



Across the Channel and across the Atlantic

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SQUIBS AND DISCUSSION

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ACROSS THE CHANNEL
AND
ACROSS THE ATLANTIC*
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In their treatment of English word stress, Liberman and Prince (1977, 304f.) point out a huge class of counterexamples to their Lexical Category Prominence Rule. The LCPR predicts that no English word should have primary stress on its final syllable, but many words borrowed into English from or through French (or from finally stressed forms in other languages) show final stress; *charade, antique, hotel, manure, police, typhoon, latrine, vignette, champagne* are typical examples, and they contrast with words like *omelette, cognac*, and British *marquis* [márkwɪs], which obey the LCPR. The two classes of cases can be labeled as showing the *borrowed* pattern (*vignette*) or the *nativized* pattern (*omelette*). Liberman and Prince, in common with other investigators (Lee (1969, 400), Ross (1972, 238f.), and Oehrle in unpublished work), assume that most of the words showing the borrowed pattern can be identified by the shape of their endings (they cite forms in [ir un ik u iz ed et i el er š es en ar o esk]); with these endings they propose to associate a lexical feature +F(rench) that permits the LCPR to mark certain final syllables as strong. The few remaining examples showing the borrowed pattern (*police, latrine, and patrol*, for instance) must be marked as taking ultimate stress as a pure lexical idiosyncrasy.

* A Fulbright-Hays research fellowship at the University of Sussex in the fall of 1977 provided me with the quiet time to mull over silly questions like why British and American speakers stress some words in different ways (though the topic was very far from my announced research work). I must give thanks to many friends on both sides of the Atlantic for helping me to keep my ears open, and to Elizabeth Zwicky for her assistance in extracting information from the OED.

American English and British English do not differ substantially with respect to which words have the borrowed pattern and which the nativized pattern, so long as the words end in consonants (as all the examples cited above do).¹ But American English and British English diverge in their treatment of words that end in vowels, with British English showing a tendency towards nativization and American English a tendency towards borrowing. The divergence is most striking in disyllables, as in the following examples, which have invariable final stress (0 1) for American speakers but (invariable or optional) initial stress (1 3) for British speakers:²

final [e]: paté, sorbet, ballet, sauté, gourmet, cliché, valet, puree, parfait, de Musset, soiree, cachet, bidet, Calais, blasé, croupier, bouquet, beret, foyer, crochet, glacé, café, touché, dossier, croquet

final [i]: debris, Chablis, précis

final [o]: chateau, tableau, plateau, gateau, Rousseau

A corresponding difference can be seen in words of more than two syllables, with British speakers preferring antepenultimate stress in vowel-final words with light penults, like *attaché*, *sobriquet*, *communiqué*, *émigré*, *protégé*, *negligee*, *matinee*, *canapé* (with [e]) and *Debussy* (with [i]), and penultimate stress in words with heavy penults, like *chimpanzee* and *fiancé(e)*. The effect is weaker here, since many British speakers have alternative pronunciations and some American speakers do as well.

Some borrowed words in [o] have initial stress on both sides of the Atlantic (*bureau*, *trousseau*, *oboe*), and of the borrowed words in [i] there are some with initial stress in both dialects (*fricassee*, *recipe*, *Vichy*) and some with final stress in both (*marquee*, *esprit*, *etui*, almost all words with the suffix *-ee*, like *detainee*). Borrowed words in [u] seem to show no dialectal variation, having either final stress as in *tattoo*, *kazoo*, *canoe*, *shampoo*, *bamboo*, *Peru*, *taboo*, *ragout*, *adieu*, *Timbaktu*, and *kangaroo*, or earlier stress as in *bijou*, *Lulu*, *curler*, *Zulu*, *venue*, *bayou*, *Bantu*, *cashew*, *kinkajou*, *Kikuyu*.

I know of only a handful of cases in which consonant-final items are involved in transatlantic stress differences. Two, *garage* and *barrage*, involve the marginal consonant [ʒ] (though *mirage* is stressed finally on both sides of the ocean); and two more, *brochure* and *premier*, involve an [r] that is absent in

¹ A few consonant-final words have the borrowed pattern for some British speakers, though the American pronunciation is nativized; *princess* is a prominent example.

² The data are for the most part gathered from my own observations of British speech in situ, though in a few cases I have listed forms I have not heard, on the strength of their being listed in the OED with nativized stress, either invariably or as an option.

most British pronunciations (though *manure* is stressed finally on both sides of the ocean).

The transatlantic differences involve only relatively unasimilated loans, words that have “kept their end-stressing in the passage from one side of the English Channel to the other” (Lieberman and Prince (1977, 304)). Most of the examples with the British-nativized/American-borrowed patterns are recent loans from French; the earliest citation in the OED is usually nineteenth century (*soiree* 1830, *sauté* 1813, *gateau* 1883, *bar-rage* 1859), or there is no entry at all in the OED (*cliché*, *parfait*, *garage*). Earlier disyllabic loans like *decay* and *betray* show standard stressing for English—final stress for verbs (*assay*), initial stress for nouns (*essay*).

Two questions arise with respect to these dialectal stress differences. First, why should they concern essentially only vowel-final words? And then, why should certain final vowels—[e] enormously, [i] much less, [o] still less, [u] not at all—condition the nativizing shift to different degrees?

The answer to the first question lies in a degree of freedom in stressing that vowel-final words have but consonant-final words lack. For consonant-final words, there are basically only two stressings, the 0 1 (*unique*) type provided by the borrowing strategy and the 1 0 (*omelette*) type provided by the nativizing strategy.³ But for vowel-final words, there are *three* possibilities: the 0 1 type provided by the borrowing strategy; the 1 3 type provided by the nativizing strategy with the final vowel treated as tense (hence attracting stress, which is then shifted forward); and the 1 0 type provided by the nativizing strategy with the final vowel treated as lax.⁴ In both the 0 1 and 1 3 types the final syllable bears some stress. Hence, a foreign word with final stress could reasonably be assigned to either of these types (but not easily to the 1 0 type),⁵ and the choice between American 0 1 and British 1 3 will then correlate with the use of the borrowing or the nativizing strategy, respectively.

The answer to the second question is not so obvious, though the differences between different final vowels may reflect nothing more than the relative frequencies of these vowels

³ As Ross (1972, sec. 3) has pointed out, the 1 0 pattern holds mainly for words ending in vowels, dentals, dental clusters, and [m]; the dominant pattern for words ending in other segments (*Carnap*, *Lakoff*, *kayak*) is 1 3. Since only a few French loans—*Cognac* is one—would nativize with the 1 3 pattern, this difference between the two types of forestressed nouns is not of much significance for the British/American divergence in stressing.

⁴ This treatment of the two types of final vowels follows Chomsky and Halle (1968, 74f. and 77-79).

⁵ Some British speakers have shifted the 1 3 stressing to 1 0 in (stigmatized) pronunciations of a few words, most notably *garage* [gæri:] and *paté* [péti].

in French. However, the sturdy resistance of words with final [u] to nativization calls for some account.

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