

Niels Hald

Niels Davidsen-Nielsen: *Engelsk udtale i hovedtræk.*

Odense: Odense University Press, 1991.

When he notices the year of publication of the work under review, the reader may be forgiven for initially thinking that after his recent successful foray into **Tense and Mood in English: A comparison with Danish**, Mouton de Gruyter 1990, Niels Davidsen-Nielsen has made a new investigation of the territory he is usually associated with, phonetics. **Engelsk udtale i hovedtræk** is, however, an old friend, being in fact a reprint of the revised second edition (Gyldendal 1982) of this title, whose first edition appeared in 1974, and which was essentially an abbreviated version of the author's **Engelsk Fonetik**.

According to the preface, the book is intended primarily for students of English at Danish "seminarier" and "handeshøjskoler", the aim being to acquaint them with the main principles of the pronunciation of modern British English, concentrating on the difficulties typically encountered by the Danish learner.

The book is divided into seven chapters. Ch. 1, "Basic concepts of phonetics" (pp. 11-15), touches on the communication process and subdivides phonetics into articulatory, acoustic (not included in the subsequent treatment) and auditory phonetics, after which follows a description of the organs of speech and their function. Ch. 2, "Pronunciation and language" (pp. 16-20) discusses the analysis of speech from sentence level to phoneme level, concentrating on the latter. Ch. 3, "Applied phonetics" (pp. 21-24), argues the need for utilizing comparative phonetics in the teaching of the pronunciation of a foreign language. Ch. 4, "Sound and writing in English" (pp. 25-27) discusses the (partial) lack of overlap between speech and writing in English, arguing that English orthography actually does quite a good job. The body of the book is chapters 5-7 on "The English consonants" (pp. 28-66), "The English vowels" (pp. 67-98) and "English intonation and accent" (pp. 99-152). An annotated bibliography (pp. 153-156) and an index (pp. 157-160) complete the book. The symbols used are those of the International Alphabet, with one exception: DI is used for IPA Q .

Engelsk udtale i hovedtræk has for a number of years filled a need in a number of Danish institutions. The blunt question that the reviewer has to ask is: does an unrevised reprint still fill that need adequately?

It must be admitted that to some (myself included) there is a whiff of the old-fashioned about a book for students of English that is written in Danish and which concentrates solely on Standard British English. In his preface to the 1974 edition ND-N explains that he opted for Danish for two reasons: 1. an English version would have taken him longer to write (this argument has by now lost some of its force); 2. relatively difficult subjects are arguably more easily grasped if explained in the mother tongue (the preface **does** say, though, that there won't be too much detail). He further states that Standard English was chosen as the norm for Danish learners because speakers of this dialect are understood in the entire English-speaking world (this variant is rapidly losing prestige, though; a couple of years ago an American lady explained on the B.B.C. World Service that where she came from - the Midwest - people listened to the World Service to laugh at the funny accents), yet Danish students might still benefit from being told, if only as a warning, that in American English "writer" and "latter" may be indistinguishable from "rider" and "ladder" (pp. 40-41). The annotated bibliography is a boon, but it only takes us up to 1982; the Danish word "dælle" (p. 40) became "delle" in 1986; a number of the sentences included for practice are set in a vanished world.

Reviewing shouldn't be nitpicking, however. **Engelsk udtale i hovedtræk** remains a lucid and well-written introduction to English pronunciation and intonation with special emphasis on the pitfalls traditionally confronting Danes (and very nasty pitfalls they are, too: I remember overhearing the - admittedly good-natured - guffawing that greeted a Danish waitress who had informed a party of English guests of the speciality of the day: "Dog? Can we have dog? How interesting!"), combined with sound advice on when there is no need to imitate particular groups of native speakers (p. 48 on glottal reinforcement; pp. 76 and 77 on glides in /i:/ and /u:/).

The chapter on intonation and accent, which dates mainly from the early 1980s, emphasizes the importance of mastering the pronunciation of larger elements of speech, i.e. above phoneme level. The distinctive function of accent is stressed (7.2) at word ("bellow"- "below") and sentence level (the two interpretations of "He has plans to leave"), after which the reader is given clearly formulated rules for the position of the

accent in words of more than one syllable, compound words and in sentences (7.3 - 7.5). A useful feature is the comprehensive lists of examples given. Time has to some extent overtaken the remarks made (p. 107) on the position of the accent in "waste-paper-basket" (wrongly divided, incidentally, and nowadays usually spelt "wastepaper basket") and "head-quarters", but these are very minor quibbles indeed.

The excellent, very thorough treatment of English intonation rightly emphasizes the communicative implications of intonation; 7.9 (pp. 124-129) is another timely warning of the pitfalls facing Danish speakers of English. - The reader is informed of the existence of tapes; the detailed and reliable index can only be faulted for leaving out a reference to "tale-lyd" (p. 17f.).

This useful book contains hardly any misprints. I spotted "Irwing" for "Irwin" or "Irving" (p. 78), "I" for "ei" (p. 87), and an extra "t" in the transcription of "you should have told him" (p. 99). It fully deserves translation into English.