5 Non-Vowel Phonology

5.1 [ti]/[tf] and [dj]/[dʒ] alternations

In the late eighteenth century, the level of interest and controversy in this area of the debate equals that in the early part of the century. On the one hand, that controversy again centred around whether -ion, -iate, -ium terminations comprise a single- or two-syllable structure and, on the other, the extent to which dental obstruents in tion, dion terminations and the like (as in items like condition, medium, invidious) could show a continuancy shift towards fricativization (Jespersen 1909–49: 333; Sheldon 1938: 342). Buchanan (1757: 13) unequivocally considers such terminations to be ‘pronounced as one syllable’ in items such as tertiai, partial, ancient, patient, which he respells as tershal, parshal, anshent and pashent: ‘the terminations sion and tion have generally the same sound, viz. shun or shon and pronounced as one syllable’. Johnston (1764: 34) makes a similar claim: ‘Unaccented terminations with ia, ie, and io, the i being Roman [i.e. to be pronounced: C], after d, l, n, and t proper, sound, ya, ye, yu, short’ and he respells items such as obedience, soldier, indies and filial as obeyence, soldyer, indyes and filyal, adding that ‘the d and y in these and such like words, sounding like soft g [his [dʒ]: C]’. Walker (1791: 33) refines the contextual factors: ‘In the very numerous termination ion, these vowels [io: C] are pronounced in one syllable like short u; but when they are preceded by a liquid, as in million, minion, clarion, &c. the two vowels are heard distinctly: the same may be observed when they are preceded by any of the other consonants, except s and t; as champion, scorpion, &c. where the vowels are heard separately: but the terminations, tion and sion, are pronounced in one syllable, and exactly like the verb shun’. However, Walker hints that some flexibility in these constraints may be allowed (1791: 16): ‘when the i precedes another vowel in an unaccented syllable, and is not preceded by any of the dentals: thus we hear iary in mil-ary, bil-ary, &c. pronounced as if written mil-yary, bil-yary, &c. Min-ion and pin-ion, as if written min-yon and pin-yon. In these words the i is so totally altered to y, that pronouncing the ia and io in separate syllables would be an error the most palpable; but where the other liquids or mutes precede the i in this situation, the coalition is not so necessary; for though the two latter
syllables of convivial, participial, &c. are extremely prone to unite into one, they may, however, be separated, provided the separation be not too distant’.

Under an extensive list of items containing three syllables, Smith (1795: 190) includes items such as abbreviate, alleviate, appreciate, immediate – with the i symbol italicized to show that it is ‘mute’; yet he adds in a footnote that ‘I have marked this, [alleviate: CJ] and such like words, as trisyllables, because I think the making of them words of four syllables, as Mr. Walker [who has a*l-le've-1-a'te: CJ], Dr. Kenrick, &c. have done, has a tendency to lead foreigners into a dawling pronunciation. The v coalesces perfectly well with the long sound of e’, suggesting, perhaps, a pronunciation like [alivjet]. But Smith’s evidence is confusing, and one has to wonder whether his typesetter is given to errors, for while he uses the mute-marking italic for i in items such as appreciate, depreciate, immediate, it is not so marked in accretion, concretion, secretion, cohesion; likewise we find italicized i in malicious, delicious, religious, but not in ambitious, propitious, factitious, addition, ambition, condition, tradition and many others. If, on the other hand, his transcriptions are accurate, we have evidence for extensive lexical diffusion for some kind of [i]/[i] alternation in items of this type. Tucker is very conservative on this issue, his system representing items like structure, nature as (structur), (netur); discretion, affection and profession as (discresiun), (afectesiun) and (profesiun), warming his readers (1773: 50) ‘not to give implicit faith to the old woman who taught him that “t” assumes the voice of “s” before “ion”’. Still, he repels allusion as (alujuin). However, Carter (1773: 30) gives respellings for items like surgeon, artificial, musician, vicious, etc. as sur-gon, artifish-al, musi-shan, vi-shus, noting the sociophonetic significance of the vowel loss in the final syllable: ‘We cannot find any instance in Poetry, where any of the Terminations above is esteemed more than one Syllable, except in Doggerel Rhyme, and I judge the Standard for proper Pronunciation is not to be taken from thence’. So too Ward (1758: 16) who under his discussion of ‘False and imperfect sounds corrected’ dictates that courteous, courtier and creature are to be correctly realised as curthshus, cortshur and cretshur, with Ash (1763: xxi) observing that the -tion termination sees the t ‘softened to sh, as station, in which the sound of the i is nearly, if not quite lost’. Not unlike this is the observation by Rudd (1755: 56) that ‘Ti takes the sound of Te, in pronouncing the words Celestial, called celesteal: unless we choose to consider the i (which I take to be a real fact) as having here it’s [sic] true sound, only in a faint, obscure way’. Bell (1769: 59–60) seems willing to accept a one or two-syllable interpretation of these types of terminations, although he seems to favour the latter. He renders, for instance, soc-ial as either so-shal or so-she-al; partial as par-shal or par-she-al, musician as musi-shan or mu-sish-sh-an, while commenting on the spelling of righteous he asserts: ‘The reason of e after t, and before ous is plain (since the ti before a vowel sounds like sh) for if i was written in these positions, the words would want a syllable, which is contrary to the customary pronunciation’.

Nares (1784: 129) describes the [ti]→[tʃ] innovation as a ‘pronunciation which has been creeping in upon us very perceptibly for some years past’, but even only a few years later, Coote (1788) is sceptical concerning the propriety of such developments: ‘T when it precedes ion … has the sound of s (unless the t follow s