

# “Syllabication” in English according to John Walker’s dictionary

Poitiers

Journée Parole 4

“Walker and the English of his Time (18th c - 19th c)”

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Are there clear-cut principles behind  
the syllabification choices in Walker's  
*Critical Pronouncing Dictionary*?

# Research Questions

- MOP: Are Walker's principles and entries consistent with the Maximal Onset Principle?
- MaxCoda: Do Walker's respellings conform to Wells' first two syllabification principles when it comes to codas?
- Ambisyllabicity: Are Walker's repeated consonants really ambisyllabic?
- CV-patterned syllabification: Does Walker prefer dividing “on the vowel” wherever possible?

# Research Questions

- Privilege of occurrence: How does Walker deal with unstressed short vowels?
- Syneresis and Dieresis: What was the preferred realization of words such as <egregious>, <plenteous>?
- Syncope: does Walker give compressed forms of words like <history> ?

# Walker's transcription system

*A Table of the Simple and Diphthongal Vowels referred to by the Figures over the Letters in this Dictionary.*

ENGLISH SOUNDS.	FRENCH SOUNDS.
1. $\acute{a}$ . The long slender English <i>a</i> , as in <i>fâ</i> te, p $\acute{a}$ -per, &c. (73) - - -	<i>é</i> in <i>fée</i> , <i>épée</i> .
2. $\grave{a}$ . The long Italian <i>a</i> , as in <i>fâr</i> , f $\acute{a}$ -ther, pa-p $\acute{a}$ , mam-m $\acute{a}$ , (77) - - -	<i>a</i> in <i>fable</i> , <i>rable</i> .
3. $\hat{a}$ . The broad German <i>a</i> , as in <i>fâ</i> ll, w $\hat{a}$ ll, w $\hat{a}$ -ter, (83) - - - - -	<i>â</i> in <i>âge</i> , <i>Châlons</i> .
4. $\grave{a}$ . The short sound of this Italian <i>a</i> , as in <i>fât</i> , m $\acute{a}$ t, m $\acute{a}$ r-ry, (81) - - -	<i>a</i> in <i>fat</i> , <i>matin</i> .
1. $\acute{e}$ . The long <i>e</i> , as in <i>mé</i> , hère, m $\acute{e}$ -tre, m $\acute{e}$ -dium, (93) - - - - -	<i>i</i> in <i>mitre</i> , <i>epitre</i> .
2. $\grave{e}$ . The short <i>e</i> , as in <i>mêt</i> , lêt, gêt, (95) - - - - -	<i>e</i> in <i>mette</i> , <i>nette</i> .
1. $\acute{i}$ . The long diphthongal <i>i</i> , as in <i>pî</i> ne, tî-tle, (105) - - - - -	<i>aî</i> in <i>laïque</i> , <i>naif</i> .
2. $\grave{i}$ . The short simple <i>i</i> , as in <i>pîn</i> , tî-tle, (107) - - - - -	<i>i</i> in <i>inné</i> , <i>titré</i> .
1. $\acute{o}$ . The long open <i>o</i> , as in <i>nô</i> , nôte, nôte-tice, (162) - - - - -	<i>o</i> in <i>globe</i> , <i>lobe</i> .
2. $\hat{o}$ . The long close <i>o</i> , as in <i>mô</i> ve, prôve, (164) - - - - -	<i>ou</i> in <i>mouvoir</i> , <i>pouvoir</i> .
3. $\hat{o}$ . The long broad <i>o</i> , as in <i>nôr</i> , fôr, ôr ; like the broad $\hat{a}$ , (167) - - -	<i>o</i> in <i>or</i> , <i>for</i> , <i>encor</i> .
4. $\acute{o}$ . The short broad <i>o</i> , as in <i>nôt</i> , hôt, gôt, (163) - - - - -	<i>o</i> in <i>botte</i> , <i>cotte</i> .
1. $\acute{u}$ . The long diphthongal <i>u</i> , as in <i>tû</i> be, cû-pid, (171) - - - - -	<i>iou</i> in <i>Cioutat</i> , <i>chiourme</i> .
2. $\acute{u}$ . The short simple <i>u</i> , as in <i>tû</i> b, cûp, sûp, (172) - - - - -	<i>eu</i> in <i>neuf</i> , <i>veuf</i> .
3. $\acute{u}$ . The middle or obtuse <i>u</i> , as in <i>bû</i> ll, fûll, pûll, (173) - - -	<i>ou</i> in <i>boule</i> , <i>foule</i> , <i>poule</i> .
$\acute{o}\acute{i}$ . The long broad $\acute{o}$ , and the short $\acute{i}$ , as in $\acute{o}\acute{i}$ l, (299) - - - - -	<i>oî</i> in <i>cycloïde</i> , <i>heroïque</i> .
$\acute{o}\hat{u}$ . The long broad $\acute{o}$ , and the middle obtuse $\hat{u}$ , as in $\acute{o}\hat{u}$ , p $\acute{o}\hat{u}$ nd, (313)	<i>ou</i> in <i>Aouî</i> .

