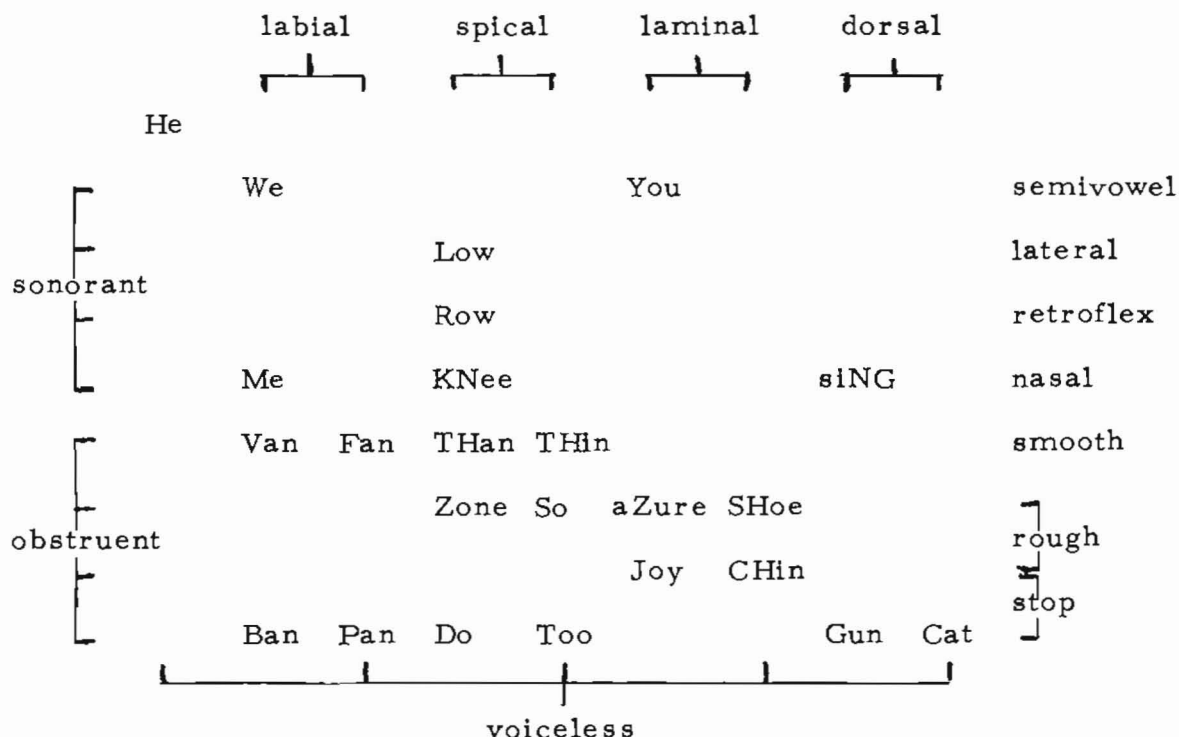


POEMS IN PRAISE OF ENGLISH PHONOLOGY

CHARLES F. HOCKETT
Ithaca, New York

Our language is so very rich
 that you can set a part apart
 and still have quite enough with which
 to sing some sort of song on pitch;
 it's too arcane a form of art
 for barbs that strike straight to the heart,
 but fun -- and certainly not kitsch.
 So study carefully this chart,
 then turn the page, and I will start.

A Classification of Consonant Sounds in English



(the smooth and rough consonants are collectively termed spirant)

.. and assorted screwy vowels and diphthongs.

A DEPRIVED TALE

- (1) I know a lazy sophomore
 who never answers one with sass,
 although one's nerves he will harass
 with ceaseless songs of Elsinore,
 lanthanum ore, the life of Thor,
 or similar things of now or yore --
 he overflows with useless lore.
 His usual fare is farfel, or
 alfalfa, saffron, sassafras;
 his ethos allows him nothing more.
 In summer with a roaring snore
 (a shallow genre of snoring roar)
 he loafs for miles along a shore
 of river or of sea. Alas!
 he never, never will amass
 resources others have use for.
- (2) I want to make it mighty plain:
 he can't abide to work at gain --
 to work at all would bring him pain.
 I ken he'd only try to try
 to mount a hillock, not a high
 and mighty peak. 'Twould be awry
 were he a top goal to attain
 by toil bucolic or urbane;
 'twould trap yon brain in endocrane
 and break an archetype in twain.
 Money to him became inane,
 impractical -- he'd nought to buy.
 Indeed, an indolent, idle guy,
 undoubtedly in time he'll die
 a pauper, poor like you and I.
- (3) Last Tuesday he set out to stroll
 under a trestle, to stint the toll;
 and there he sighted the trestle-troll
 dressed in red sandals, a tattered stole,
 and little else. This sort o' dress'll
 soon daunt any undaunted soul.
 He halted. He knew he had to wrestle
 the troll to saunter on under the trestle,
 or else retreat. A troll in stress'll
 not sit idle -- they're hardly sessile.
 The satyr stood on a little knoll
 and stared a stare so hostile (yet droll)
 that the hero decided to turn around dessil
 and hunt a hideout, therein to nestle
 until the runt'd returned to his hole.

