L6 : Letter-to-Sound Rules
Consonants

David Deterding

changes in pronunciation
• knight used to be pronounced [kni:t]

multiple origins
• words with ‘f’ come from Anglo-Saxon or Latin
  friend, field, food
  feudal, fibula, follicle
• words with ‘ph’ come from Greek
  photon, phonetic, phoenix

recent borrowings
• from Spanish
  junta, marijuana
• from French
  chic, genre, precis, debris
• from German
  schadenfreude, zeitgeist

words gradually get anglicised
do you have /dʒ/ or /ʒ/ at the end?
• village
• voyage
• garage
• massage
• collage
• entourage
spelling reform?
• whose pronunciation?
• loss of patterns

whose pronunciation?
• should we show the /r/s in car park?
• should we differentiate which from witch?

patterns
• 'c' is sometimes /k/ and sometime /s/
• this links the derivation of some words:
  electric ~ electricity
  ethnic ~ ethnicity
  atomic ~ atomicity

silent letters
• sometimes become pronounced in derivations
  sign ~ signature
  bomb ~ bombardment
  column ~ columnist

Five Principles
• Principle 5: 'th' is /θ/ or /ð/
• Principle 6: 'th' in content/function words
• Principle 7: /ŋ/ before /k/ and /g/
• Principle 8: /r/ only occurs before vowels
• Principle 9: 's' at the end of function words

Principle 5: the dental fricatives
• 'th' is pronounced as /θ/ or /ð/
  thousand, athlete
  therefore, brother
• exceptions
  thyme, Thames, Thai, Thailand
  Theresa, Thomas, Anthony
• 't' is never pronounced as /θ/ or /ð/
Principle 6: 'th' in function words
- 'th' at start of content words = /θ/
  - thumb, thought, theatre, three
- 'th' at start of function words = /ð/ 
  - this, that, then, therefore, though
- this only applied to the start of the word

Principle 7: /ŋ/ before /ɡ/ and /k/
- /n/ never occurs before /ɡ/ and /k/:
  - anger, angle, think, finger, thankful
- be careful: 'g' is sometimes /dʒ/; /n/ occurs here:
  - ranger, angel, revenge,

Principle 8: /r/ only occurs before vowels
- /r/ occurs in:
  - rain, ready, free, very, arrange, abroad
- /r/ does not occur in:
  - car, park, teacher, pardon, where, are
- linking /r/ can occur if next word begins with a vowel:
  - where is, are out

Principle 9: 's' as /z/ in function words
- 's' at the end of function words is /z/:
  - his, hers, is, was, has, these, those, as,
- exception: this /ðɪs/ 

Rhotic accents
- some accents (eg AmE) have /r/ wherever 'r' occurs
- these are called rhotic
- /r/ after a vowel is called "postvocalic /r/"
- SgE seems to be becoming more rhotic

Reading
- pronunciation of consonants: SoE 73 – 74
- for postvocalic /r/ in Singapore: TELISROP 69-70; ESPROC 12