

Pre-L Breaking in English:
Dark-L influence on the preceding vowel

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Abstract

The present paper focuses on pre-L breaking, a phenomenon whereby an epenthetic schwa appears before a dark-L in words such as *feel* and *file*. The widespread appearance of this pre-L schwa insertion is an indication for a possible rearrangement in the system of English phonemes; a change which the English language is currently undergoing. Therefore, it is described in many different ways by many different authors. This study offers a comparison of the relevant sources and looks into the question of how this phenomenon is represented in the latest edition of the Longman Pronunciation Dictionary. Thus, the aim of this paper is to examine and compare different approaches to certain problems and dubious questions in connection with pre-L breaking, as well as to give an overview of its current status.

1. Introduction

1.1. It has long been observed that a dark-L (most often transcribed as [ɫ]) has a significant effect on the quality of the preceding vowel. Since the articulation of [ɫ] is very similar to that of a round back vowel, it logically follows that, due to its coarticulatory influence, the vowel before it also becomes somewhat lower and more back. Sometimes [ɫ] even turns into an [o]-like sound through a process known as L-vocalization, therefore *fall* can be pronounced: /fɔːo/. In certain cases, however, especially after long high vowels and high-ending diphthongs, the vowel quality changes in a different way: a schwa is inserted into the V+[ɫ] sequence. Wells (2008) uses the term “pre-L breaking” in his pronouncing dictionary to describe this phenomenon.

1.2. There are other approaches, some of which call into question the very nature of the phenomenon. Riera and Romero (2007) analysed the acoustic parameters of what they call “the schwa-like elements in coda V+/l/ sequences” (including all full vowels), and found that they differ greatly depending on the vowel. They concluded,

“we are certainly not dealing with a simple process of schwa insertion, but rather a complex pattern of articulatory transitions from the steady-state vowel to the syllable-final lateral. This view is more in accordance with the continuous and overlapping nature of speech production than would be suggested by a simple, categorical process of vowel epenthesis.” (p. 136)

Their study, as they themselves admit it, is preliminary and confined to General American. Furthermore, the method they chose (making and analysing acoustic measurements) to approach the question was bound to yield results that would point toward the “continuous and overlapping nature of speech”. It is not completely unfounded to hypothesize that if they had examined the acoustic parameters of what they call a “canonical schwa” (e.g. in words such as *away*, *patrol*, *Ian*, etc.), they would have found that the vowels in these non pre-L environments are equally different in terms of their articulatory features. Their conclusion misses the idealization, which is the basis for linguistic abstraction, and ignores the obvious difference between the *parole* and the *langue*, i.e. between phonetics and phonology. What their findings do prove is only that the implementation of pre-L breaking is still somewhat elusive and is yet to be investigated and defined in exact terms.

1.3. Contrary to the findings of Riera & Romero, the measurements of Gick & Wilson (2006), who used ultrasound equipment for more exact results, provide evidence that the tongue moves through the “canonical-schwa space”, hence the perception of schwa. I shall also regard the excrescent schwa of pre-L broken words as canonical (same in quality as the schwa of e.g. *around*.)

2. Environment

It is important to note that although pre-L breaking is becoming more and more common in RP, it may be entirely absent from some RP-speakers’ speech. But even when it is present, defining when and where exactly the mechanism applies is by no means an easy task.

2.1. To understand the complexity of the matter, let us first consider L-darkening, which feeds (i.e. creates environments for) our rule. Generally, /l/ is clear before vowels or /j/, and dark in all other environments. A more exact way to define the distribution of [ɫ] and [l] is by saying that an /l/ in the onset of a syllable is clear, whereas in the rhyme (i.e. in the nucleus or the coda) it is dark. The problem is that while the first definition suggests a post-lexical rule, the second one points toward dependence on non-segmental factors. Kreidler (1989) merges the two and writes: “the variation [between clear and dark L] depends mostly on what position /l/ has in a syllable and only partly on what kind of phonemes follow” (p. 101). Gimson (1970) also points out that the distributional difference is not always clear-cut and implies that rhythmic, syntactic, and semantic features should be considered as well:

The use of the clearer or darker quality [l] may be related to the rhythmic and sense structure of the utterance, e.g. *feel it* may have a clear [l] as in *feeling*, but the [l] of

feel in *feel ill*, which is possible to treat as two rhythmic groups may be of a darker kind. (p. 204)

Therefore, it is obvious that there is uncertainty regarding the exact rules that determine the quality of /l/ in the above cases.

