Stressed schwa in English

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the “short” vowels of (British) English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sweet 1900</th>
<th>Jones 1918</th>
<th>Gimson 1962</th>
<th>Lindsey 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KIT</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>ɪ</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRESS</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ɛ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAP</td>
<td>æ</td>
<td>æ</td>
<td>æ</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRUT</td>
<td>ə</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
<td>ə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMA</td>
<td>ɛ</td>
<td>ɛ</td>
<td>ɛ</td>
<td>ɛ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOT</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>ɔ</td>
<td>ɒ</td>
<td>ɔ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOOT</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>ʊ</td>
<td>ʌ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“I clearly feel œ and å 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jones</th>
<th>Kenyon &amp; Knott</th>
<th>Merriam-Webster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hiccup 'hikəp</td>
<td>'hɪkəp, 'hɪkəp</td>
<td>'hi-(,)kəp (reordered to match K&amp;K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syrup 'sirəp</td>
<td>'sɪrəp, 'sər-əp, 'sə-rəp</td>
<td>'sɪr-əp, 'sər-əp, 'sə-rəp (reordered to match K&amp;K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humdrum 'hʌmdrʌm</td>
<td>'hʌmˈdrʌm</td>
<td>'həm-ˈdrəm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conundrum kə'nʌndrəm</td>
<td>kə'nʌndrəm</td>
<td>kə-'nən-drəm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>catapult 'katəpɔlt</td>
<td>'kætəpɔlt</td>
<td>'ka-tə-,pəlt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult 'difikəlt</td>
<td>'dɪfɪkəlt</td>
<td>'di-fi-(,)kəlt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the marking of posttonic stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jones</th>
<th>K&amp;K</th>
<th>M-W</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alcove</td>
<td>'alkouv</td>
<td>'ælkov</td>
<td>'al-kōv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>latex</td>
<td>'leiteks</td>
<td>'leiteks</td>
<td>'lā-teks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>robot</td>
<td>'roubot</td>
<td>'robot</td>
<td>'rō-bāt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>satisfy</td>
<td>'satisfai</td>
<td>'sætis.fai</td>
<td>'sa-təs-fi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>underworld</td>
<td>'ʌndəwɜːld</td>
<td>'ʌndər.wɜːld</td>
<td>'ən-dər.wɜːld</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“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 ∧ 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, ∧, ’) is superior to it (hommage à Occam)
**history**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ME</th>
<th>i e ə a u o</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17th c.</td>
<td>i e ə a æ u o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th c.*</td>
<td>i e ə a “ē” u o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th c.</td>
<td>i e ə æ æ u o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th c.**</td>
<td>i e ə æ æ æ u o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21th c.</td>
<td>i e ə æ æ æ u o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* “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: ʌ or ə

languages with stressed ə: Welsh, Romanian, Bulgarian, Albanian French ə=œ/ø

BrE goat-fronting: Jones gout, Gimson ɡəut (stressed schwa?!)

I WANNA BE A SCHWA.

IT'S NEVER STRESSED
short vs long/diphthong? lax vs tense? both?

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<th>Jones</th>
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<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>eu</td>
<td>e</td>
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<tr>
<td>æ</td>
<td>æ</td>
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<tr>
<td>œ</td>
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<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ū</td>
<td>ū</td>
<td>ū</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
stressed vs unstressed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bolinger 1986</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( i \neq \iota )  civic 'sivɪk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \Lambda \neq \varepsilon )  covet 'kəvət</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( u \neq \varepsilon )  putto 'pʊtə</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<th>Wells 1990</th>
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<td>( i = \iota )</td>
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<td>( \Lambda \neq \varepsilon )</td>
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<tr>
<td>( u = \varepsilon )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 ʌ and ə can be made redundant by marking all stresses.
- Check out https://youglish.com/search/london/uk
thank you very much
I’m also grateful to

- the organizers
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- George Soros