Lexical Sets
from J.C. Wells’ Accents of English: Introduction Chapter 2.
Typical spellings taken from Reference Vowels & Lexical Sets in Accent Acquisition by Douglas N. Honorof.

1. KIT
   Typical Spellings: iC
   ship, bit, sick, stick, stiff, pith, wish, rib, kid, dig, bridge, give, his, dim, skin, sink, fill, milk, limp, hint, drink, lift, list, plinth, mix, slither, vision, spirit, dinner, silly, winter, sister, myth, symbol, rhythm, Syria,…
   woman, wolf, bosom, could, should, would, shouldn’t.

2. DRESS
   Typical Spellings: eC
   step, bet, neck, fetch, Jeff, mess, mesh, ebb, bed, egg, edge, rev, fez, hem, pen, bell, shelf, hemp, tent, theft, best, sex, next, effort, method, terror, tenor, jelly, centre/center, pester, threat, sweat, deaf, death, bread, dead, head, health, realm, meant, breast, ready, jealous, weather, treacherous,…
   any, many, Thames, friend, says, said, Leicester, bury.

3. TRAP
   Typical Spellings: aC
   tap, cat, back, batch, gaff, math(s), mass, dash, cab, mad, rag, badge, have, jazz, ham, man, hang, shall, scalp, lamp, ant, hand, thank, lapse, tax, arrow, carriage, banner, abbey, tassel, cancel, panda,…
   plaid.
   1 GenAm also with /ɛ/.

4. LOT
   Typical Spellings: oC
   stop, pot, sock, notch, Goth, rob, odd, cog, dodge, Tom, con, doll, solve, romp, font, cope, box, profit, possible, proverb, bother, resin, honest, ponder,…
   swan, quality, yacht, wasp, watch, squabble, waffle,…
   knowledge, acknowledge.

5. STRUT
   Typical Spellings: uC
   cup, cut, suck, much, sniff, fuss, rush, rub, bud, jug, budge, buzz, hum, run, lung, dull, pulse, bulge, punch, lump, hunt, trunk, butter, study, punish, number, mustn’t, Guthrie,…
   done, come, love, mother, stomach, monk, tongue, onion, money, front,…
   touch, enough, young, double, southern, country,…
   blood, flood.

6. FOOT
   Typical Spellings: uC, ooC, ouC
   put, puss, bush, full,
Typical Spellings: (a) tape, late, cake, safe, case,

11. FACE
mosquito, casino, visa, trio, ski, chic, …;

(b) wait, faith, plaice, aitch, raid, nail, main, faint, …;

1 as English place-names or surnames RP /ˈnɔːrəs/,
2 RP also with /ɔː/.

9. NURSE
Typical Spellings: ur, or, ir, er, earC
usurp, hurt, lurk, church, turf, purse
curb, curb, urge, curve, furze,
turn, curl, spur, occurred,
burnt, burst, murder, further,
shirt, irk, birch, birth, bird, dirge
firm, girl, gir, stirred, first, circus, virtue,…;
myrrh, myrtle, Byrne;
twerp, assert, jerk, perch, serf, berth, terse,
verb, erg, emerge, nerve,
term, stern, deter, err, preferred
certain, person, immersion, emergency, kernel
Earp, earth, dearth, hearse, rehearse, search
heard² ear, yearn, earl, pearl,
rehearsal, early, earnest;
wort, work, worth, word, worm, whorl,
worst, Worthing, worthy, whortleberry:
scurge, adjourn, courteous, journal, journalist,
journey;
attorney, colonel, liqueur, masseur, connoisseur.
¹ occasionally with the vowel of DRESS.
² occasionally with the vowel of FORCE.
³ also sometimes with the vowel of CURE.

10. FLEECE
Typical Spellings: (a) e, ee, eCe (b) ea, oeC (c) i
(a) creep, meet, seek, beech, reef, teeth,
seed, sleeve, seethe, cheese,
seem, green, feel,
see, tree, agree,
noodle, feeder, sweeten,…;
grebe, these, Peter, even,…;
shriek, brief, piece, believe, field,…;
calling, Keith, Sheila,…;
be, me, …
key, people;
(b) reap, meat, speak, teach, leaf, beneath, peace, leash,
bead, league, leave, breathe, please,
team, mean, deal,
sea, tea,
feast, reason, weasel, easy, Easter,…;
metre, equal, decont, legal, penal, complete, scene,…;
deceive, receive, seize,…;
Caesar, an(a)emic, Aesop,…;
phoenix, subpoena, f (o)etus,…;
quay;
(c) police, unique, machine, prestige, elite,
mosquito, casino, visa, trio, ski, chic, …;

11. FACE
Typical Spellings: (a) aCe; (b) aiC, ay, ey, eiC, aig; (c) ea
(a) tape, late, cake, safe, case,
babe, fade, vague, age, wave, bathe, craze,
name, mane, vale,
change, waste, …;
taper, bacon, nature, station, lady, raven, invasion,
April, …;
bass (in music), gauge, gaol/jail,
crepe, fete, bouquet;
(b) wait, faith, plaice, aitch, raid, nail, main, faint, …;
day, play, way, grey/blue, …;
rein, veil, beige, feint, …;
they, whey, obey, …;
weigh, weight, eight, straight, …;
reign, campaign, deign, …;

(c) great, steak, break, yea.

