

TYPICAL PRONUNCIATION CHARACTERISTICS OF NATIVE FRENCH SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

Contrastive Phonology: English and French



1. Transcription: Daniel Jones vs Jean-Paul Gaultier

	< Madonna [...] ! Whatever she wears, she is always herself. >	
Daniel Jones (2003):	[	]
Jean-Paul Gaultier:	[	]
	< Truly, she knows what she does. >	
Daniel Jones (2003):	[	]
Jean-Paul Gaultier:	[	]



2. Zula Test Text

When the doorbell rang, poor old Aunt Judith had been sitting in her comfortable armchair for hours, knitting a new pullover for her dog Rusty. He was lying in front of her on his dog bed, gnawing an enormous bone for breakfast. Suddenly, Rusty started to bark. After signalling to Rusty to get up, Aunt Judith put down her unfinished knitting and two balls of wool, walked towards the door, and opened it.

It was the postman. He gave her a huge package. It was from Japan! A present? Judith didn't know she had any Japanese acquaintances. She didn't know any foreigners! From whom could it be? The address was incorrect, too – a road unknown to her. But Judith Washington was curious by nature, so she took the parcel and opened it, back in her flat.

She presented the contents to Rusty. They were most mysterious: a teddy bear with a piercing, a whistle, a fire extinguisher, a prayer book, a woolly hat, an apple pie, thirteen pieces of chalk and a blackboard, a comb, a silk dress made in France, Italian wine, two tins filled with “magic pudding”, three mouse-traps, a golden credit card, a CD from some singer, a model ship, a well-thumbed book on psychology, a baby sheep, another animal Judith and Rusty did not know, a champagne bucket and a big pork sausage.

Naturally, it was especially the sausage that made the dog's mouth water. “Not too bad after all”, Rusty mouthed. “Shall we have a little party?” Judith asked. And the two started preparing what promised to be the best party they'd had in months. (Heim 2006: 160)

More French English: www.thomasheim.de/zula.

3. The English and French vowel systems

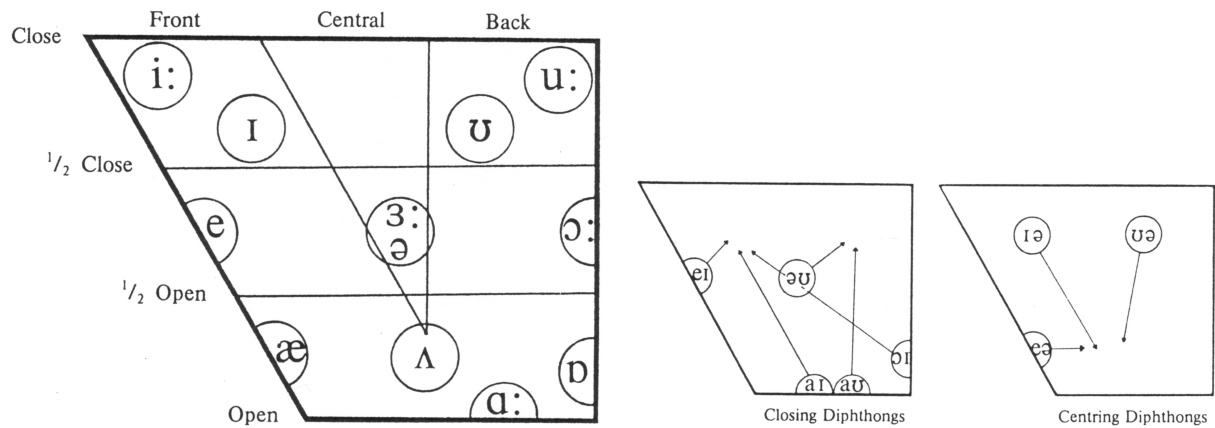


Fig 1: English RP monophthongs (left) and diphthongs (right) (cf Sauer 1990: 16).