On the other hand, Wells (2008:103) defines the phenomenon in phonemic terms and does not even specify that the /l/ must be dark in order to trigger breaking. Of course, that is not to say that the vowel in monomorphemic words with an intervocalic /l/ (e.g. *velum*) can undergo breaking, but there are some cases when the darkness/clearness of the /l/ is, to say the least questionable, nonetheless the preceding vowel is represented in the dictionary as a potentially broken diphthong (e.g. *feeling* /'fi:ʔlɪŋ/ and *dealer* /'di:ʔlə/). However, in words like *feeler* /'fi:lə/ or *boiler* /'bɔɪlə/, regardless of their structural similarity to *dealer*, the possibility of breaking is not shown. (For further examples, see section 4.)

2.2. Another question is which vowels can be broken before [ɪ]. Cruttenden (2008) observes that “in the case of /i:/ + [ɪ], a central glide between the vowel and [ɪ] is often noticeable, and the [ɪ] element of /eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ/ tends to be obscured” (p. 216). The obscured (or suppressed) [ɪ] he writes about most probably results from the smoothing of a triphthong, whose presence, albeit only implied, is due to pre-L breaking. Wells (2008) also lists these four vowels (/i:, eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ/) as the ones after which schwa epenthesis is possible, but also notes: “some speakers of GenAm have pre-L breaking after /u:/, /oo/, /aʊ/, thus *rule* /ru:ʔl/” (p. 103). Pre-L breaking after back (or back-ending) vowels can also happen in some accents of the British Isles (e.g. in varieties of Scottish English), but it is much rarer and considered dialectal.

Some people argue that schwa insertion can take place even after short vowels, and words such as *will*, *tell*, and even *bull* can be pronounced with a broken diphthong.

2.3. As the data so far presented implies, pre-L breaking is an optional process, and the environment in which the mechanism applies changes from speaker to speaker. On the other hand, since the phonetic difference between the /i:/ of *reek* and the /i:/ of *reel* is obvious, and since neither type of /i:/ can appear in the environment of the other, some sort of obligatory mechanism must work at least on the level of allophones. In any case, it is safe to say, that the additional schwa is most commonly inserted after /i:, eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ/, since passing from these high or high-ending vowels to [ɪ] requires the biggest movement of the tongue. Hence, a simplified rule may be formulated as follows:

2.3.1.

$$\emptyset \rightarrow \text{ə} \quad / \quad \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{V} \\ +\text{high (ending)} \\ +\text{front (ending)} \\ +\text{long} \end{array} \right] \text{---}[t]$$

Pre-L schwa insertion rule

3. Pre-L breaking and dark-L influence in other English accents

3.1. Wells (1982:298) notes that speakers of Near-RP fail to retain the three-way opposition of /i:/, /ɪ/, and /ɪə/ before a final /l/. Thus *reel*, *rill* and *real* are homophones. The fact that in Near-RP even the short /ɪ/ is subject to the influence of a dark-L is a significant difference compared to other accents in with pre-L breaking.

3.3. As mentioned in section 2, pre-L breaking is characteristic of General American, too. Wells (1982:487) writes that before final /l/, the vowels /i, eɪ, au, u, o, ɔɪ/ “develop a centring off-glide in much mid-western speech. This is particularly noticeable with /i/ and /u/.” He adds that with the “auditory impression of an intrusive semivowel”, words may become disyllabic. (e.g. *feel* /'fijəl/, *rule* /'ruwəl/). See section 5 for further discussion of the question of syllabicity in connection with pre-L breaking.

