Studies in the Pronunciation of English

A COMMEMORATIVE VOLUME IN HONOUR OF A.C. GIMSON

Edited by Susan Ramsaran

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Section V Phonostylistics

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A.C. Gimson and the pronunciation of English

SUSAN RAMSARAN

When I was first asked to edit a volume in memory of Professor A.C. Gimson, the main problem was deciding how best to circumscribe its scope. A.C. Gimson's far-reaching influence in the field of phonetics and the high personal regard in which he was held world-wide combined to make the choice of contributors almost impossible. So many people would have liked to be associated with such a memorial that I should begin with an apology for the omissions.

It seemed to me that the volume would offer the greatest academic contribution if it were strictly limited to one area of phonetics, thus presenting a coherent whole. I was, therefore, happy to accept Professor Sir Randolph Quirk's suggestion (though it unfortunately precludes a paper from him) that the field (and the title) should be *Studies in the Pronunciation of English.* This appropriately echoes A.C. Gimson's major works in the field in which he was most distinguished, *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English* and the *English Pronouncing Dictionary* which are established as basic tools of the phonetician, their influence being evident in many of the papers collected here.

Reluctantly, I have excluded papers dealing with acoustic and experimental matters although this decision has prevented the inclusion of contributions from a number of A.C. Gimson's colleagues. The same applies to the area of clinical phonology in which he took a positive interest and where, on the Council of the College of Speech Therapists, he played an important part in the establishment of speech therapy as an all-graduate profession. Whilst the papers are limited in their coverage to English, it is to be hoped that in their close attention to phonetic detail they are worthy of the late President of the International Phonetic Association. The transcriptions here use IPA symbols for phonetic detail and Gimson's phonemic system for the representation of English; where occasional inconsistencies arise between chapters, there are reasons for these (for instance, the need in Chapter 10 to separate length from tenseness and to represent differing levels of abstraction).

A.C. Gimson's pre-eminence in the field of English phonetics does not

need reiterating. I clearly remember my sense of awe when twenty years ago this authority addressed me in person. Along with everyone else who came into contact with him, I found that the awe turned to affection as I discovered that he was unfailingly kind, approachable and humorous, in short humane. He had a very genuine concern for the well-being of his students and colleagues as is testified to by the comments which I received when I sent out invitations to contribute to this volume.

Invitations were sent to Professor Gimson's colleagues (throughout the wide-ranging *famille phonétique*), his past research students and other scholars whom I knew to be working in the field of English pronunciation. In keeping, I believe, with his academic liberalism, I invited writers to offer papers on topics of their choice. I hope that the final selection from these (nearly all of which were specially written for this volume) presents a serious and coherent contribution to the field.

Section I deals with prosody, beginning with Cruttenden's interesting attempt (in Chapter 2) to tackle the much-debated problem of nucleus placement. In the following paper (Chapter 3), Maidment argues that tone choice as well as nucleus placement signals focus — which itself is a gradient feature. The discussion develops with Gussenhoven's tonal association domains (Chapter 4). A conservative view of phonology might lead one to see this chapter as something of an anomaly in the volume since Gimson was not noted for his expertise in metrical phonology or other recent theories. Naïvely one might have believed him when he said to younger colleagues, 'I don't understand this modern theory', but one would soon realise from his subsequent questions that he *did*. (He held to his rather more 'concrete' approach as having practical advantages.) Since intonation is an area where the work on English is progressing with particular rapidity, it is certainly appropriate to include here all kinds of new approaches; Baldwin's paper (Chapter 6), indeed, brings together comments on rhythm formulated between the years 1913 and 1984. Some of these approaches demonstrate that there is a place for speculation, as House shows in her paper (Chapter 5) on an aspect of the interrelation between intonation and pragmatics. At the same time, trained in the Gimson tradition, she relates her discussion to some real recorded speech elicited under test conditions.

If there is one thing that all the papers of this volume have in common, it is the refusal to base argument entirely on introspection and invented examples. We do not aim at a descriptive catalogue of trivial facts, but share with (or derive from) Gimson a firm belief that to be well founded a theory must be based on 'hard' verifiable data. Some of these papers provide information which may have useful applications (see especially Section IV) or data on which subsequent theories may be built. So it is, that the papers on phonology in Section II are firmly data-based.