12. PALM
Typical Spellings: a memorize foreign word pronunciations
(a) calm, balm, psalm, alms, father,
bra, ma, pa, mamma, pappa, aha,
ah, ha⁰(h), blah, hurrah;
(b) bah, Bath, facade, couvade, roulade, raj, taj,
salaam, Brahms, Kahn, Afrikaans, kraal, Transvaal, Taj
Mahal,
spa, Shah, Pooh-Bah, Armagh, schwa,
cantata, inamorato, legato, sonata, staccato, pizzicato,
Lusaka, Karachi, mafia;
Dada, bravado, incommunicado, Mahdi, Mikado,
laager, lager,
Zhivago, (maha)raja, kava, guava, Java, Swazi,
Dali, Mali, Guatemala, Somali(a),
lama, llama, Yokohama, swami, Brahmin, guano, piano
('softly'), marijuana, iguana, Botswana, (maha)rami,
ha-ha, Malawi, Bahai, Sumatra, candelabra.
¹ GenAm also with /ɔː/.
² RP also with /æ/.
³ also with other vowels.

12b. PALM/BATH
Typical Spellings: a memorize foreign word pronunciations
boa, bah,
Koran, khlan, Pakistan, Shan, chorale, rationale, locale,
khaki, pasha, Nazi,
Colorado, enchilada, Nevada, aubade, lave, palaver,
plaza,
almond, drama, pajama/pyjama, panorama,
Ghana, nirvana, sultana, soprano, piranha, Bali, finale.

13. THOUGHT
Typical Spellings: auC, outh, aw, al, aik;
(b) aik (other than 'k') – in England merges with
THOUGHT or LOT depending on generation or region
(a) taught, caught, Maugham, Vaughan, Waugh,
nougy, haughty, slaughter, daughter,
ought, bought, wrought, brought, fought, nought,
sought,
auty, auk, debauch, sauce,
applaud, cause, faun, haur, Paul,
autumn, author, taunt, laundry, gauntlet,…;
gawp, hawk, crawl, shard, awn, yawn,
Jaw, law, saw, draw, awe,…;
chalk, talk, wail, stalk, caulk,
all, fall, small, wall, appal, instal, Raleigh,…;
bald, water, broad;
(b) halt, salt, malt, false,
alter, also, alderman, walrus,…
18. MOUTH
Typical Spellings: ouC, ow
out, pouch, south, house,
loud, rouge, mouth v., rouse,
noun, foul, thou,
count, round, pronounce, oyst,
flour, sour, trousers, mountain, council, boundary,...;
crowd, browse, owl, down, cow, allow,
dowry, flower, coward, towel, powder,...;
bough, plough/plow, doughty,...;
MacLeod.

19. NEAR
Typical Spellings: (a; c) eer, ere, eer, ear; erV; (b) ierC,
eirC
(a) beer, deer, career,...;
here, mere, sincere, interfere,...;
bier, pier, cashier,...;
weir;
fear, ear, appear, yearling,...;
(b) fierce, pierce
weird, Deirdre
beard;
(c) serious, mysterious, period, serum, diphtheria,
hero,...

eerie, peerage, Madeira, dreary, weary.

19b. NEAR+
idea, Korea, diarrh (o) ea, Galatea,...;
European, Jacobean, Crimean,...
ratafia, Maria, Sophia,...;
museum, Colosseum, Te Deum,...
real, ideal.

'GenAm also /'hri:/.
several of these words also have RP variants with /iə/.
20. SQUARE
Typical Spellings: (a; b) ar#; arC; (c) ar
(a) far, star, bar,...;
bazaar, Saar;
(b) sharp, part, bark, arch, scarf, farce, harsh,
scarf, card, large, carve, parse,
farm, barn, snarl, Charles,
party, market, marvellous,...;
heart, hearken, hearth;
sergeant;
aardvark;
(c) sari, Bari, safari, cascara, curare, Mata Hari¹, arza¹
scenario¹, Sahara¹, tiara¹.
¹GenAm also /'ær - eər/.
22. NORTH
Typical Spellings: (a) or#; ar#: (b; c) orC, uar; aur
(a) or, for, nor, Thor;
war;
(b) Thorpe, assort, cayont, sortant, sortant, sortant, sortant, resort, re-
tort, short, snort, tort, cork, fork, stork, torque, York,
schorch, torch, morph, gorse, horse, remorse,
orb, absorb, accord, chord, cord, lord, record, George,
gorge,
corn, form, reform, storm, adorn, born, corn, horn,
morn, porn, scorn, thorn, corn, corpse,
porpoise, torpid, torpor, fortify, fortunate, fortune, important,1
corporal, importunate, mortal, mortar,
shorten, tortoise, orchestra, orchid, Dorking, torture,
forfeit, morpheme, morphia, morphilne, orthodox,
torso,
orbit, order, border, ordinary, organ, organism,
organize, Morgan,
dormer, Mormon, normal, ornament, corner, forward,
fortress;
quart, quarter,2 quartz, sword, warm, swarthy, warlike,
ward, warden, wardrobe, warlock, warm, warmth,
warn, warp, Warsaw, wart;
(c) aura, aural, Laura, Taurus.
1 in accents other than GenAm usually a FORCE word.
2 GenAm also /kwotər/.