(4) He was kept at his hideout half a week.
 Each day, he poked his head out, to peek
 to see if the pixie was at the spot
 he'd picked to picket those who sought
 to bypass the viaduct. He got
 toasted feet (the dust was hot),
 cuts at head, gashes by cheek
 (the pixie had a jagged beak
 which got used quick if he chose to seek
 to get away). Yet, at the dot
 of eight of the sabbath, the pixie said "eek!",
 gave his digits a twisted tweak,
 so faded away. The boy, half shot,
 took his achy body, quite taut,
 off the spot at which he'd got caught
 back to the city, without a thought,
 without a squeak, too weak to speak,
 deposited it atop a cot
 to doze two days as a potted sot.

(0) Don't pester me with your complaints
 about the pictures my poetry paints --
 I've chosen to work within constraints.
 The moral of this silly story
 isn't to not be sophomory
 nor yet to decipher deep allegory,
 but just to determine what I've done,
 what types of sounds I decided to shun
 in each of the stanzas (except this one).

THEME FOR VARIATIONS

(5) The bees were buzzing merrily
 along the road as I rode in;
 the birds were warbling in G
 (or maybe I mean B or D)
 and all the woods were yang and yin.
 As I rode down the lonely road
 the rain renewed the mud below.
 The reeds, the weeds, the woods, the woad
 all in a muddle, were a load
 I barely bore. I bore them though.
 Renewing vim and vigor then,
 the vinegar was eager. Ang-
 -gry words of bees and birds. Then bang!
 My rubber gone, my legs again
 removed me there beyond the glen.
 And all the woods were yin and yang:
 and all the world was young and yen.

Variation One On A Theme For Variations

- (6) A babbling river wandered by a wood.
 A burly bull was grazing by the river;
 a big bug nibbled on the bovine's liver,
 deeming the menu only middling good.
- A boy and girl drew nigh along the road,
 ignoring woods and river, nibbler, grazer.
 The lad was gazing eager on the load
 the maiden lugged there under blood-red blazer.
- The lazy bull, aroused, arose and ran,
 ran ever nearer, breathing gamey air.
 The bug abandoned bovoid and began
 a-boring in the boy's legs (they were bare).
 The bug then rode the boy away, and there
 the girl amused the bull with large élan.
- The drama done, the bored woods gave a yawn;
 the river, unannoyed, meandered on.

Variation Two (Inversion) On A Theme For Variations

- (7) Sing a song for fifty cents,
 a pocket stuffed with oats;
 sixty pixie elephants
 sporting fancy coats.
 When a raucous klaxon toots
 in yon circus tent
 elephantancy tusks and foots
 relax, all passion spent.
- A king sat counting in a house,
 currency or cheques.
 A queen went shopping for her spouse:
 turnips, thirteen pecks.
 A footman stretched out, tinkering at
 a teensy foreign car,
 when on it stepped an elephant
 like practiced circus star.

CONSTRAINED SONNETS

I. Verses For Readers With Bad Colds

- (8) At dusk I gazed at Sagittarius,
 That archer bold who gallops through the sky.
 The air was clear; 'twas easy to descry,
 Despite the other stars so bright, so various,
 That, south of Aquila, his perch precarious,
 He raised his bow, he let his arrows fly.

Largely westwards did their orbits lie,
Towards Scorpio. 'Twas really quite hilarious.

The recoil toppled Archer off his saddle.
He twisted like a helix through the Zodiac.
He tried to use his bow as oar or paddle;
But I let out a laugh, a sort of throaty yak,
For Scorpio bit his arse. He lost the battle;
He fell to earth at Sioux Falls, South daKodiak.

II. Alone Of An Evening In Northern England
(Variation Three On A Theme For Variations)

(9) I wander down the lonely road alone.
The woods are dim. The birds are warbling low;
The bees are buzzing rather louder, though;
The leaves are barely by the breezes blown.
The weeds along the berm are newly mown --
Or maybe newly grazed. There is a glow,
A yellow glow above, and green below,
Now visible, now glimmering, now gone.

Then, moving round a bend, I view the moon,
A golden gleam above the village burning.
Though I am deadly weary, I dragoon
My energy, my journey near adjourning.
The village inn lies nigh beyond the dune:
A mug of lager there will end my yearning.

III. In The Cat(arrhine) House

(10) Ed, the young attendant, rose at dawn.
To clear his head he lit a cigarette.
He had to check the rhesus cages, yet
He tarried at his cot to stretch and yawn.
Like any other creature, he is drawn
To laziness and dozing. His gillette
He set aside -- that chore could surely get
Delayed until the night had really gone.

At last he staggered out and closed his door;
The corridor resounded to his tread.
His caged charges started then to roar
Or screech or snicker, shaking hands and head
To show their hunger.

Neither rhesus nor
The other catarrhines e'er dreaded Ed.