The first of these, by Davidsen-Nielsen (Chapter 7), represents

Gimson's interest in historical phonology, though having considerable synchronic relevance to phonological theory. Moulton's paper on American vowel systems (Chapter 11) also has a historical orientation and it is interesting to have contributions from Gimson's contemporaries, Moulton and Martinet (Chapter 13), who can add first-hand experience of sound-change over a lifetime to scholarly insight. Representing Gimson's lexicographical work, Bronstein's paper (Chapter 12) provides a far-ranging survey of dictionary treatments of pronunciation and the types of phonological analyses implicit in these. The other three papers in this section make use of evidence from a number of accents to develop their arguments concerning phonological topics. Wells (Chapter 8) shows how a morphophonological approach to syllabification can account for apparently unconnected phonetic facts. Within the framework of lexical phonology, Harris (Chapter 9) demonstrates how the application of phonological rules at different levels in the derivation can explain allophonic variants in accents of English on both sides of the Atlantic, looking in detail at examples from Ireland, Scotland and England. Lindsey (Chapter 10) concentrates on England and the USA, presenting loanword evidence to support his thesis that underlyingly British English retains a long/short distinction whilst American English displays a tense/lax distinction.

Discussion in the following papers is narrowed down to deal with specific accents of English, the whole of Section III being devoted to RP — although Windsor Lewis (Chapter 14) might not be altogether *happ*Y with this designation as he records and classifies a contemporary change in what he calls 'General British'. Martinet's paper (Chapter 13) raises questions concerning the dynamics of languages, whilst the Ashbys' paper (Chapter 15) presents a phonotactic analysis that questions some past assumptions; by taking into account morphology and the concept of hierarchy with respect to plosive epenthesis, they offer useful generalisations about the combinatory possibilities of RP phonemes. (See also Chapter 28.) It will be seen, then, that there is implicit agreement between these authors and several of those in Section II as to the necessity for drawing on information from different levels of linguistic analysis to account for varied allophonic and phonemic data. In the next chapter (16), I examine something of the concept and history of RP and having attempted to demonstrate that it is a valid concept, I examine some of the current trends within the accent. This description is followed (Chapter 17) by a substantial survey of evidence concerning the current status of RP, Giles, Coupland, Henwood, Harriman and Coupland employing objective sociolinguistic methods to discover the evaluative attitudes of listeners hearing RP spoken by groups of people of different ages. Attitudes of *non*-native speakers of English may differ from those of Giles's judges as is shown by Ufomata (Chapter 18) whose paper broadens the discussion to consider the place of RP in the teaching of English as a foreign language with special reference to Nigeria.

Section IV follows naturally on from this as it deals with other accents of English, several of them being those of non-native speakers of English. In the case of India, English has a long tradition as a widely spoken second language, and Bansal (Chapter 19) provides a comprehensive account of some prosodic as well as segmental features of educated Indian English. Pongweni's paper (Chapter 20) is slightly different from some of the others in that he gives a detailed explanation of the mother-tongue (Shona) influences on the pronunciation of English in Zimbabwe. Whilst he concentrates on the pronunciation of vowels, Lanham (Chapter 21) concerns himself with stress and intonation in the speech of some black South Africans. For those readers particularly interested in the prosodic topics of this volume, it should be noted that there are important points in this paper which complement the theoretical orientation of the papers in Section I. It may be of interest, too, to compare Lanham's somewhat controversial view of 'right' intonation with some of Baldwin's comments in Chapter 6. The interesting variety of influences on English in different parts of the world is further seen as we move on from English as a *second* language to English as *foreign* language with Martens's paper (Chapter 22) on a variety of German English pronunciation. These last four papers may suggest that RP is a target accent in some sense. The question has already been raised as to what sort of 'standard' may be the most suitable target for the pronunciation of English as a second language. Gimson himself (1978) discussed the setting up of a special pronunciation model for TEFL purposes. Ufomata (in Chapter 18) makes a similar plea and we have here, in these chapters (18-22 inclusive), a useful gathering together of data from five countries (three continents) illustrating the various effects of local languages on the pronunciation of English. It may be left to the reader to observe what features they share.

The remaining two papers in this section are concerned with aspects of native-speaker pronunciation. Lass (Chapter 23) gives a very detailed account of South African English, including the treatment of Afrikaans loanwords. Local, meanwhile (in Chapter 24), dealing with urban Tyneside speech, argues the need for a polysystemic treatment of vowel quality phenomena as he demonstrates the interrelation between rhythm and resonance.

