

David Jolly

ENGLISH NOISES

It is genuinely disturbing to find foreign noises such as »joj« and »ovaj« in the continuous speech or conversation of a foreign speaker of English who otherwise speaks the language fairly fluently. While nobody these days insists on or even wants perfect sound reproduction from a foreign language learner, I would suggest that it is necessary to produce more or less accurate foreign noises. Noises are not simply ancillary to the language, but are essential to communicative competence; such noises may have both continuity and attitudinal functions. Since these noises occur rather frequently in English, the foreign learner of English ought to be aware of the meanings of them for adequate social performance — to fit in, and more essentially, to avoid causing social misunderstanding. The Yugoslav who says »eh« with a short low fall (intending to convey interest) is likely to be regarded as somewhat curt.

The written forms of English noises vary considerably and are rather misleading as to sound production. Dictionaries nor writers are consistent. Thus in the list below I shall offer a rough phonemic transcription and intonation markings. However I would point out that successful production of English noises depends upon more meticulous intonation, and attention to vowel-length than I can indicate. Equally important is voice-colour.

Thus it follows that such a list is not intended to be offered »neat« to students. Teachers should aim to include all these noises in their own speech and gradually to push them into the language of their students whenever the occasion arises. Such are the phonological properties of the noises that they can only really be taught by a teacher who has the noises regularly in her own speech. I suggest that the noises should be taught »naturally«. If the teacher hears an un-English noise from a student, it should be corrected immediately — hesitation, approval, surprise noises can be pushed in this way. However it is also profitable and amusing to spend the odd five minutes every so often on the practice of a couple of the slightly less common noises.

Social meaning and variation of social meaning should be made clear by relating meanings to phonetic, intonational, and »colour« features. In the list below I include general meaning, phonemic form, intonational features, written form, and a contextualised example of each noise. The phonemic and intonational information is bound to be imprecise — noise vary

enormously from speaker to speaker — but I trust that the list will be of some use as a general summary of the most important English¹ noises. I have divided the list somewhat arbitrarily into two sections: a) continuity noises (non-tonal) and b) attitudinal noises (tonal).

a) continuity noises

Meaning	Phonemic ² form	Intonation	Written form	Illustration
to express hesitation	ə:, ʌ:, ə:m, əm, (h)əm		er..er.. h'm..h'm hum/hem	»Could you h'm.. come a bit.. er.. earlier tomorrow«
to express continuing interest a query	əu	low rise	oh?	»Mick rang« »oh?« »Yes, he's going after all.«
to express acknowledgement of a statement	əu	low fall	oh.	»..Yes, he's going after all.« »Oh.«
to express puzzlement	ə: ei	low or high rise	eh?	...and cybernetic theory.« »Eh? What's that?« What?.. cybernetics?«
to attract discreet attention	pst	low fall	pst!	»pst! give me your comic.. old Skinny's not looking.«
to attract attention aloud or from a distance	hei	high fall	hey!	»Hey! Jan, where are you off to?«
to give a warning	ɔi		oy!	»Oy! watch out, you'll knock the table over!«
to demand silence »Quiet!«	ʃ		sh!	»Here comes the conductor.. sh! you kids.. the music's just starting.«
to express comprehension »I understand« »that's clear« »go on, I'm following«	ha əhəm m ʌhʌ əhə	low fall low rise low rise	ha! uh-hm uh-uh	»and disappeared.. (ha!) and has never been seen since.. (uh-uh).. least not as I know (uh-hm).«

¹ By »English noises« I mean British English noises. American English noises, although similar, will have to be dealt with by an American.

² I use the phonemic system found in A. C. Gimson »An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English«.

b) attitudinal noises

Meaning	Phonemic form	Intonation	Written form	Illustration
to express pleasant surprise amazement satisfaction	a:	high fall	ah!	»Ah! she's a lovely kid, isn't she?«
	a:	rise-fall	ah!	»Here comes Blair...«
	əhə:, əhʌ: əha:	rise-fall	aha!	»... Blair, ah! now we'll see something!«
	əu	high fall	oh!	»Aha! I knew there was something fantastic for pudding!«
	wau	low fall	wow!	»Oh! So you've come after all — how nice!«
	wau	rise-fall	wow!	»He said the whole job had taken him ten hours.« »Wow! that's a whole day.« Wow! now she's a pretty lass!«
to express unpleasant surprise	əu	low fall	oh!	»The miners are on strike.« »Oh! they would, wouldn't they!«
to express disgust especially at strong smells	uh, ə:h, ə:x	low fall	ugh!	»Ugh! the flat's in awful mess.«
	pu:	high fall	pooh!	»Jim, where did you get these eggs — pooh! they must be bad.«
to express aggression irritation superiority	ə, ei	low or	eh?	»So just what are you going to do now, eh? Mister Clever Dick.«
to express disapproval	t...t	high rise	tut-tut...	»Tut-tut, Joe, you left your missus all alone again to-night?«
to express mild pain	autʃ	high fall	ouch!	»Ouch!... Mummy, Bobby pinched me!«
	au	high fall	ow!	»Ow!... that plate's hot — I've burnt my hand.«

I should point out that all attitudinal noises can function ironically or whimsically. I have excluded noises which indicate acute distress since they are not part of social intercourse, and one expects people to express acute distress in the most sincere medium they have, their own language.

I have also excluded other noises for which there are commonly accepted written forms and meanings but no commonly accepted (or teachable) phonemic forms, or which are very infrequent or archaic or obsolete. These include,

bah! faugh! grr! (anger)
brr (it's cold) phew! (it's hot)
ha ha, he he (laughter) etc.

Finally I have excluded common variants of »yes« and »no«, and also the noises that accompany greetings and leave-takings on the grounds that they must be sufficiently well-known already.

H. Vujadinović

LA PRONONCIATION DE LA VOYELLE - Y -

(Une grande difficulté pour nos débutants)

Aujourd'hui on est sûr que l'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère ne peut pas se faire sans l'apprentissage de sa prononciation correcte. Cela est prouvé par le fait que beaucoup de nos professeurs de français, malgré une connaissance parfaite de la morphologie et de la syntaxe du français, n'arrivent pas à communiquer. Très souvent, il nous arrive aussi de constater que aussi les Français comprennent avec difficulté nos élèves, et que ces derniers ne peuvent pas les comprendre non plus.

La plupart de nos professeurs pensent que les élèves peuvent arriver à bien prononcer en apprenant les règles de la prononciation. Ils expliquent aux élèves où il faut placer exactement la langue, comment arrondir ou ne pas arrondir les lèvres, ouvrir ou fermer la bouche pour bien prononcer une voyelle ou une consonne. Si cette gymnastique articulatoire ne donne pas les résultats escomptés on recommence en utilisant les exercices de prononciation de paires comme: sur — sir, dur — dire, pont — pot... Après beaucoup d'exercices les élèves arrivent à prononcer, tant bien que mal, ce qu'on exige d'eux.

Il faut dire que chez nous, les élèves commencent à étudier la langue étrangère en cinquième année, à douze ans. A cet âge les élèves sont déjà habitués à mémoriser les règles et à les appliquer. Mais l'année passée, on a introduit le français en première année, où les élèves ont sept ans. On s'est aperçu très vite que les règles de prononciation correcte, de même que la gymnastique articulatoire, étaient inopérantes. Les enfants refusaient les règles, tandis que la gymnastique articulatoire les faisait rire. Aussi, on a vu qu'il était faux de croire que l'acquisition des sons, pris isolément, rende possible une prononciation correcte.