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## Phonetic Notation Systems in *Macmillan English Dictionary*

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### 1. Introduction

One of the major innovations by *Macmillan English Dictionary* is the creation of two editions targeting two separate audiences: learners of British English and those of American English. (The British and American editions are hereafter referred to as *MED-B* and *MED-A* respectively.) Based on the same database, the content in each edition has been tailored in such a way as to best meet the needs of the learners of respective varieties, so that "a user of either edition will know that the dictionary was specially written for her or him" (p. x). Accordingly, each edition follows the convention of the variety, such as in the styles of spelling and punctuation. Also, example sentences for an identical entry word may differ between the two when the editors find it necessary. This attitude is basically no different in the treatment of pronunciation.

A two-page pronunciation guide at the end of the volume has a list of vowel and consonant symbols "based on the International Phonetic Alphabet" (*MED-B*: p. 1692; *MED-A*: p. 1658). This is followed by succinct explanations on stress, alternative pronunciations, weak forms and strong forms, syllabic consonants, the symbol /ə/, and nasalized vowels.

Comparison of the vowel symbols listed in the two editions reveals a regrettable shortcoming, its unique enterprise notwithstanding. Great care is necessary in selecting vowel symbols for an English biletal dictionary, or rather, "twin dictionaries" in this case, since the number of vowels in English is quite large even within one variety and can be difficult for the users to fully comprehend, and moreover, dialectal variations notable in

vowels manifest complicated phonemic distribution as well as various phonetic realizations (Weinreich 1954; Wells 1982). Unfortunately, the problem in the current two editions of *MED* extends to both phases, namely:

- (1) vowel phoneme symbols in *MED-A* that are not user-friendly
- (2) possible confusion to the learners who refer to both *MED-B* and *MED-A* for comparison of British and American English vowels

This twofold problem appears to have been caused by different editing policies of the two editions.

## 2. Vowel Symbols in *MED-A*

The Table below shows the keywords used in *MED* in the leftmost column, followed by the vowel phonemic symbols in *MED-B* and *MED-A* respectively, then those used in *EPD*<sup>16</sup> and *LPD*<sup>2</sup>, two of the most accepted pronunciation dictionaries, and lastly *ODP*, whose vowel sets are referred to in the discussion in Section 3.

A conspicuous difference between the vowel set of *MED-A* and all the others in *MED-B*, *EPD*<sup>16</sup>, and *LPD*<sup>2</sup>, is the lack or use of length mark for the "long vowels": *MED-A* have symbols without length mark, thus **fit** and **feet** are /fit/, /fit/ respectively, whereas the same words are represented as /fɪt/ and /fi:t/ in the other notation systems. This lack of length mark in the former system is less favorable than the others, for the following reasons.

It is true that the former use of /ɪ/ and /i/ without a length mark may be sufficient in terms of phonological analysis, and is quite common in the United States since *PDAE*. Symbols *with* length marks are more user-friendly, however. Redundant as it may be, the use of length marks greatly helps nonnative learners distinguish the two sounds in question, especially when the relative length plays an important role in their mother tongue as in Japanese (Takebayashi 1978; Takahashi et al. 1992; Ichikawa et al. 1996).

It must be also noted that the use of length mark, along with different symbols to represent qualitative difference, was first found in Gimson's

Table The vowel symbols in *MED*, *EPD*<sup>16</sup>, *LPD*<sup>2</sup>, and *ODP*.