3.4. In New York speech, the respective differences of /i/ - /ɪə/ and /eɪ/ - /ɛə/ are usually neutralized before /l/, and the schwa-ful quality is used in both cases. “Thus not only may *reel* and *real* fall together, but also pairs such as *Bailey* and *barely*; /ɛ:/ ~ ɛə/ is very commonly heard in words such as *bail*, *sailor*, *failure*” (Wells, 1982:505). Interestingly enough, the oppositions of /ɪ/ - /ɪə/ and /ɛ/ - /ɛə/ are retained most of the time.

3.5. Scottish English has no alternation between clear and dark-L. Some speakers, especially in the Gaelic and post-Gaelic areas use clear-L in all environments, others, in the Glasgow area, use pharyngealized /l/-s, but the most widespread variety is a velarised, /ɒ/-coloured sound. Since this is heavily stigmatized, elocutionists recommend the usage of a neutral /ə/-coloured /l/. Pre-L breaking appears in several urban varieties of Scottish English. E.g. *school* is pronounced /skuəl/, and *coal* is pronounced /koəl/. (Wells, 1982:412)

3.6. Speakers of many British accents (e.g. London, Yorkshire dialects, Southeastern dialects, etc.) pronounce *goat* and *goal* with two different vowels. Wells (1982) calls this the “GOAT-GOAL split”, but in fact, it is only an allophonic variation as long as the final /l/ is pronounced. While *goat* is pronounced /gəʊt/, *goal* becomes /gɒl/ due to the dark-L influence. Interestingly, in this case, it is not the second element of the diphthong that is

affected by the final /l/, but the first one, which does not immediately precede /l/. Thirty years ago, Wells wrote about the GOAT-GOAL split: “RP characteristically lacks the pre-/l/ allophone [ɐ] of many other accents.” (Wells, 1982:237) However, in a 2011 entry of his phonetic blog¹, Wells reports that since then, the phenomenon has appeared in RP as well. He supports this claim with a video clip of Prince William making his wedding vow, in which the archbishop of Canterbury pronounces *hold* as /həʊld/, but when the young royal repeats the vow, /hɒʊld/ is heard. In the case of such words, LPD³ includes the alternative pronunciation as well. (Thus the main pronunciation of *cold* is shown as /kəʊld/, but /kɒʊld/ is also listed.)

4. Representations

The phenomenon of pre-L breaking is hardly ever represented in pronouncing dictionaries, or in any other type of dictionary. As the table below (4.1.) shows, Wells’s LPD is the only one that considers pre-L breaking significant enough to transcribe the entries accordingly, and all the other dictionaries investigated in this study disregard it completely.² However, it can be assumed that more and more dictionaries will appear in which pre-L breaking is represented.

4.1.

vowel	word	LDCE	OED	COB	EPD	LPD
/i:/	<i>feel</i>	fi:l	fi:l	fi:l	fi:l	fi: ^ə l
/eɪ/	<i>hail</i>	heɪl	heɪl	heɪl	heɪl	heɪ: ^ə l
/aɪ/	<i>mile</i>	maɪl	maɪl	maɪl	maɪl	maɪ: ^ə l
/ɔɪ/	<i>oil</i>	ɔɪl	ɔɪl	ɔɪl	ɔɪl	ɔɪ: ^ə l

Representation of pre-L breaking in different dictionaries

The superscript (or raised letter) schwa in the LPD transcriptions indicates that the sound is optional, but the primary pronunciation is without it.

