

Beware of charlatans on the Web!

Doing Phonetics or just thinking of doing it?

As anyone of sound mind can attest, the wonderful artistic science, which is called Phonetics, is not for everyone. In fact, it needs a bit of real cleverness, which is less and less easy to find, especially on the Web.

The fundamental thing, of course, is to be actually able to do phonetics, and to honestly evaluate oneself. The world is full of people who think they are good at something, while just the opposite is true. They just make a fool of themselves. No doubt, their poor mothers feel ashamed of their own brood. But, as we all know, nobody's perfect.

A friend who, from time time wastes some time visiting some of the too many ridiculous and harmful blogs that infest the Web, reported me that one of these freaks (who likes very much to show his stone-marten-like face) has decided to take himself to extremes. As a matter fact, he also likes to talk about what he does not know or does not understand. Well, this guy, Alex Rotatori, continuously waffles on his own exceptional mental abilities and intellectual capabilities in the field of phonetics, that he will certainly come to believe that himself, some day. The worse thing is that some other 'geniuses' may trust him!

Now, for some reason or other, this guy claims to have understood that what I do is all rubbish! On second thoughts, perhaps it is because I preferred not to answer him (when some months ago he wanted me to know how smart he was), instead of letting him know what I now feel obliged to say loud and clear: he'd better change what he does, or really learn how to do it, if he can.

In fact, in spite of what he says about himself, he shows to have no clear notion about the difference between phonetic and phonemic transcriptions, nor about neutral (or 'standard') and regional pronunciations; how could he know anything about 'international accents'? The international accents of English, as I clearly write in my books, can be heard from some CNN journalists, actors and singers, for instance on Radio Montecarlo. If people are not able to identify them, the problem is their own. For the time being, this guy is just able to make unhappy and untrue comments on symbols and terms (and other topics, too), without even reading (or, simply, understanding?) the whole books.

Our additional symbols are not 'special' or 'strange' sounds. They simply show more clearly sound nuances that the official *IPA* cannot show with a restricted number of symbols. For instance, [ɛ] indicates a vowel sound between [e] and [ɛ]. All three are clearly perceptible as different for most people. But, officially, for the very same [ɛ] vowel, some authors arbitrarily choose [e], while others choose [ɛ]!

Without wasting further time on our fellow's highly unprofessional behavior, let's close this note just saying that he writes 'Canepari has, however, published *English PronunciationS*, which to me looks like a very bad carbon copy of Wells's *Accents of English*' and indicates my site, where a great number of chapters are freely downloadable.

But, our 'clever' guy did not understand that what these two works have in common –objectively– is just their subject. However, given his way of 'working', he probably attributes to me his own habitual way of doing things. Even by simply looking at the Contents, he could have understood how deeper and wider my treatise is (all based on recordings), in comparison with the other outdated and incomplete work (mostly based on written sources

and people heard, here and there, from time to time).

Mine does not just tell something about accents, but actually describes 201 of them (including variants): 120 native, 61 bilingual, and 20 foreign ones, by means of very precise symbols. In fact, they present the normalized speech habits of several speakers, in a more realistic way than any piece of sample recordings could ever do, especially to people who are not used to 'phonetically listen' to languages.

Should our prentious, pompous, and superficial reader simply had taken the trouble to look at any of the chapters available there, he might realize how wrong and unfair he was – instead of spreading slanders.

An optimistic friend of mine –perhaps too optimistic, indeed– suggested me to ignore him once again, and letting him stew in his own juice. My friend thinks that people will soon understand how things actually are and be able to tell which is which. I'm much less optimistic than my friend, and this fact is too serious to be passed over. After all, we must think of the others, as well. Innocent dupes must be protected from charlatans.

Anyway, as it happens, our presumptuous and dangerous fellow, at last, dug his own grave himself. The rest is silence!