keywords in <i>MED</i>	<i>MED</i>		<i>EPD</i> <sup>16</sup>		<i>LPD</i> <sup>2</sup>		<i>ODP</i>	
	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A
<u>bit</u>	ɪ	ɪ	ɪ	ɪ	ɪ	ɪ	ɪ	ɪ
<u>bed</u>	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e
<u>bad</u>	æ	æ	æ	æ	æ	æ	a	æ
<u>hot</u>	ɒ	ɑ	ɒ	ɑ:	ɒ	ɑ:	ɒ	ɑ
<u>cut</u>	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	ə
<u>book</u>	ʊ	ʊ	ʊ	ʊ	ʊ	ʊ	ʊ	ʊ
<u>about</u>	ə	ə	ə	ə	ə	ə	ə	ə
<u>pretty</u>	i	i	i	i	i	i	i	i
<u>annual</u>	u	u	u	u	u	u	u	ə(w)
<u>bee</u>	i:	i	i:	i:	i:	i:	i:	i
<u>father</u>	ɑ:	ɑ	ɑ:	ɑ:	ɑ:	ɑ:	ɑ:	ɑ
<u>caught</u>	ɔ:	ɔ	ɔ:	ɔ:	ɔ:	ɔ:	ɔ:	ɔ
<u>boot</u>	u:	u	u:	u:	u:	u:	u:	u
<u>bird</u>	ɜ:	ɜr	ɜ:	ɜ:	ɜ:	ɜ:	ɜ:	ɜr
<u>bay</u>	eɪ	eɪ	eɪ	eɪ	eɪ	eɪ	eɪ	eɪ
<u>buy</u>	aɪ	aɪ	aɪ	aɪ	aɪ	aɪ	aɪ	aɪ
<u>boy</u>	ɔɪ	ɔɪ	ɔɪ	ɔɪ	ɔɪ	ɔɪ	ɔɪ	ɔɪ
<u>go</u>	əʊ	oʊ	əʊ	oʊ	əʊ	oʊ	əʊ	oʊ
<u>now</u>	aʊ	aʊ	aʊ	aʊ	aʊ	aʊ	aʊ	aʊ
<u>poor</u> <sup>1)</sup>	ʊə	ʊr	ʊə	ʊr	ʊə	ʊ <sup>h</sup> r	ʊə	ʊ(ə)r
<u>hair</u>	eə	er	eə	er	eə	e <sup>h</sup> r	ɛ:	ɛ(ə)r
<u>hear</u>	ɪə	ɪr	ɪə	ɪr	ɪə	ɪ <sup>h</sup> r	ɪə	ɪ(ə)r

*EPD*<sup>14</sup> (1977), and is quite common in English-Japanese dictionaries that junior/senior high school students in Japan purchase. It is very unlikely that the advanced users, who look for an English-English dictionary for better understanding the language, will pick up one without length marks.

Adopting symbols without length mark as in *MED-A* may yet cause another problem to some naïve learners: clear distinction cannot be made between /i u/ with strong stress and those represented by the same symbols but carry weak stress, unless the users refer to the existence of

stress mark. It is too much of a requirement for users to understand and pronounce appropriately the two types of /i/ as in **cheesy** /'tʃi:zi/ and **treaty** /'tri:ti/, or /u/ as in **usual** /'ju:ʒuəl/, when many of them are overwhelmed even by the number of vowels.

A quick and easy solution is to adopt the system used in *MED-B* (and the other two dictionaries), that is, to use /i:/ and /u:/ for strong vowels. *MED-B*'s **cheesy** /'tʃi:zi/, **treaty** /'tri:ti/, and **usual** /'ju:ʒuəl/ are much easier to follow, and the description is in accordance with the phonetic fact that vowels with strong stress are longer than those with weak stress.

In fact, the symbols in *MED-B* are more feasible in showing the status of the two types of vowels: the existence/absence of length mark corresponds to the existence/absence of strong stress (Takebayashi 1998):

	<i>MED-B</i>	<i>MED-A</i>
strong vowels:	/i:/, /u:/, /ɜ:/	/i/, /u/, /ɜr/
weak vowels:	/i/, /u/, /ə/	/i/, /u/, /ər/

### 3. Symbols for *MED-A* and *MED-B* as twin dictionaries

The lack of length mark on the part of *MED-A* can lead to a misunderstanding that is even more serious. Ambitious learners, who wish to search for similarities and differences of the two varieties of English, may refer to both editions and compare the description. Finding /bu:t/ for **boot** in *MED-B* and /but/ in *MED-A*, or /lɔ:/ for **law** in the former and /lɒ/ in the latter, the nonnative learners may take this for a significant length difference in the two varieties.

