stop, making their speech sound choppy and halting. This kind of linking is also something native speakers are not necessarily very aware of.

A trivial quirk to get used to: this book uses the symbol [e] for the sound that is usually rendered [ɛ]. Personally I would prefer the standard IPA [ɛ] usage, but this is not a big issue.

Another relatively minor point: perhaps || could be used as a symbol for a longer pause rather than |. The need for this was noticed when reading transcribed texts aloud – the biggest problems to understanding were ones of prosody and rhythm. The || would have cleared some of these problems up; e.g. [ | aɪ 'flʌŋkt 'aʊt ɪn maɪ 'fɜːst 'jɪə | aɪ 'dəʊn nəʊ waɪ | ] (p. 60) And if the authors are interested in a new, related project, perhaps they could consider producing a second volume that addresses intonation and prosody issues.

It is surprising that there apparently is no accompanying cassette tape or CD with this book. This would be of tremendous value particularly for instructors and students outside the UK, including those both in English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries.

This book will be useful and instructive to teachers and students learning to transcribe any dialect of English, though it is obviously most suited to those working in RP. The authors suggest (p. 3) two other books for those teaching standard US English. Perhaps it would be useful to suggest books for other varieties of English, such as Canadian, South African, Australian, and even other UK dialects, if such books do indeed exist.

This review has in part ended up as a long list of suggestions. Perhaps it is because this book is basically so good and so useful to those involved in teaching and practicing phonetics that it is easy to get carried away with one's personal wish list. But this is a really well-thought out, well-designed, and meticulously produced volume. Phonetics and ESL instructors who are serious about cultivating in their students good pronunciation and clear, solid concepts of what that entails would do well to take a close look at this book.

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