The final part of this book, Section V, contains an interesting variety of papers within the wide field of phonostylistics. Nolan and Kerswill (Chapter 25) present data (obtained in an ingeniously controlled way) exhibiting connected speech processes which may fruitfully be examined by means of sociolinguistic and experimental techniques in conjunction with each other to shed light on various areas of linguistic study. Bald (Chapter 26) presents some detailed data to substantiate his claim that a single process of phonological reduction can account for a gradation of elision, frication and devoicing in connected speech. The justifiably anomalous

paper by Laver, McAllister and McAllister (Chapter 27) leads on to a highly topical area of applied phonetics and at the same time makes one aware of the remarkably complex processing operations of which the human speaker is capable. Wales's exploration of phonotactics (Chapter 28) opens up a completely different area of the application of phonological knowledge. This paper offers an approach quite unlike that of the Ashbys (in Chapter 15) as it discusses neologism and literary creativity in the light of phonotactic possibilities.

The volume ends with a complete References section of works referred to by all the contributors. This in itself should provide a useful source of up-to-date information on studies in the pronunciation of English. It is to be hoped that this volume in all its variety nevertheless exhibits a certain coherence. A.C. Gimson's influence is, I think, apparent even where contributors disagree with him. He encouraged discussion and, as may be seen here, stimulated not only those who were in personal contact with him but also those who knew him only through his writing. He approved of judicious eclecticism and so I hope that this volume is apposite in that it avoids slavishly following any one theoretical approach. There is, I think, a suitable emphasis on meticulous description. At the same time, several contributors indicate further theoretical implications of their papers whilst others suggest research work that could be fruitfully undertaken. I hope, therefore, that readers find this a stimulating volume, appropriate to the memory of A.C. Gimson.

Section I

Prosody

2

Nucleus placement and three classes of exception

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The technical terms 'intonation group' and 'nucleus' are terms which are used in most systems and descriptions of intonation and/or sentence-stress. For the purposes of this article I will assume their relevance and validity and will not attempt any sort of strict definition, merely some exemplification, as in (1):

(1) Mr WHITE / wants to KNOW / whether you would welcome an end to the MYTH / that private ENTerprise / is always efFIcient / and public OWnership / means INefficiency

My term 'intonation group' (boundaries whereof are indicated by / in the above example) appears in various systems and descriptions under a variety of alternative labels: intonational phrase, phonological clause, phonological phrase, tone unit, tone group, sense group, word group or breath group. Similarly the term 'nucleus' (marked by capitals in the above capital) is alternatively labelled as tonic, primary stress, or primary accent.

I propose to survey in this article the present state of our knowledge regarding where the nucleus is placed in intonation groups; this in practice amounts to asking which word receives the nucleus in an intonation group, since, given that we know which word is involved, which syllable receives the nucleus within that word is governed (at least in the vast majority of cases) by rules of word stress. Thus, returning to our example above, the words *enterprise* and *efficient* receive nuclei, rules of word stress determining the placement of the nucleus on the first syllable of *enterprise* and the second syllable of *efficient.*

A common way of approaching the description of nucleus placement in intonation groups has been to divide intonation groups into those which have neutral or unmarked nucleus placement and those which have non-neutral or marked nucleus placement. There has been much argumentation about what exactly it means to say that nucleus placement in an intonation group is neutral. This is a debate in which I do not wish to get embroiled here. I will merely assume that a neutral nucleus placement is one in which the information comes 'out of the blue', either as the opening of a new

topic, or in response to a question like 'What happened?' or some variant of this like 'What's all the fuss about?' or 'What's on tomorrow?' (Past, present or future time may be involved.) Or, putting it another way, it is one which does not involve special nucleus placement for contrast or the deaccenting of previously mentioned information. A common approach to nucleus placement has been to specify rules for neutral nucleus placement and then to show how any non-neutral nucleus placement deviates from the norm established for the neutral cases. What I will examine here is the validity of the various rules put forward for neutral nucleus placement.