Phonetic transcription of a "diasystem" (Weinreich 1954) is not easy, since the two varieties must be recorded in such a way that the phonetic facts are respected and yet a clear phonemic distribution in the two varieties is maintained as much as possible. Use of different symbols /əʊ | oʊ/ (hereafter, in the order of British | American pronunciation) for **go** to indicate noticeable vowel quality difference, a convention in many bilingual dictionaries, would not hurt the understanding of the users. However, employing /i: | i/ for **feet**, /ɑ | æ/ for **bad**, /ʌ | ə/ for **cut**, and /aɪ | aɪ/ for **buy**, as in *ODP* (see the list in Table above), only leaves the

nonnative users with question marks, no matter how systematic the symbols may be within one variety and how accurate they may be phonetically. By the same line of argument, *MED*'s use of /u: | u/ and /ɜ: | ɔ/ is quite misleading. The editors of *MED* may as well keep this possibility in mind, and it is strongly expected that the future edition extends its scope to those who refer to both American and British editions.

For better understanding of the complicated vowel distribution in the two varieties, especially for readers without intuition native speakers possess, the pronunciation guide could be improved even more by adding a few keywords in the list.

<i>MED-B</i> :	ɒ hot	<i>MED-A</i> :	æ bad, ask
	æ bad		ɑ father, hot
	ɑ: father, ask		

An addition of *hot* as a keyword would help learners understand that what are considered distinctive vowels as /ɑ:/ and /ɒ/ in British English have been merged to be considered identical as /ɑ/ (better yet, /ɑ:/) in American English. In British English, the so-called "ask-words" (Kenyon 1951: 179–184) whose distribution is complicated yet important for advanced learners would be suggested by adding *ask* in the list.

### 4. Pronunciation of abbreviated forms

One merit of *MED* is its detailed description on how abbreviated forms and acronyms should be pronounced. **ACT** /,eɪ si: 'ti: | ,eɪ si 'ti/ and **ADD** /,eɪ di: 'di: | ,eɪ di 'di/, for example, might be erroneously pronounced /ækt/ and /æd/ by nonnative learners without the pronunciation. Readers will find *MED* quite useful to see a number of unfamiliar acronyms with the information on how they should be pronounced, e.g. **ASIO** /'eɪziəʊ | 'eɪzi,oʊ/, **ASIS** /'eɪsɪs/, that are not shown even in *EPD*<sup>16</sup> and *LPD*<sup>2</sup>.

### 5. Stress

Stress marks (primary stress (ˈ) and secondary stress (ˌ)) are used to show the stress patterns of the compound entries, as well as phrasal verbs. Secondary stress is usually applied in both cases when it precedes and

follows a primary stress. Some difference is observed in the two editions when the secondary stress follows right after the primary stress:

<i>MED-B</i> : ' _____, <i>MED-A</i> : ' _____	<b>ally, context, program, comment, female</b>
<i>MED-B</i> : ' _____, <i>MED-A</i> : ' _____	<b>pillow, veto, follow, window</b> (when the second syllable contains a vowel /əʊ  ou/)

This rightly reflects the difference in stress pattern between British and American English.<sup>10)</sup>

When it comes to the notation of the second stress immediately before the primary stress, however, there is some inconsistency in description both within and between the varieties:

<i>MED-B</i> : _____', <i>MED-A</i> : _____'	<b>bamboo, champagne</b>
<i>MED-B</i> : _____', <i>MED-A</i> : _____'	<b>unpaid, fourteen, fifteen</b>
<i>MED-B</i> : _____', <i>MED-A</i> : _____'	<b>unsure, unlit</b>
<i>MED-B</i> : _____', <i>MED-A</i> : _____'	<b>Chinese, thirteen, sixteen</b>

Marking the second stress before the primary stress provides the learners with important information of possible stress shift, and consistent description is asked for. No information on the phenomenon is available in the current edition.

Likewise, without any account of stress shift, the already shifted forms are recorded for phrase entries: **Chinese** /tʃaɪˈniːz/, **Chinese** 'cabbage, **Chinese** 'checkers, **Chinese** 'lantern; **elementary** /eləˈment(ə)ri/, **elementary** 'particle. For pedagogical purposes, several lines could be spared in the pronunciation guide.

## 6. British and American Pronunciations

“Language Awareness” pages inserted in the middle of the body has a section titled “British and American English,” in which the differences of the two varieties are reviewed in terms of pronunciation as well.