¹ Wells, J. C. *The evidence of the vowels*. Retrieved Nov. 21, 2012, from <http://phonetic-blog.blogspot.hu/2011/05/evidence-of-vows.html>

²Dictionaries used: COB = Sinclair, J. (1995). *Collins cobuild English dictionary* (2nd ed.). London: Collins. EPD = Jones, D., Roach, P., Hartman, J., & Setter, J. (2003). *Cambridge English pronouncing dictionary* (16th ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. LDCE = Summers, D. (1987). *Longman dictionary of contemporary English* (2nd ed.). Harlow: Longman. LPD = Wells, J. C. (2008). *Longman pronunciation dictionary* (3rd ed.). Harlow: Longman. OED = Simpson, J. A., & Weiner, E. S. (1989). *The Oxford English dictionary* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

4.2. LPD shows the inconsistencies regarding breaking before l#V, i.e., in strong-boundary suffixed derivatives of words with a final /l/. For instance, the dictionary shows that if the *-ing* suffix is added to a word which ends in /i:°l/, /eɪ°l/ or /aɪ°l/, the word can still be pronounced with breaking, however, if the stem ends in /ɔɪ°l/, the ING form is represented sometimes with the optional schwa, and sometimes without it.

4.2.1.

vowel	schwa epenthesis possible	schwa epenthesis not possible
/i:/	<i>feeling, reeling</i>	
/eɪ/	<i>ailing, mailing</i>	
/aɪ/	<i>filing, piling</i>	
/ɔɪ/	<i>foiling, toiling</i>	<i>coiling, boiling</i>

Possibility of schwa insertion in ING words according to LPD

Even more anomalies are seen in the group of words with an agentive *-er* suffix:

4.2.2.

vowel	schwa epenthesis possible	schwa epenthesis not possible
/i:/	<i>dealer</i>	<i>feeler</i>
/eɪ/	<i>trailer</i>	<i>hailer, jailer</i>
/aɪ/	<i>(miler)</i>	<i>miler</i>
/ɔɪ/	<i>toiler</i>	<i>boiler</i>

Possibility of schwa insertion in *-er* suffixed words

Surprisingly, *miler* ('an athlete or horse specialized in one mile races') is transcribed in both ways: without breaking, and with the alternative pronunciation of the stem: /maɪ°l-/. The same is true for *stylish*, *stylist*, and *stylize*. The motive behind this is particularly obscure, given that the schwa is optional anyway.

4.3. Tables 4.2.1. and 4.2.2. show that LPD's transcriptions are somewhat inconsistent in the representation of pre-L breaking. Then again, they are based on actual speaker data, and therefore "the inconsistencies and anomalies reflect, (...) inconsistencies or variability in

usage.”³ These anomalies prove two things: firstly, there is uncertainty about the clear or dark quality of /l/ in these words (cf. section 2). Secondly, language change is gradual, and not always consistent. Wells (1982) gives another example of such an inconsistent sound development:

Sound changes do not always apply to all lexical items which apparently meet their structural description. For example, the change from short /a/ to long /a:/ (later /æ/, /ɑ:/) in the history of RP applied, among other environments, before /nt#/, as in *slant*, *grant*, *plant*, *shan't*, *can't* etc. For reasons that are not clear, it never extended to the words *pant*, *cant*, and *rant*. (p. 100)

In this case, the sound change was arrested before the gradual lexical diffusion reached the items *pant*, *cant* and *rant*. If we believe the speaker data collected by Wells in LPD, then we can observe that pre-L schwa development spreads in the same gradual way: *feeling*, *ailing*, *filing*, *foiling*, *dealer*, *trailer*, *toiler*, etc. have undergone the change, while *coiling*, *boiling*, *feeler*, *jailer*, *miler*, *boiler*, etc. have not yet been affected.

