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## SOME NOTES ON A NON-ENGLISH SOUND IN CONTINENTAL ENGLISH

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It is today a phonetic commonplace that "each apperceives the unkown sounds by means of the sounds of his own language" (Boas). When English sounds came into Romanian, however, both in loan words and as English sounds proper in the teaching of the language they came over through the medium of French or German. In these languages the above mentioned rule held good for both the French and the Germans replaced English vowels no. 10 and 11<sup>1</sup>, i.e. the vowel sounds in *but* and *bird* by their own front rounded vowel *ö* as in Fr. *deux* and Germ. *schön*. The *Nouveau Petit Larousse Illustré* (1935) records the pronunciation of *trust* as *treust*; *plum-cake* is *pleum-kèke*, while *club* may be either *klub* or *kleub*.

The relationship between the respective English, French, and German sounds has been adequately dealt with by Wilhelm Horn and Martin Lehnert.<sup>2</sup>

Conversely the French *eu* becomes English *ir* as in *amateur*, while the German names *Röntgen* and *Goethe* become *Runtyen* and *Girte* respectively.

On the more restricted plane of language teaching and learning the same habits prevail and French and German students often pronounce *böt* for *but*, *börd* for *bird*, etc.

The French and German rendering of the vowels under discussion have a justification: a non-French and a non-German sound was replaced by a native one. And since English was first taught in Romania through the medium of French and German these "second-best" vowels were adopted when the Romanian language had within its own vowel system more suitable sounds: *a* for the vowel in *but* and a lengthened variety of *ă* for that of *bird*. It may be noted that the pronunciation of *ö* was, and is, actually difficult for Romanians.

There are two reasons why this vowel was so readily adopted by the Romanian student of English. First, his French and German teachers and text-books taught him so. In the northwestern part of the country the tendency was helped along by Hungarian-English text-books and dictionaries especially as regards the vowel in

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<sup>1</sup> D. Jones, *An Outline of English Phonetics*, Heffer, Cambridge.

<sup>2</sup> *Laut und Leben*, Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, Berlin, 1954, pp. 167—184, 454—456.

*bird*.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the inconsistencies of English spelling may have caused a frame of mind which made the Romanian student look upon English pronunciation as an insurmountable difficulty and the ö-sound being non-Romanian helped the student believe that he was nearer to English the farther he went away from his mother tongue.

A book revealing this frame of mind is *Limba engleză fără profesor, călăuză practică pentru învățarea limbii engleze de toate zilele cu pronunțarea exactă* (English without a teacher, a practical guide to everyday English with the exact pronunciation) by W. Payne and St. G. Gorjan<sup>4</sup> in the introduction of which the authors speak of the ö-sound (giving Fr. *liqueur* and Germ. *schön* as examples) as an English vowel.

Likewise in L. Duncan's *Gramatica limbii engleze* (English Grammar)<sup>5</sup> we learn (p. 8) that the phonetic symbol (ə:) represents the long German ö. In his classifications of vowels (p. 12) the author again identifies (ə:) with the long German ö and French *eu*.

The ö-sound was commonly so much associated with English that, at a time, it was thought fashionable to pronounce the name of a brand of cigarettes *Plugar* as *plögär* in a manner considered "à l'anglaise".<sup>6</sup>

It must be noted that English words are frequently pronounced with the ö-sound when the Romanian speaker is especially aware that these words are English. Thus Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* is commonly *Madame Böterfly*, *rummy* is *römmy*, *rugby* is often *rögby*. However, some words borrowed from English and which one might expect to be pronounced with an ö, and which have become part and parcel of our language, are given spelling pronunciations and we find the Romanian phonetic value of the English spelling in *trust* and *club* which are pronounced *troost* and *kloob* respectively.<sup>7</sup>

It is true that of recent years, with the spreading of the study of foreign languages, the ö-sound is losing ground and Romanian vowels closer to the English are making more and more headway i.e. *a* and *ă*. The use of plain Romanian *a* in *but* is so much the more recommendable since English vowel No. 10 has moved towards a more advanced and lower position. While some linguists have long marked it in phonetic transcription with a simple (a).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Latzkò Hugo, *Magyar-Angol és Angol-Magyar Kéziszótár*, Budapest, 1929. Dr. Biró Lajos Pál, Dr. Willer Jozsef, Dr. Fest Sándor, *Angol-Magyar és Magyar-Angol iskolai és kéziszótár*. Az Atheneum Kiadása, Budapest. Arthur B. Yoland, *A Dictionary of the Hungarian and English Languages*. First Part (English-Hungarian), Franklin Társulat, Budapest, 1908. Dr. Biró Lajos Pál, *Express English leggyorsabban angolul*, Delta Könyvkiadoállalat, Budapest.

<sup>4</sup> Editura Gorjan, Bucuresti, 1944.

<sup>5</sup> Bucuresti, Editura Universul, 1947.

<sup>6</sup> Iorgu Iordan, *Stilistica limbii romane*, Seria II, Societatea română de lingvistică, Studii, 4, Bucuresti, 1944, p. 39.

<sup>7</sup> Ida C. Ward, *The Phonetics of English*, Heffer, Cambridge, 1939, p. 201.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Wyld, *The Historical Study of the Mother Tongue*, London, Murray, 1907, p. 46.

## DISCUSSION

### *Witting:*

I think there is a certain parallel in Swedish to what you have told us, since in earlier Swedish pronunciations of the English [ʌ] sound (as in *cut*) the use of [ə] has been quite frequent.