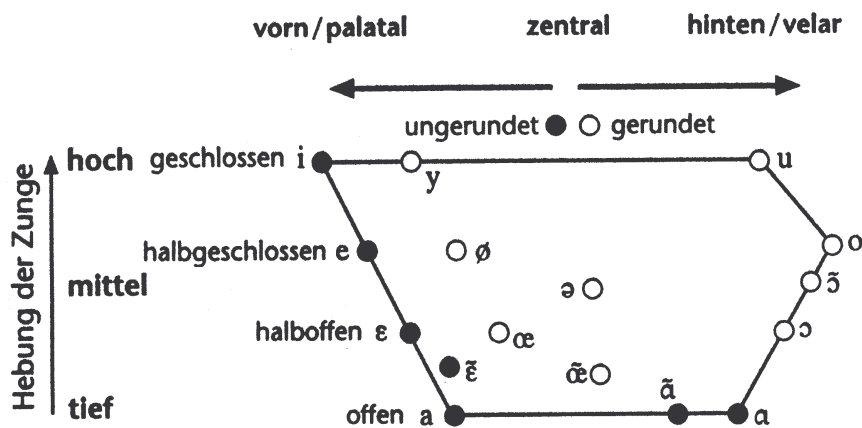


Fig 2: French vowel chart (maximal system); Meisenburg/Selig (1998: 60).

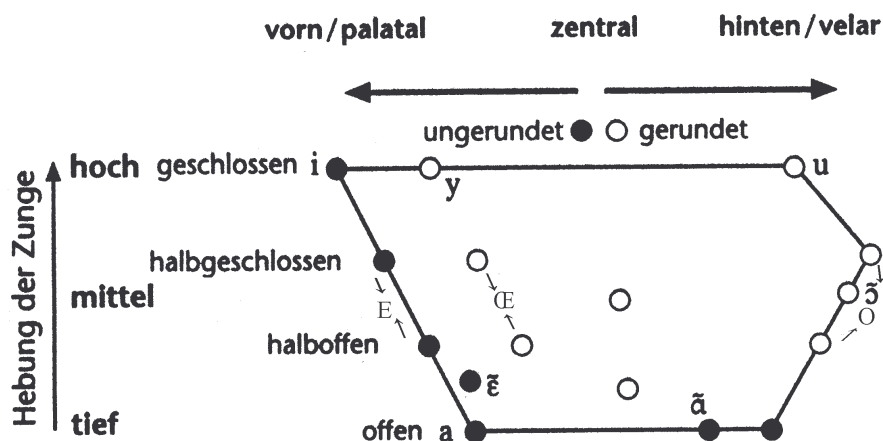


Fig 3: French vowel chart: minimal system with the archiphonemes¹ /E/, /œ/ und /O/; Meisenburg/Selig (1998: 60) adapted.

“English” vowels missing in French:

“French” vowels missing in English:

¹ Archiphoneme /ɑ̃ki:fəʊni:m/: phonological unit expressing the common features of two or more phonemes which are involved in a neutralisation (= suspended contrast).

4. The English and French consonantal systems

	MANNER OF ARTICULATION							
PLACE OF ARTICULATION	semivowel	fricative		nasal	lateral	vibrant	stop	
	voiced	voiced	voiceless	voiced	voiced	voiced	voiced	voiceless
bilabial	w			m	-		b	p
labiodental		v	f		-			
dental		ð	θ					
apicodental		z	s	n	l, [ɫ]		d	t, [t̚]
alveolar		ʒ	ʃ					
		affricates						
		dʒ	tʃ					
postalveolar		r (RP [ɹ], GA [ɹ̥])						
		[ɹ]	[ɹ̥]					
palatal	j			ŋ		-	g	k
velar								
uvular								
glottal			h					

Fig 4: The English consonantal system.

PLACE OF ARTICULATION	MANNER OF ARTICULATION							
	semivowel	fricative		nasal	lateral	vibrant	stop	
	voiced	voiced	voiceless	voiced	voiced	voiced	voiced	voiceless
bilabial	w			m	-		b	p
labiodental		v	f		-			
apicodental		z	s	n	l		d	t
alveolar		ʒ	ʃ					
prepalatal	j			ɲ				
labiopalatal	ɥ							
velar				ŋ		-	g	k
uvular		ʁ						

Fig 5: The French consonantal system.