5. Words traditionally pronounced with a [Vəʔ] segment

5.1. In the case of certain words, the schwa-ful realization of the basic [Vəʔ] segment is considered more traditional. The schwa in these words is not the result of pre-L breaking; however, the schwa-ful pronunciation is supported by the regressive influence of [ʔ] in the case of these words, too. They might have also contributed to the appearance of the schwa elsewhere. Such words include *real*, *ideal*, *dual*, *cruel*, *fuel*, *dial*, *phial*, etc.). A careful RP speaker would probably pronounce *real* with a diphthong or a hiatus, while for this same speaker, the pronunciation of *reel* would be equally acceptable with a long monophthong. Wells (2008) contains pronunciation preference polls about such pairs, and they show that older people tend to prefer the diphthongal pronunciation in the case of these words. (e.g. About 70% of older speakers would pronounce *real* as /rɪəl/. The poll also shows that an overall 55% of the participants prefer the monophthongal (or tense) pronunciation /ri:ːl/, thus, it has already become the prevalent form.)

5.2. The reason why words like *real*, *ideal*, *dual*, etc. are traditionally pronounced with a diphthong is that the *-al* suffix (which is not always obvious anymore) contains a schwa.

³ excerpt from an e-mail from J.C. Wells in reply to my inquiry – received on 14 Nov, 2012.

However, there are also some monomorphemic words in which the schwa is traditionally pronounced in pre-L position. (e.g. *duel*, *fuel*, *gruel*, *cruel*, *jewel*, etc.). The diphthong in these words has been present for centuries, as opposed to the group of words which are subject to the relatively new pre-L breaking mechanism.

5.3. It must be noted that in both of the above cases smoothing can apply, i.e., the complex vowel may be simplified. That is why *file* and *phial* can both be pronounced /faəl/ or even /fa:l/.

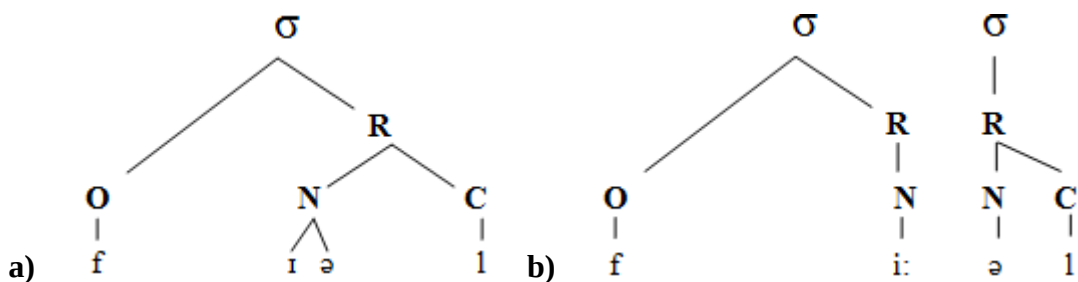
6. Syllabification

In terms of syllabification, the epenthetic schwa resulting from breaking (pre-L or pre-R) can be analysed in two ways. It can be either considered an off-glide (non-syllabic) or an independent, non-glide (syllabic) sound.

6.1. In the first case, the schwa creates a centring diphthong or triphthong, because the tense /i:/ turns into a broken tense /ɪə/ through pre-schwa laxing. (e.g. *feel* - /fiəl/). Wells (1982:215) treats the schwa of pre-R broken words as historically non-syllabic, since /i:/ - /i:ə/, etc. were merely allophones that later rose to phonemic status with the appearance of R-dropping, thus *beer*, *chair*, *more*, and *sure* are monosyllabic (see 6.3.a).

6.2. However, if we consider the schwa to be the nucleus of the next syllable, then we are dealing with a hiatus, i.e. two separate phonemes, rather than just one complex phoneme. In this case *feel* is /'fi:.əl/ and *file* is /'faɪ.əl/ (see 6.3.b). This is in accordance with the *μμμ constraint (English syllables contain no more than two moras).

6.3.



The representation of monosyllabic and disyllabic *feel*

6.4. With occasional exceptions, the LPD transcriptions of words in section 5.1 (*dual*-type *-al* suffixed words and *fuel*-type monomorphemic words with a historical diphthong) show the primary pronunciation as having a syllabic schwa (indicated by the space between the two vowels), with the optional compression of the two syllables. The “true” pre-L broken

words, i.e. where the schwa develops as a result of the regressive influence of the dark-L (e.g. *deal*, *oil*), are transcribed as having one syllable, since there is no stress mark, neither is there space between the vowels.