# M.O.P.

Walker explicitly states that (a) “a consonant between two vowels must go to the latter”, as in:

**e'dikt**

**e1'di2kt**

**a-pli'**

**a4-pli1'**

He is nevertheless aware of restrictions on this rule concerning certain vowels, as is clear in other entries:

**si<sup>2</sup>v' i<sup>2</sup>l**

**si2v'i2l**

**e<sup>2</sup>d' e-bl**

**e2d'-i2-bl**

# M.O.P.

But Walker also tells us that (b) “two consonants coming together must be divided”:

âf-plre'  
a4s-pi1re'

kâwf'tik  
kaws'-ti2k

# M.O.P.

Unsystematic application of rule: affricates, <Cl> and <Cr> clusters

**di<sup>2</sup>tʰh'ũr**

di<sup>2</sup>tsh'-u<sup>2</sup>r

**fá<sup>4</sup>b're-ká<sup>2</sup>te**

fa<sup>4</sup>b'-re<sup>1</sup>-ka<sup>1</sup>te

And he also prefers keeping long vowels in open syllables, as in:

**pe<sup>1</sup>'trô<sup>4</sup>l**

pe<sup>1</sup>'tro<sup>4</sup>l

**pa<sup>1</sup>'stre-kô<sup>2</sup>ô<sup>2</sup>k**

pa<sup>1</sup>'stre<sup>1</sup>-ko<sup>2</sup>o<sup>2</sup>k



# M.O.P.

The problem of redoubled consonants:  
ambisyllabicity?

**i<sup>1</sup>m' m<sup>2</sup>idje**

**b<sup>2</sup>et' t<sup>1</sup>or**

i<sup>2</sup>m'mi<sup>2</sup>dje

be<sup>2</sup>t'tu<sup>2</sup>r

# MaxCoda

Some entries might seem to conform to this principle:

**sělf'ĩsh**

se2lf'i2sh

**kôv'è-tũs**

ko4v'e1-tu2s

But others do not:

**shělf'ĩsh**

she2lf'i2sh

**dôl'fĩn**

do4lf'i2n

**něrvũs**

ne2r'vu2s

**kôv've-tũs-le**

ku2v've1-tu2s-le1

**pu're-te**

pu1're1-te1

# MaxCoda

Between two unstressed syllables:

**â<sup>1</sup>r-<sup>2</sup>ân-d<sup>2</sup>in'ê-<sup>2</sup>us**

a4r-u2n-di2n'e1-u2s

**â<sup>1</sup>f-<sup>2</sup>êr-vâ'nh<sup>2</sup>ân**

a4s-e1r-va1'shu2n

**â<sup>1</sup>-f<sup>2</sup>êr'vâ<sup>1</sup>te**

a4-se1r'-va1te

**kô<sup>1</sup>-rê-â<sup>4</sup>n'd<sup>2</sup>ur**

ko1-re1-a4n'du2r

**kôn<sup>4</sup>-trâ<sup>4</sup>-d<sup>2</sup>ik'tô<sup>2</sup>r-ê**

ko4n-tra4-di2k'tu2r-e1

# Ambisyllabicity

Many of Walker's entries include “ambisyllabic”  
consonants:

**bɛt' tɔr**

be2t'tu2r

**kɔk'kl**

ko4k'kl

**ak-kɔm'plɪʃ**

a4k-ko4m'pli2sh

**fɔl-lɛ-bɪl'ɛ-tɛ**

fa4l-le1-bi2l'e1-te1

**dɔm'mɔdʒe**

da4m'ma1dʒe

**pɛr'rɪl**

pe2r'ri2l

**pɛt'trɛ-fi**

pe2t'tre1-fi1

# Ambisyllabicity

Indeed, they are not always present when they might be expected:

**hôr-ê-zôn'tâl-ê**

ho4r-e1-zo4n'ta4l-e1

**fâr-ê-nà'fûs**

fa4r-e1-na1-shu2s

Sometimes, alternate pronunciations allow direct comparison:

