

To My Parents and Grandparents

FOREWORD

"This book deals with *phonology*, the study of the sound systems of language." So begins this book which, true to its subtitle, is concerned with both phonological theory and descriptive analysis, recognizing and demonstrating that every phonological analysis is dependent on theory.

The author's main concern is to reveal "how speech sounds *structure* and *function*" in the languages of the world. All phonological theories have this as their goal; alternative theories are critically examined in reference to this goal. The basic tenets of the theory of generative phonology as proposed by Chomsky and Halle are set against the background of earlier phonologists like Trubetzkoy, Martinet, Jakobson, Sapir, Pike, and Firth. The book thus illuminates the continuity and the breaks between past and present in phonological theory, providing the reader with the theoretical and practical background necessary to understand and analyze phonological phenomena.

The book's primary aim is to serve as a textbook for students of linguistics, but it is more than a textbook. The author objectively assesses and summarizes what has been learned through the ages about the sound systems of human language and also reveals some of the gaps in our knowledge. This is not a book written by someone who has learned his phonology from books; it is written by a working phonologist who has himself struggled with and contributed to phonological theory and analysis. The modifications in current phonological theory which he proposes reflect the author's intimate knowledge of the many languages he has studied. For this reason, the book, while introductory in style and exposition and completely understandable by the novice, will also be of interest to the advanced student and working phonologist.

Little previous knowledge of phonology is assumed; anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of phonetics will have no difficulty. The tables in the appendixes define all the symbols used; both IPA charts of phonetic symbols and distinctive feature matrices are provided.

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The book is comprehensive and detailed. Traditional and current concepts and technical terms, such as distinctiveness, redundancy, complementary distribution, neutralization, assimilation, dissimilation, phonetic similarity, free variation, alternation, archiphoneme, segmental and sequential constraints, conjunctive and disjunctive ordering, alpha variables, are carefully explained and exemplified by language data drawn from more than seventy languages from Akan to Zulu.

Phonology is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the basic distinction between phonetics and phonology, the notion of levels of representation, and the kinds of evidence which support theoretical hypotheses and analyses. Chapter 2 deals with the basic building blocks of phonology—distinctive features—and provides an historical view of the development of distinctive feature theory. Binary and multivalued features are discussed, as are the articulatory and acoustic correlates of universal phonetic features. Chapter 3 covers alternative approaches to phonological analyses and the nature of the “phoneme.” The abstractness of phonological representation is considered. In Chapter 4 the formal representation of phonological analysis is presented. The notion of simplicity is discussed in relation to the formal devices and ordering relations between phonological rules that have been proposed in the literature. In this chapter, some recent proposals for modifications of generative theory—such as those dealing with global rules and derivational constraints—are considered. Chapter 5 deals with the concept of phonological naturalness—of classes of sounds, phonological systems, and rules. The development of the theory of “markedness” is discussed in terms of both synchronic and diachronic “natural” systems and rules.

The first five chapters thus present a comprehensive view of segmental phonology. Chapter 6, a special feature of the book, discusses suprasegmental phenomena. Stress and tone, the kinds of units to which they should be assigned, and the rules that affect them are considered. The syllable, the morpheme, and the word as phonological units are examined, and the concept of the transformational cycle is evaluated.

No description of the contents of this book, however, can suggest the exciting discoveries about the nature of sound systems that await the reader.

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PREFACE

When faced with the task of teaching an introductory course in phonology, a linguist must decide which of two strategies to follow. First, one may choose to devote the course to one particular theory of phonology, the theory that one personally esteems to be the most adequate—or possibly the “right” approach to the field. Or, the linguist may choose to reflect a wider range of views on the nature of sound systems, a subject that has inspired a number of different theoretical schools of thought.

In writing *Phonology*, my aim has been to present what I feel to be the major advances in the study of phonology over the past several decades. Though I cannot claim to have given each theorist the number of pages deserved, I have attempted to provide a historical perspective on the evolution of phonological study. By incorporating many of the contributions of earlier scholars, as well as discussions of some currently debated issues, I hope I have produced an introduction to the field that is broad enough to satisfy phonologists of different theoretical persuasions.

Because of the rapidly changing scope of phonology and because of the diversity of opinions held about its nature, it is impossible to satisfy all teachers of phonology with one book. In addition, some phonologists may not agree with the relative weight I have given various topics. Most professors would probably agree that it is good to expose students to different points of view. While some may prefer to make “comparative phonological theory” a topic for graduate seminars, devoting more elementary courses to one view of phonology, I have chosen to give the beginning student a more general picture. This should, I hope, enable students to approach the phonological literature (much of which is cited in the text) and make critical judgments on their own. The risk, of course, is that students may be discouraged by the fact that, as in other areas of linguistics, most of the answers are yet to be found.

The last fifty years have taught us a lot about the way sound systems work—and it is expected that the next fifty years will be at least as ex-

citing. I hope that this introductory overview of phonology will contribute to the development of the science.

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