In the main body both pronunciations are given only when the pronunciation of one variety is “so different” from that of the other variety “that

they might not be understood correctly” (pronunciation guide). Yet it is not clear what is meant by “so different.” Moreover, the description is not consistent in the two editions. Both *MED-B* and *MED-A* contain British and American pronunciations for **laboratory** (*MED-B*: /ləˈbɒrət(ə)ri; *AmE* ˈlæbrəˌtɔːri; *MED-A*: /ˈlæbrətɔːri; *BrE* ləˈbɒrət(ə)ri/), but it is not so for **lieutenant** (*MED-B*: /lefˈtenənt; *AmE* luˈtenənt/; *MED-A*: /luˈtenənt/) and **vase** (*MED-B*: /ˈvaɪz; *AmE* ˈveɪz; *MED-A*: /veɪs; veɪs<sup>(10)</sup>). **Hostile** has either British or American pronunciation (*MED-B*: /ˈhɒstəl/; *MED-A*: /ˈhɒstl/), while **missile** has both pronunciations, divided by a semicolon (*MED-B*: /ˈmɪsaɪl; ˈmɪsl/; *MED-A*: /ˈmɪsl; ˈmɪsaɪl/). It is not clear what the role of a semicolon is here when /ˈmɪsaɪl/ and /ˈmɪsl/ are given as an example of noticeable dialectal differences between British and American English in the “Language Awareness” (*MED-B*: LA18, *MED-A*: LA20). Furthermore, **garage** (*MED-B*: /ˈgærɑːʒ; ˈgærɪdʒ/; *MED-A*: /gəˈrɑːʒ; gəˈrɑːdʒ/), **debris** (*MED-B*: /ˈdebrɪː; ˈdeɪbrɪː/; *MED-A*: /deˈbrɪ/), and **schedule** (*MED-B*: /ˈʃedjuːl/; *MED-A*: /ˈskeˌdʒul; ˈskedʒəl/), whose British and American pronunciations are likely to sound “very different” to the ear of nonnative listeners, do not have their counterparts recorded.

## 7. CD-ROM

By clicking a loudspeaker icon, every headword is pronounced both in British and American English. This is surely helpful to the learners for letting them have easy access to actual sounds. The speakers consist of both males and females. Pronunciation practice is available, too, with which users are able to record their own pronunciation and compare it with the model.

Some discrepancy is found in the stress pattern and the recorded pronunciation. *MED-B*: **lemon**'ade and *MED-A*: **lemon**ade, for instance, are pronounced with primary stress on the first syllable by both British and American speakers. The same kind of discrepancy is also found in **labo(u)r mobility** and **loudspeaker**. In the case of **ice cream**, which is recorded in the book as *MED-B*: **ice**'cream and *MED-A*: **ice**cream, the phrase is shown as **ice**'cream in the CD-ROM version for both varieties, and is pronounced as such both by British and Ameri-

can speakers.

## 8. Conclusion

*MED-B* and *MED-A*, based on the same database, but published in separate volumes to represent two distinct varieties of English, leave much room for improvement in their adoption of vowel symbols. The attitude that the two varieties stem from one system appears to be more or less desirable for this type of dictionaries, and for this reason bilocal transcriptions are expected.

To this end, employment of length marks for *MED-A* would not only make the transcriptions more accessible to the Japanese learners who are used to such notations, but promote users' comprehension of the phonetic and phonemic distributions of the sounds in the two varieties.

Assignment of stress is overall adequate, although some discrepancy is found when *MED-B* and *MED-A* are compared. A few lines that explain "stress shift" in the future edition will highly benefit English learners.

As for the recording of pronunciation variants in the counterpart variety that are "so different," inconsistency is found when the two editions are compared. This may be due to the policy differences of the editors in the two editions.

Inconsistency is also observed between the transcriptions in the book and the actual sounds in the CD-ROM. Some revisions will be necessary for the future edition.

## NOTES

i) A more appropriate keyword should take the place of **poor** /ʊə/ in *MED-B*: The current edition's **poor** is recorded as /pɔ:/ in the main body. Words like **tour** would be better.

ii) It must be added, however, that the status of the secondary stress is different depending on the position it appears: the syllable that carries secondary stress *before* the primary stress has a possibility of becoming a tonic, while *after* the primary stress it does not. The current notation system does not allow users to distinguish these two. One solution to this problem may be to adopt a different notation symbol for the "tertiary" stress, as was done in *LPD*<sup>1</sup>.

iii) This must be a typo for either /veɪz; veɪs/ or /veɪs; veɪz/.

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