“English” consonant phonemes missing in French:

“French” consonant phonemes missing in English:

5. Typical pronunciation characteristics of French E2 (cf Heim 2006: 77-94; 105-107)

A. Vowels

- **Substitution** of missing target phonemes
 - i. **Monophthongs**
 - Engl. /ɪ/ > Fr. /i/
 - Engl. /æ/ (and also Engl. /e/) > Fr. /ɛ/
 - Engl. /æ/ > Fr. /a/ and /e/
 - Engl. /ɑ:/ and /ɒ/ > Fr. /a/
 - Engl. /ʊ/ > Fr. /u/
 - Engl. /u/ > Fr. /y/
 - Engl. /ʌ/ > Fr. /a/, /œ/, /u/ or also Engl. /ʊ/
 - Engl. /ɜ:/ > Fr. /œ/ or /ø/
 - Engl. /ə/ > Fr. /œ/, /ø/ or also /ɛ/ or /i/
 - ii. **Diphthongs**
 - Engl. /ɪ/ > /j/, Engl. /ʊ/ > /w/ or
 - Monophthongisation
- **Non-articulation of weak forms; Non-differentiation weak / strong forms**
- **Nasalisation** (rare)
- **Hypercorrections** (epenthetic² *h* etc.), also with consonants (/s/ > [θ] etc.)

B. Consonants

- **Substitution** of missing target phonemes
 - Engl. /θ/ or /ð/ > Fr. /s/ or /z/ or Fr. /d/ or /t/
 - Engl. /r/ [ɹ/ɹ̥] > Fr. /ʁ/ [ʁ/ʀ]
 - Engl. /tʃ/ > /ʃ/ or Engl. /dʒ/ > /ʒ/
 - Engl. /w/ > Fr. /v/
- **Desonorisation**
 - /z/ > [z̥] or /s/
 - /d/ > /t/
 - /v/ > /f/
 - /ʒ/ > /ʃ/
 - /g/ > /k/
- **Sonorisation**
 - /t/ > [t̪]
 - /p/ > /b/
 - /s/ > [s̪] or /z/
- **Elision of /h/**
- **Non-differentiation of [l] and [ɫ]**
- **Difference in articulation of /t/ and /d/:** French dental, English alveolar (cf Ginésy 2000: 18, Yavaş 2006: 188)
- **Production of geminates** (doubled consonant; rare; cf Ginésy 2000: 19)
- **Non-aspiration of aspirated voiceless stops:** [p^h] > [p], [t^h] > [t], [k^h] > [k] (reduced VOT³)

Detailed analysis of 25 native French E2-speakers: www.thomasheim.de/zula.

² *Epenthetic* /epənˈθetɪk/; *epenthesis* /ɪˈpənθəˌsɪs/: insertion of a segment internally in a word; contrary: *elision* (deletion of a sound).

³ *VOT* (voice onset time): The period of time from the burst of a plosive to the onset of vocal fold vibration.

C. Brief Overview: Prosody in French E2 (suprasegmentals)

- Oxytone lexical stress (on last syllable)
 - Elision or reorganisation of secondary stress; disregard of English rules of sentence stress
 - Syllables of the same length with unchanged pitch (sometimes staccato-rhythm); French: (?) syllable-timed (syllables have equal duration); English: (?) stress-timed (syllables occur at equal intervals in time)
 - Reduced melodic variation of pitch amplitude
 - Step-like rather than gliding intonation with intervocalic pitch variation
 - Ascending contours instead of descending contours
- [...]

(For a detailed analysis cf Heim 2006: 47-69, 92 ff and Herry 2001.)

Interference does not only happen on the segmental level but also on the suprasegmental level. Prosodic features of L1 are very likely to be transferred to L2 prosody and very difficult to suppress. Unfortunately, however, **the role of L2 prosody in foreign language learning is often overlooked.** The mastery of an L2-like prosody may be difficult to teach, from a pedagogical viewpoint, sometimes because teachers themselves are not really aware of their prosodic systems, sometimes because teachers do not have the appropriate teaching materials or technical equipment at hand. But just as poor pronunciation can make a foreign language learner very difficult to understand, poor prosodic skills can have an equally devastating effect on communication and can make conversation frustrating and unpleasant for both learners and their listeners.

Bibliography

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