

**A PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION  
TO FRENCH PHONETICS: FOR  
THE USE OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING  
STUDENTS AND TEACHERS**

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A practical introduction to French phonetics: for the use of English-speaking students and teachers by G. G. Nicholson

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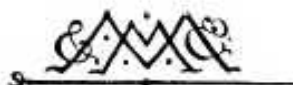
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TORONTO

A PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION  
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FRENCH PHONETICS

*FOR THE USE OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING STUDENTS  
AND TEACHERS*

BY

G. G. NICHOLSON, B.A., B.C.L.

OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD

LECTURER IN FRENCH AND GERMAN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

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## PREFACE

IN the revision that modern language teaching has undergone during the last quarter of a century two facts have been firmly established: first, that the pronunciation of a modern foreign language should be taught with great care from the outset; and, secondly, that pronunciation can neither be taught nor learned to the best advantage without the aid of phonetics.<sup>1</sup> There is, moreover, to use the words of Dr. Breul, 'a growing conviction that the teaching of modern languages in our secondary schools should henceforth as a rule not be entrusted to foreigners but to duly qualified English men and women.'<sup>2</sup> But whether the language he teaches be his native speech or not, the teacher can no longer afford to dispense with a phonetic training.<sup>3</sup> For however successful he may be without the aid of phonetics, he can always improve his results with such aid. Especially is this true when it is his lot to teach French to English-speakers. He can then hardly allow the pupil to carry over a single sound from his

<sup>1</sup> See *The Teaching of Modern Foreign Languages and the Training of Teachers*, by Karl Breul, Cambridge, 1906; *How to teach a Foreign Language*, by O. Jespersen, London, 1904; and *The Sounds of English*, by Henry Sweet, Oxford, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> 'Phonetics makes us independent of native teachers. It is certain that a phonetically-trained Englishman who has a clear knowledge of the relations between French and English sounds can teach French sounds to English people better than an unphonetic Frenchman . . . who is unable to communicate his pronunciation to his pupils, and, perhaps, speaks a vulgar or dialectal form of French himself' (Sweet's *Sounds of English*, p. 92).



own language without modification. And yet the sounds of French often resemble English sounds so far that the learner will fail to detect any difference even when he is assured that the sounds are not the same. It is obvious, then, that every means of fixing the identity of a sound will be helpful. Now phonetics enables the teacher to fortify the appeal to the ear with an appeal to the reason, and often to the senses of touch and sight. In correcting a faulty pronunciation he no longer rests content with a repetition of the right sound. He tells the pupil exactly why his pronunciation is wrong, and what he must do in order to rectify it. The pupil has then the immense advantage of knowing when he is wrong, even though his ear may still not appreciate the difference between the right and the wrong sound, and even when the teacher is not there to help him. Like sounds thus acquire distinguishing marks, cases of mistaken identity become less common, and the training of the ear is greatly accelerated. Where, on the other hand, the foreign sound has no analogue in English, and can be produced only by bringing the organs of speech into positions which are quite unfamiliar to the learner and which at first probably demand a considerable effort on his part, the teacher can spare him the tedious task of discovery.

To the self-taught student, *a fortiori*, phonetics is invaluable. Even if he be most favourably situated for the acquisition of the foreign tongue, by residence in the country where it is spoken, a reasoned knowledge of the sounds will render his progress much more rapid and much more sure. He will know what sounds to expect, he will know when the pronunciations he hears are abnormal and not to be imitated, he will be quicker to detect his own faults, he will know from what cause they proceed, and how to amend them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Sweet's *Sounds of English*, p. 92.

In the first part of this book I have endeavoured to fix the identity of each sound in standard French by (i) giving a list of its traditional spellings, (ii) defining the position of the organs of speech necessary for its production, and (iii) explaining its relations to other sounds, usually its nearest English analogues. Where the pronunciation of the latter fluctuates, reference is made to the most important variations, including those current in America and Australia. Occasion is everywhere taken to warn the student against the errors into which he will be most likely to fall.

The second part deals with the factors which control the combination of sounds in connected speech. One needs only an elementary acquaintance with the language to be aware that a knowledge of these factors is of vital importance. Here, again, wherever they seemed likely to be helpful, comparisons have been drawn between the two languages.

It was at first my intention to add a running commentary explaining the growth and origin of the sounds of modern French. The pages of history are here peculiarly alluring and enlightening. But the book being designed for a practical mission, it seemed, on reflection, prudent to resist this temptation. The scholar would no doubt be interested to observe how the very numerous diphthongs of Old and Middle French gradually passed over into other sounds, leaving not a single survivor; how the diverse spellings of a sound originated; how elision became more and more common as linking grew more and more rare; but a solution of these and like problems did not appear to be so helpful as to warrant my diverting attention from the main purpose. To master the pronunciation of a foreign language is no light task, and the student's forces need to be economized.

I frankly own that this little treatise would never have seen the light had not the works of Professor Paul Passy,

of M. l'abbé Rousselot, of Professor Viëtor and Dr. Sweet been already in existence. I also express my general indebtedness to most other works of repute on French Phonetics, of which I must be content to mention but one: Dr. Quiehl's *Fransösische Aussprache und Sprachfertigkeit* (4th ed. Marburg, 1906), an admirable contribution on the teaching of French in German schools. Yet, in spite of my debts, I trust it will be found that the book is not a 'compilation from foreign works.' I have unhesitatingly resorted to all good sources for help and succour, but I have ventured to differ from authority in print whenever it seemed at variance with authority in speech: in all such cases my opinion has been corroborated by careful observation and experiment in the great laboratory of French, Paris itself. On some chapters, particularly Elision and Linking, the authorities in print were distressingly silent, and I was compelled to embark on long courses of investigation. The materials thus gathered I have endeavoured to present in the way which seemed most suited to English needs.

The attempt has been greatly facilitated by generous help and encouragement both in Sydney and Paris, and, in particular, by the constant and wise counsels of my wife, without whose aid the work would not have been undertaken. For this counsel, encouragement and help I tender my best thanks.

G. G. N.

PARIS, *Easter*, 1908.

The author owes a special debt of gratitude to Dr. E. J. Trechmann, M.A., his predecessor at the University of Sydney, now of London, for revision of the proofs and valuable suggestions.

G. G. N.

SYDNEY, 1909.