6.3.1.

	word	vowel	transcription
-al suffixed	<i>real, ideal, serial, venereal</i>	/i:/	/rɪəl/, /aɪ'diəl/ (exceptions) /'sɪər iəl/, /və 'niər iəl/
	<i>portrayal</i>	/eɪ/	/pɔ:'treɪəl/
	<i>denial</i>	/aɪ/	/di'naɪəl/
	<i>royal</i>	/ɔɪ/	/'rɔɪəl/
	<i>dual</i>	/u:/	/'dju:əl/
monomorphemic with historical diphthong	<i>duel</i>	/u:/	/'dju:əl/
	<i>phial</i>	/aɪ/	/'faɪəl/
pre-L broken	<i>deal</i>	/i:/	/di:əl/
	<i>bail</i>	/eɪ/	/beɪəl/
	<i>bile</i>	/aɪ/	/baɪəl/
	<i>boil</i>	/ɔɪ/	/bɔɪəl/

Monosyllabic and disyllabic LPD transcriptions of the [Və] segment in different type of words

The LPD transcriptions suggest that Wells considers the epenthetic schwa non-syllabic, i.e. belonging to the same syllable as the preceding vowel, therefore forming a diphthong or a triphthong, just as in the case of pre-R breaking.

6.4. Lavoie & Cohn (1999) also collected speaker data of words containing a certain V+liquid segment in the rhyme (see 6.4.1.). In their experiment, about half of the participants perceived these words as disyllabic, the other half as monosyllabic. Therefore, Lavoie & Cohn named these segments sesquisyllables (L. ‘one and a half syllable’). They describe them as an “inherently unstable structure, resulting in the perceived or real variation in pronunciation as one or two syllables.” (p. 110) They suggest these are trimoraic words, i.e. one syllable consists of three moras. This view, of course, violates the constraint which says that each syllable consists of either one or two moras.

Their study is based on the phoneme inventory of AmE, therefore they regard words such as *pearl* /pɜ:l/ as sesquisyllabic. The RP pronunciation of this word, /pɜ:l/ would be clearly monosyllabic.

6.4.1.

vowel	followed by /r/	followed by /l/
/i:/	-	<i>peel</i>
/eɪ/	-	<i>pale</i>
/ɜ:/	-	<i>pearl</i>
/u:/	-	<i>pool</i>
/aɪ/	<i>pyre</i>	<i>pile</i>
/aʊ/	<i>hour</i>	<i>owl</i>
/ɔɪ/	<i>foyer</i>	<i>foil</i>

Sesquisyllabic words – Lavoie & Cohn (1999)

6.5. Gick & Wilson (2006) carried out experiments in order to test the hypothesis of Lavoie & Cohn. They argue that if there is indeed a third mora in these words, then the additional timing unit must be measurable in the duration of the syllable. They concluded: “The results support our prediction that the presence of the excrescent schwa does not contribute to the duration of the syllable. Further, the results also support the more general model of coda timing, wherein coda timing is not systematically affected by the number of intervening vocalic gestures” (p. 637).

6.6. This section showed that the syllabification of pre-R and pre-L broken words causes difficulty, since the number of timing slots occupied by the vowel(s) in such words is disputed. This problem is on the interface of phonetics and phonology, therefore a good approach to the question requires the reconciliation of the acoustic measurement data and the theory of syllable structure.

