BOOK REVIEW


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The editors of this volume, a collection of eighteen papers on various topics in the history of phonetic ideas and of writing systems, had two purposes in undertaking their enterprise: to do honor to David Abercrombie on the related occasions of his seventieth birthday and retirement from the chair of phonetics at the University of Edinburgh, and to make a beginning toward a systematic history of phonetics, one of the enduring interests of the distinguished scholar being saluted. As the editors note, this book is nothing like a complete or integrated history of the field, or even a first approximation to one; with nineteen authors from six countries and the inevitable diversity that multiple and independent authorship entails, this was not to be expected. It does, the editors say, include discussion of those matters that should be important components of any proper history. The papers are arranged into six "parts," three of which deal with the development of phonetic ideas (basic concepts, processes, voice quality, and voice dynamics), one on "national contributions," one on the achievements of individual scholars, and one on writing systems.

The contributions included in the first three parts of the book range over the following topics: feature classification (V. A. Fromkin and P. Ladefoged), the phonetics-phonology distinction of Kruszewski and the Kazan' School (K. H. Albow), the articulatory versus acoustic-auditory description of vowels (J. C. Catford), western traditions in the description of nasals (J. A. Kemp), early experimental studies of coarticulation (W. J. Hardcastle), consonantal rounding in British English (G. Brown), and the auditory analysis of voice quality (J. Laver) and prosody (M. Sumera). Of these papers, all but three are of interest largely as intended, that is, as history. The essays by Catford, Hardcastle, and Brown, while historically-oriented, might also engage the attention of an historically-minded contemporary speech researcher. Catford makes a spirited yet judicious defense of the traditional vowel-height model of vowel classification developed by A. M. Bell and elaborated by Henry Sweet and Daniel Jones. Hardecastle's paper reminds us that the phenomenon of coarticulation, currently very much under scrutiny, is by no means a recent discovery, and that the view of speech as a

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sequence of static positions or sounds linked by glides has been explicitly recognized as fallacious for at least a century. Brown discusses the relatively neglected feature of lip rounding as a property of British English consonants, casts doubt on historical inferences based on the absence of reference to it in earlier descriptions of the language, and suggests that the so-called rounded vowels are less reliably marked by rounding than are certain of the consonants.

Two papers deal with the contributions of individual phoneticians. One is by R. Thelwell, who describes the career of a relative, John Thelwell, a speech therapist and lecturer on "elocutionary science" in London during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The other is a brief autobiographical sketch by K. L. Pike that describes the path he followed in his development as a phonetician; naturally enough, it does not begin to do justice to the contributions that make him the most accomplished phonetician among the American linguists of this and the last four decades.

W. S. Allen, who contributed significantly to our historical perspective with his study of the phonetics of ancient India, here gives an account of the phonetic thought of the ancient Greeks, and presents evidence to support his view that in phonetic analysis they were not up to the Indians, even if they elaborated an alphabet that he judges to be more useful a tool for phonetic analysis than the Devanagari. Two papers, by M. A. K. Halliday and by N-C. T. Chang, are densely packed with information on the development of phonetic and phonological thought in China. Both papers are rich in leads for those interested in pursuing the relation between phonetic theory and orthography in the Chinese context. Developments in phonetics in nineteenth-century Germany are, of course, much nearer home (hardly any more "national" than those in Britain), and K. Kohler goes well beyond a historical accounting to conduct a forceful polemic against what he deplores as the unfortunate separation of "linguistic phonetics" from phonetics in its physical, physiological, and psychological aspects, a development for which he holds Sievers mainly responsible. He argues vigorously against the separation of phonology from phonetics, which he terms an "ominous schism," and instead, champions the idea of an independent discipline of "speech science" freed of any "unfortunate" dependence on linguistics and open to all the disciplines that have something to contribute to the study of speech in all its aspects.

The last four papers are concerned with writing systems that can be said to represent, more or less imperfectly, the phonetic properties of speech. Two of them are devoted to the history of efforts to fit systems borrowed from one linguistic setting to another rather different one. A revision of a study by Abercrombie himself describes attempts over the past four centuries to repair the perceived deficiencies of the Latin (or Roman) alphabet as a vehicle for English, while J. Maw deals with the refashioning by scholars and others of the Arabic and Latin orthographies as devices for representing Swahili. Both papers go into detail in recording the many attempts at script "reform," but we can only infer from the extent to which the various changes proposed gained general acceptance just how widespread was dissatisfaction with the orthographical status quo. A paper by J. Kelly and one by M. K. C. MacMahon recount the history of the development of the various "shorthands" invented and promoted by a number of phoneticians during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: A. J. Ellis, I. Pitman, A. M. Bell, and Henry Sweet. These systems were, for the most part, intended to serve as auxiliaries to the standard orthography, for scientific and secretarial purposes. The modern
reader may be surprised to learn how large a role phoneticians played in a matter that aroused a good deal of public interest and contention at the time; the recent popularity of Shaw's *Pygmalion* brought about no revival of interest in the means by which Professor Higgins captured on paper the details of Liza's speech patterns.

A bibliography of David Abercrombie's published works, prepared by Elizabeth Uldall, a list of the names of persons and institutions whose subscriptions aided its publication, and indices of personal names and subjects complete the book. The editors and publisher are to be congratulated for the aesthetically pleasing format and remarkably error-free printing of an extremely demanding text.

Towards a *history of phonetics* succeeds in making a case for the serious study of the development of ideas about the nature of speech as an important aspect of the history of linguistics. Not that anyone would contend that the history of phonetic thought is unworthy of scholarly attention, but the contributors to this volume demonstrate that a wealth of readily accessible materials awaits the historian who can organize into a lucid picture men's opinions, different over time and place and cultures, regarding the nature of that uniquely human product, the act of speech.