

Stressed schwa in English

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the “short” vowels of (British) English

	Sweet 1900	Jones 1918	Gimson 1962	Lindsey 2012
KIT	i	i	ɪ	ɪ
DRESS	e	e	e	ɛ
TRAP	æ	æ	æ	ɑ
STRUT	e	ʌ	ʌ	ɚ
COMMA	ə	ə	ə	ɚ
LOT	ɒ	ɔ	ɒ	ɔ
FOOT	u	u	ʊ	ʊ

Jones

“I clearly **feel** ə and ʌ to belong to two separate phonemes in my type of English, but I am **unable to find proof** by a pair of words differing solely by an exchange of one of these sounds for the other” (1967:40, §148, emphasis mine)

STRUT–schwa contrasts

Jones

hiccup 'hɪkʌp	syrup 'sɪrəp
humdrum 'hʌmdrʌm	conundrum kə'nʌndrəm
catapult 'kætəpʌlt	difficult 'dɪfɪkəlt

Kenyon & Knott

'hɪkʌp, 'hɪkəp	'sɪrəp, 'sɜːəp, 'sɜrəp
'hʌm,drʌm	kə'nʌndrəm
'kætə,pʌlt	'dɪfə,kʌlt, 'dɪfəkəlt

Merriam-Webster

'hi-(,)kəp	'sɪr-əp, 'sər-əp, 'sə-rəp (reordered to match K&K)
'həm-,drəm	kə-'nən-drəm
'ka-tə-,pəlt	'di-fi-(,)kəlt

the marking of posttonic stress

	Jones	K&K	M-W
alcove	'alkouv	'ælkov	'al- ₁ kōv
latex	'leiteks	'letɛks	'lā- ₁ teks
robot	'roubət	'robət	'rō- ₁ bät
satisfy	'satisfai	'sætɪs ₁ fai	'sa-təs- ₁ fī
underworld	'ʌndəwɜ:ld	'ʌndə ₁ wɜɹld	'ən-dər- ₁ wɜ:ld

but Jones insists. . .

“from the point of view of **legibility** I believe this system [with 'ə vs ə] would be inferior to the equally justifiable system of using the separate and easily distinguishable letters ʌ and ə” (1967:61, §206, emphasis and explication mine)

however, from the point of view of **theoretical simplicity**, a system using two objects (ə, ') where another system uses three (ə, ʌ, ') is superior to it (hommage à Occam)

history

ME	i	e	ə	a	u	o
17th c.	i	e	ə	a	ʊ	o
18th c.*	i	e	ə	a	“ə”	o
19th c.	i	e	ə	æ	e	o
20th c.**	i	e	ə	æ	ʌ	o
21th c.	i	e	ə	a	ə	o

* “unaccented vowels in final syllables terminated by a consonant, but especially *r*, have an obscure vowel quality that nearly approaches the short *u*” (Walker 1774)

** “All those female interviewers talking about bunk bulences and Ufrica. I suppose they all grew up in the Sixties... when... working class became beautiful, and everyone from Princess Unne downwards embraced the Flat A.” (Jilly Cooper in 1978, cited by Wells 1982:291)

“schwa is never stressed”



a trivial claim if we use different symbols for stressed schwas: \wedge or \mathfrak{z}

languages with stressed \mathfrak{z} : Welsh, Romanian, Bulgarian, Albanian
French $\mathfrak{z} = \text{œ}/\text{ø}$

BrE GOAT-fronting: Jones $\text{g}\mathfrak{z}\text{ut}$, Gimson $\text{g}\mathfrak{z}\text{ut}$ (stressed schwa?!)

short vs long/diphthong? lax vs tense? both?

Jones		K&K		Gimson	
i	i:	ɪ	i	ɪ	i:
e	eɪ	ɛ	e	e	eɪ
ə	ə:	ə	ɜ	ə	ɜ:
ɔ	ou	ɒ	o	ɒ	əʊ
ʊ	u:	ʊ	u	ʊ	u:

stressed vs unstressed

Bolinger 1986

ɪ ≠ ɪ *civic* 'sɪvɪk

ʌ ≠ ə *covet* 'kʌvət

ʊ ≠ ə *putto* 'pʊtə

Wells 1990

ɪ = ɪ

ʌ ≠ ə

ʊ = ʊ

conclusions

- ▶ distinguishing the vowel symbol used in stressed and unstressed syllables is important **iff** we do not mark all stresses
- ▶ the British tradition does not mark posttonic stress and distinguishes stressed and unstressed vowel symbols **only** in the case of STRUT vs schwa, not for KIT or FOOT
- ▶ this practice is inconsistent
- ▶ distinguishing \wedge and \eth can be made redundant by marking all stresses
- ▶ check out <https://youglish.com/search/london/uk>

thank you very mách

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