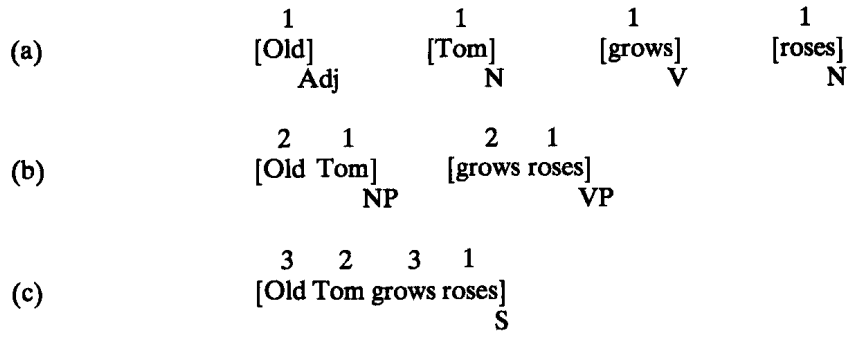

Figure 2.1 Sentence-stress in classical generative phonology

Firstly, the classical approach within generative phonology was contained in Chomsky and Halle (1968) and supplemented in Bierwisch (1968). By this sort of approach nuclear stress is cyclically applied to the rightmost element of all constituents above the word. So in a sentence like *Old Tom grows roses* (as in Figure 2.1), on the first cycle each of the words is given a primary stress, then on the second cycle each of the phrases (NP and VP) is given a primary stress on the rightmost element, which in effect means that the item keeps the primary stress it had when considered as a word, while primary stresses on other words are downgraded to secondary stresses. On the third cycle, the whole sentence is given a primary stress on the rightmost element, which in effect means downgrading all the other stresses in the sentence by one.

More recently, classical generative phonology has been replaced by metrical phonology, and the standard exposition of this as far as stress is concerned is in Liberman and Prince (1977). The principal advantage generally claimed for metrical phonology in its representation of stress is that it represents syllables only as having weak or strong stresses in relationship to the stresses of surrounding syllables. Liberman and Prince have a nuclear stress rule which says that, in constituents above word level, right branches of trees are strong. So in a sentence like *Johnny*

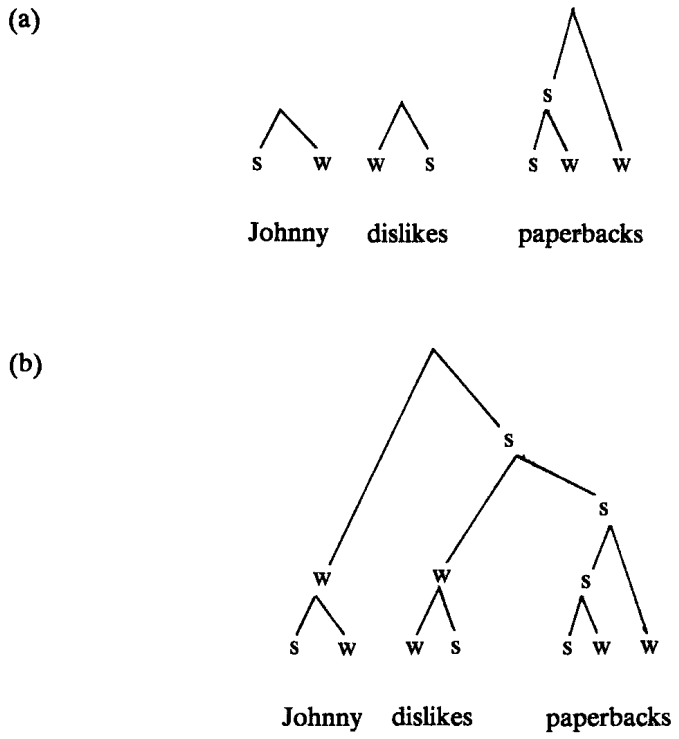

Figure 2.2 Sentence stress in metrical phonology

dislikes paperbacks (as in Figure 2.2), the *s*'s and *w*'s within words are assigned by word stress rules (Figure 2.2a), whereas those on the higher levels are assigned by a nuclear stress rule (Figure 2.2b). In this sort of representation the primary stress in the sentence is shown to be on that syllable not dominated by any *w*'s, e.g. *pap-* in Figure 2.2. (This is sometimes called the Designated Terminal Element or DTE.) It is clear that classical generative phonology and metrical phonology differ only in the way they choose to *represent* sentence stress. Descriptively, they are the same, involving nucleus placement on the rightmost element of the highest constituent.

If we consider a description within a very different framework, that of Halliday, within what is now called systemic grammar, we find something very similar. Halliday (1967a: 22) gives a rule as follows: 'A tone group is neutral in tonicity if the tonic [= nucleus] falls on the last element of grammatical structure that contains a lexical item.' This is evidently equivalent descriptively to the generative and metrical formulations. Halliday goes on to simplify his own formulation: 'In fact this could be formulated even