

Re: French verb conjugation: "je harcele"? or "je harcelle"?

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*Source:* <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2008-03/msg01096.html>

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- *From:* mb <[azythos2@xxxxxxxxxx](mailto:azythos2@xxxxxxxxxx)>
  - *Date:* Fri, 28 Mar 2008 15:24:53 -0700 (PDT)
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On Mar 27, 2:36 pm, "Brian M. Scott" <[b.sc...@xxxxxxxxxx](mailto:b.sc...@xxxxxxxxxx)> wrote:

On Thu, 27 Mar 2008 16:54:38 -0400, Nathan Sanders  
<[nsand...@xxxxxxxxxx](mailto:nsand...@xxxxxxxxxx)> wrote in  
<[news:nsanders-9AFA39.16543827032008@xx](mailto:news:nsanders-9AFA39.16543827032008@xx)>  
in sci.lang:

In article <[jictb5-rjp...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:jictb5-rjp...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)>,  
Adam Funk <[a24...@xxxxxxxxxx](mailto:a24...@xxxxxxxxxx)> wrote:

On 2008-03-25, Nathan Sanders wrote:

I think the issue is that French schwa is not actually "that sound" (a mid central unrounded vowel), but rather a mid front round vowel, somewhat like [o] and [oe] (in fact, I \*think\* I recall that it can be analyzed as just an unstressed positional variant of the /o/ and /oe/ phonemes, but I'm not sure about this).

(Oops, looks like my slashed-o and oe-ligature didn't come through correctly.)

I looked in a few apparently IPA-using French-English and French dictionaries: they all use "that upside-down-e" for the vowel in "je" and the first vowel in "jeter", but they use ø (slashed o) for the one in "jeu". Are the dictionaries consistently misusing the IPA or idealizing French pronunciation, or am I wrong in thinking that "upside-down-e" means "schwa"?

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I presume the former. My (admittedly limited) understanding is that the pronunciations of <je> and <jeu> differ (only? primarily?) in stress, not in vowel quality.

The author of the 'French' section of the Handbook of the IPA describes it as a central vowel with some rounding and places it squarely at the schwa point of the quadrilateral. It's been a while since I last heard much French, but that or something just a little further forward sounds about right to me, and unstressed [ø] definitely sounds wrong. It's possible that barred-ø (X-SAMPA [8]) would be slightly more accurate, but in the absence of any other vowel in that range the more familiar [ə] doesn't seem unreasonable.

Attempts at detailed description of effective pronunciations (by a foreign ear, who hears what it was trained to...) are irrelevant. What counts is the phoneme range and how it is defined (eme range) in the source language.

It could sometimes be heard within the range of the phoneme "e muet", /oe-or-zero/ but that is certainly not central, and /@/ does not represent anything in the source language. It still remains highly unreasonable to force your own concepts on another language, where there is no correspondence.

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