23. FORCE
Typical Spellings: (a, bi, ci) ore, oar#, oor#, our#, ourC
(bii) oarC, ourC
(a) ore, adore, afore, before, bore, chore, core, creare,
deplore, explore, fore, galore, goren, ignore, implore,
more, one, pore, restore, score, shore, snore, sore, store,
swore, tore, whore, wore, yore
boar, hoar, oar, roar, soar;
floor, door;
four, pour;
(b) deport, export, fort, import, port, report, sport,
support,
pork, porch, forth, divorce,
afford, ford, horde, sword, forge,
borne, shorn, sworn, torn, worn,
portent, porter, portrait, proportion, Borneo;
(bii) coarse, hoarse, board, hoard, boarder;
court, fourth, course, resource, source, mourn,1
courtier,
mourning;3

(c) oral, adorable, angora, aurora, borax, boron, choral,
Dora, fedora, flora, floral, glory, gory, moron,
Norath, porous, story, thorax, torus, Tory,
censorious, euphoria, gloria, glorious, Gregorian, his-
torian, laborious, memorial, meritorious, mora-
torium, notorious, pictorial, pretorian, stentorian,
thorium, uxorious, Victoria(n), other words in
-orial,
hoary, uproarious.
1also sometimes with RP /uə/, GenAm /ur/.

24. CURE
Typical Spellings: (ai, bi, ci) oor#, our#, ourC, oori, ouri,
(aii, cii) ure, urV, eur
(ai) boor, moor, Moor, poor, pooper;
amour, dour,1 tour, your

(aii) abjure, adjure, allure, assure, conjure, demure,
endure;
ensure, immune, insure, inure, lure, McClure, manure,
mature, obscure, procure, pure, secure, sure
(b) bourse, gourd, Bourbon,2 bourgeois,3 gourmand,
gourmet,
tournament,2 tourney,2 tourmiquet;2
(ci) boorish, houri, tourism, tourist
(cii) Urall, angostura, assurance, bravura, bureau,5
c(a)esura,
Huron, incurable, insurance, mural, plural, rural,
Truro,
anthurium, centurion, curious, furious, injurious, luxu-
rious, Muriel, penurious, spurious, Uriel,
curate, during, furry, futurity, Jury, lurid, maturity,
obscurity, purify, purity, security, sulfuric/sulfuric, tel-
lurium, thurible;
Europe, neural, neuron/neurone, pleurisy.
1GenAm also /daur/.
2 GenAm also with NURSE vowel.
3alternatively stressed on the final syllable.

25. happy
Typical Spellings: (a) y#, i#, ie# (b) ee#, ey#, ea#
(a) copy, city, ink, baby, ready, foggy,
fluffy, heavy, breathy, fussy, busy, fishy,
tetchy, edgy, gloomy, penny, sorry, lily,
canopy, vanity, strategy, economy,...
campi, spaghetti, khaki, corgi, Nazi,
taxi, hibachi, salami, macaroni, sari, chilli,...
sortie, talkie, birdie, boogie, movie,
lassie, budgie, stymie, pasture, calorie,...
(b) committee, coffee;
hockey, abbey, covey, curtsy, jersey,
money, comfrey, valley,...;
Chelsea, Swansea.

26. letter
Typical Spellings: er#, or#, o(u)r#, yr#, ure#
paper, better, whisper, rubber, order, tiger,
offer, cover, leather, dress, cruiser,
usher, teacher, soldier, customer, liner,
score, dealer, tower,...
metre, centre, acre, fibre/fiber, ogre,...;
calendar, sugar, polar, liar,...;
stupor, indicator, anchor, Tudor, camphor, survivor,
author, professor, razor, major, tremor,
donor, error, pallor,...;
succo(u)r, harbo(u)r, odo(u)r, vigo(u)r,
flavo(u)r, armo(u)r, humo(u)r, colo(u)r,...;
martyr, satyr, zeppher ;
figure, pressure, measure, feature, perjure, tenure,
failure,...;

27. CommA
Typical Spellings: a#, ia# - All non-native borrowings:
Middle English had no final vowel corresponding to schiva.
catalpa, quota, vodka, am(o)eba, panda, saga,
sota, saliva, Bertha, balsa, visa, acacia,
dementia, neuralgia, drama, arena, opera,
Cinderella, phobia,...