**sûk'sês-sûr, or sùk-sês'ûr**

su2k'se2s-su2r, or su2k-se2s'u2r

# Ambisyllabicity

Comparing noun and verb forms:

**dám' mǎdje**

da4m'ma1dje

**dám' ǎje**

da1m'a1je

**prôd' juǎfe**

pro4d'ju1se

**prò-duǎfe'**

pro1-du1se

**ěk' kò**

e2k'ko1

**ǎs-sěnt'**

a4s-se2nt'

# Privilege of Occurrence

“unstressed [only] /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ are allowed the same 'privilege of occurrence' as /ə/ when a consonant begins a following syllable, and may therefore occur in final position in unstressed syllables”

(preface of the *English Pronouncing Dictionary*)

**se-vil'le-te**

se1-vi2l'le1-te1

**pe-rif'fe-re**

pe1-ri2f'fe1-re1

**ka-p-u-she'en'**

ka4p-u1-she1e1n'

# Privilege of Occurrence

In the same manner, when *i* ends a syllable, not under the accent as *qual-i-ty*, though it has not the long diphthongal sound, as in *i-dle*, yet it is not short as in *it*, but open as the *e* in *equal*: the same may be observed of *æ* (179).



# Privilege of Occurrence

Walker's "fourth sound of a":

4. **â**. The short sound of this Italian *a*, as in *fât*, *mât*, *mâr-ry*, (81) - *a* in *fat*, *matin*.

545. There is a remarkable exception to this rule in the letter *a*. When this vowel ends a syllable, not under the accent, we cannot give it any of its three open sounds without hurting the ear. Thus in pronouncing the word *abound*—*ay-bound*, *ab-bound*, and *aw-bound*, are all improper; but giving the *a* the second or Italian sound, as *ab-bound*, seems the least so; for which reason I have, like Mr. Sheridan, adopted the short sound of this letter to mark the unaccented *a* (70) (88).

**fâ1l'la4-sé**

fa4l'la4-se1

**ô4n'nô2r-â-bl**

o4n'nu2r-a4-bl

# Syneresis/Dieresis

Walker seems to prefer dieresis:

**á1-bú-jî<sup>2</sup>n'è-òs**

a4l-bu1-ji2n'e1-u2s

**á-ra<sup>4</sup>'nè-òs**

a4-ra1'ne1-u2s

**è-grè'jè-òs**

e1-gre1'je1-u2s

**yù-thân-à'zhè-á**

yu1-tha4n-a1'zhe1-a4

**ò-bè'jè-ènt**

o1-be1'je1-e2nt

**plè<sup>2</sup>n'tshùs**

ple2n'tshu2s

**kùr'tshè-òs**

ku2r'tshe1-u2s

**rásh-è-òs-è-nà'fshù<sup>2</sup>n**

ra4sh-e1-o4s-e1-na1'shu2n

# Syneresis/Dieresis

To put Walker's take on this issue into perspective, let us compare these syllabifications with those found in Thomas Sheridan's *General Dictionary of the English Language*:

ál-bú-jín'-yús

á-rá'-nyús.

ě-gré'-jús

ú-thán-á-fé'-á

ô-hé'-dzhént

plén'-tshús.

rá-thô-sý-ná'-shún

kúr'-tshús.

# Syneresis/Dieresis

- Reflection of contemporary reality:
  - Diachronically – sound change in the making (Sheridan being more “old-fashioned”)
  - Synchronically – possible variation at the time
- Example of Walker's influence, his choice due to hypercorrection linked to graphocentrism

# Syncope

Walker does not include syncopated pronunciations of such words as <history>, <voluntary> or <catholic>, and neither does Sheridan:

hîs'tôr-è

hîs'-tôr-ÿ

vòl'ân-tâ-rè

vòl'-ân-tér-ÿ

kâth'ò-lik

kâth'-ò-lik

# Conclusions

- ♦ In some respects, a truly phonological approach;
- ♦ Inconsistency and unpredictability;
- ♦ Issues linked to prescriptivism and graphocentrism;
- ♦ The written vs. the spoken syllable, and the role of “transdiction”.

# Future Research

- Illuminating the interplay between theoretical construction, observation, graphocentrism and prescriptivism
- Bringing new arguments to the contemporary debate over various aspects of English syllabification
- Providing resources for speech software (vs CMU, GenAm-based), ideas for improving algorithms
- Computing dialectal and diachronic variation of syllabification in English

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