7. Comparison to the development of Pre-R breaking

7.1. The development of pre-L breaking shows an obvious resemblance to that of pre-R breaking. Dobson (1968) writes the following about the appearance of pre-R breaking:

Either during the fifteenth century or at the beginning of the sixteenth century, there develops between certain vowels and diphthongs and a following /r/ a glide /ə/. This

glide is in effect given off by the /r/, for the reason that the ModE /r/ is closely allied to the vowel /ə/. (p. 760)

His findings provide ample evidence for the schwa off-glide after the following ME vowels: /i:/ as in *fier* ‘fire’, /y:/ as in *pure*, /ai/ as in *aier* ‘air’, and less evidence for breaking of the vowel in *flour*, (/ʌu/) or *door* (/u:/), although he claims that the paucity of evidence in this case is accidental (p. 761). It is easy to notice that all of these sounds are high, just like the sounds after which pre-L schwa insertion is possible (/i:, eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ/). Dobson notes: “This situation is what we should expect; to pass from these vowels and diphthongs to /r/ the tongue has to make a large adjustment which gives full opportunity for the development of a glide-sound” (p. 762).

The phenomenon of pre-L breaking is caused by the same articulatory reason: the transition from one sound to another, whose articulation is radically different from the preceding one, fosters the development of a glide. As Wells (1982) puts it: “This is a very natural kind of phonetic development. To pass from a ‘tense’ close or half-close vowel to the post-alveolar or retroflex posture requires considerable movement of the tongue. If this is somewhat slowed, an epenthetic glide readily develops as the tongue passes via the /ə/ area.” (p. 214) Interestingly enough, it seems that such change in the position of the tongue is not the only criterion for breaking, but vowel length also matters. Dobson writes: “After the ME short vowels there is no eModE evidence of a glide /ə/, and PresE does not show it (e.g. in *carry*, *berry*, *mirror*, *borrow*, and *hurry*)” (p. 762). The same is true for pre-L breaking and present day short vowels: speaker data (of LPD for example) shows that while *wheel* is frequently pronounced as /'wi:əl/, very few speakers (if any) would pronounce *will* as /wɪəl/. Then again, it is possible that the glide is pronounced in *will* as well, but it is hardly noticeable, since, just like the /ɪ/, it is very short.

8. Implications

It is reasonable to assume that the development of pre-L schwa insertion will take place much in the same way as pre-R breaking developed and became widespread some 400 or 500 years ago. This prediction implies two things: on the one hand, the mechanism will be obligatory (i.e. the schwa-ful pronunciation will prevail), on the other, there is a chance that even later in the future, the dark-L will be vocalized either as a schwa or as a round back vowel. (The recent practice of L-vocalization also points towards this possibility.) Of course, language change is unpredictable and cannot necessarily be explained by any logical or

physiological reason. However, there are certain patterns that repeatedly appear in many languages, and these patterns can serve as a reliable basis for predicting future changes. The developments triggered by co-articulation (such as diphthongization of certain sounds in a given environment) are fine examples of such patterns. It is easy to see that the influence of /l/ has similar and predictable effects in many languages, if one considers L-vocalization, which is undoubtedly happening again and again. (e.g. OF. *bel* has become F. *beau*, H. preconsonantal /l/ is frequently dropped, thus *zöld* is most often pronounced as *zõd*, there is no /l/ in E. *walk*, *talk*, *folk*, and *yolk* anymore, etc.) Wells (1982) makes a similar prediction:

L-vocalization has potentially massive implications for the reorganization of the vowel system, comparable in its magnitude to the effects of R-dropping. Just as it was R-dropping which assured the phonemic status for the diphthongs /ɪə, εə, ɔə, υə/, so L-vocalization offers the prospect of eventual phonemic status for new diphthongs such as /ɪʊ/ (*milk*), /εʊ/ (*shelf*), etc. (...) It seems likely that it will become entirely standard in English over the course of the next century. (p. 259)

9. Conclusion

The present paper has shown some of the problems connected to pre-L breaking from several points of view. It has demonstrated that uncertainties arise when trying to define the exact environment in which the mechanism applies, as well as when trying to determine the number of resulting syllables. The growing significance and prevalence of the phenomenon requires more research on these issues. The findings of this study have also shown that dictionaries seldom represent pre-L breaking, hence, a more ample comparison or further analysis of the mechanism is needed, which would probably result from collecting and analyzing speaker data, rather than studying dictionaries.

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