

Chinese-Australian Pronunciation versus Standard American Pronunciation:
A Wake-up Call for American Students

by Robert Oliphant, PhD*

My name is Bob and I've started to worry a lot about the Chinese-Australian pronunciation partnership. So for openers, let's raise an upscale question, namely, is there any American parent who doesn't worry about his or her children's pronunciation? Remember friends, it's Baby's first pronunciation word we cherish in our scrapbooks, not his or her first noun or swear word.

Let's start by identifying "spoken worldwide American dictionary English" as the larger entity that houses our mispronunciation worries and search for communicative clarity. Simply put, it's SWADE that now serves as a world target for the Chinese as much as it does for us, along with the British and other ABC-DEF tribes on this planet. So it's not surprising that the Chinese are right now using a computer-keyboard-friendly American pronunciation system developed by the Australians for international use. This means that the system uses current keyboard characters, not 19th century exotica.

More shockingly, SWADE means that American pronunciation representations are as a whole still quite antiquated, with a number of special squiggles and hiccups used to enrich our basic A-to-Z spelling letters. By way of contrast, it should be emphasized that the current Chinese-Australian spelling system (i.e., WordGenius(EIS) right now uses only America's A-to-Z letters in various combinations — clearly, consistently, and thriftily across the board.

The most explosive feature in Chinese-Australian spelling can be stated in one phrase "Spoken Worldwide American Dictionary English (SWADE)," as opposed to the written-reading forms of both traditional Chinese and American English. Traditional Chinese Literary plus American-spoken English for both Chinese and American speakers

— that’s the new-world order for almost every nation taking a swing at our international audience — pleasantly and productively.

What about American students? Sad to say, the United States is far less of a SWADE fan than are the Chinese today. Apart from those currently using a combination Chinese-Australian/ *Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, most American students now receive far less instruction in spoken American English, including debating, than forty years ago. Simply put, their Chinese competitors now outperform our own youngsters in high tech skills, not just basic SWADE.

Right now the current forces behind our nation’s slippage in speaking skills can be summed up in two phrases: (1) Chinese speech reform and (2) American weakness. Granted, despite their superb nationwide reading-writing system, the Chinese elected to select American Dictionary English for their Olympics in 2008 by way of recognizing that their hard ball scientists were individually bogged down in ninety different speaking dialects. Logically and productively, the remedy simply required nearly all of them (except the north) to master dictionary-authority American spoken English.

National power through foreign pronunciation, we might say, with more and more Chinese speakers of American English pushing economic prosperity and international status, including Chinese American-speaking PhDs crowding the weekly pages of *The Economist* year after year after year.

By way of contrast, let’s take a look at the current weakness of spoken American English. To parents, not just pedagogues, that weakness shows up most clearly in the awkward speech of younger Americans, especially on television or other public settings. Even more serious is our official school-emphasis upon non-American parental languages, along with the bold hostility today of many professional educators toward traditional citizenship building. China gobbling up American English? — the sentence is as grotesque as it is overstated. But its implicit threat is certainly there, enough so to urge attention by all supporters of traditional spoken American English for their nation’s power and their children’s future.

Cheerful and Practical Features. . . . As in China our American children still learn to read quickly and silently. But their local and family dialects represent a major obstacle to mastering reading aloud using spoken worldwide American dictionary English (internationally verbalized as SWADE). Practically considered, American parents and teachers can thriftily access the Eurofield Information Solutions (EIS) version of SWADE via a special computer-accessible edition (50.00\$) identified as “Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary WordGenius.”

As with the Chinese versions, SWADE presents a full-basket, unabridged dictionary of American English. Understandably, its value for most Chinese and American students lies in its computer-friendly insistence upon conventional alphabet letters as pronunciation elements in the building and comprehension of both words and sentences. Even more valuable is the explicit integrity of SWADE-based tests, given our traditional respect for spelling bees, crossword puzzles, poetry recitations, and forceful public speaking. Fewer apples for the teacher and more stand-up competition — what’s wrong with starting our fifth graders off with up front verbal achievement and self-respect?

But how are the Chinese themselves actually doing in mastering SWADE? To me our best measure is *The Economist*, especially its special-treatment quarterly features, such as *Technological Quarterly*, which as a unit comprises 21 special pages sandwiched between conventional pages 46 and 47 of the June 1, 2013 Issue. As might be expected these quarterly pullouts always cite relevant studies with the names of the scientist-authors and the names of their universities or other employment sources.

Given the legitimacy of this source, I believe the names of obviously non-English scientists employed by American scientific organizations offer a working picture of our non-American scientists producing legitimate science. Since the quarterly pullouts turn up every four issues, the variety of our surveys add more credence than a more arbitrarily chose source of evidence. Here are the names and locales of the scientists cited on pages 4–16 of *Technological Quarterly*, June 1 issue, 2013.

High Tech Authors. . . . p. 4. Chan-Meon Chung, Xonsei University, South Korea. . . . p. 5. Victor Gora, Cedar Sinai, Los Angeles. . . . p.5. William Fissel, David Humes University. . . . p.10 Uaia Saif, Punjab Government. . . . p. 10. Carl van Dyke, Oliver Wyman Consultancy. . . . p. 12. Gary Wolf, TUV Rhineland Rail Science p. 13 Valerio Recano D’Appolonia. . . . Dagma Blume Bombardier. . . . p. 14 Russell Cummings, California Polyscientific Stater Univerity. . . . 15. Clinton G Roth, University of Toronto. . . . p. 20 Tanseem Coudhury, Cornell University. . . . p. 21 John Starkovn, University of Virginia. . . . p. 21 Shwete Patel, Univeristy of Washington, Seattle.

As a cast of the net, this list has the virtue of a randomly chosen specific source paralleling similar sources in *The Economist*. It therefore justifies similar studies. As opposed to previous years, I submit that our planet is fortunate in moving away from the lexicographical whimsy of Henry Sweet and establishing SWADE as a functional international communicative tool.

A SHOW BIZ FINALE. . . . Regarding Sweet, incidentally, I suspect some readers have quickly recognized the link between Henry Sweet (a friend of George Bernard Shaw) and

Henry Higgins in the widely circulated Broadway and film musical, including the British actor Rex Harrison as Henry Higgins. . . . And why not? Are not antique dictionaries and labored speeches still fit for high comedy in England and the USA? Especially as a prelude to the international power of Spoken Worldwide American Dictionary English as a worldwide force for commerce, mutual prosperity, direct understanding, and international peace.

*Robert Oliphant is an overseas veteran of WW2 who later spent more than ten years on the road playing the piano. His best known book is *A Piano for Mrs. Cimino*, the film version won an international prize for its star Bette Davis. He lives in California and has a large family.