CHAPTER SIX

TAking stock

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I will look at the achievements, limitations and certain implications of the approach I am advocating in this study, and I will ask whether the phonology of conversation is different from the phonology of spoken prose only in degree (as Shockey 1974 has claimed) or in nature.

6.2 Achievements and consequences

The most significant achievement of this study is that I have shown that one can construct phonological statements from naturally occurring talk without having recourse to the phonetics or phonology of the citation form.

This has involved making detailed impressionistic records of a large number of tokens of the same item, and
then looking for patterns in those records. These patterns took the form of observed similarities and differences in the phonetics. The phonological statements which I proposed generalised over these observations, abstracting out those patterns which appeared solely attributable to the item(s) being analysed. In this fashion I have constructed phonological statements for seven grammatical items, together with partial analyses of other grammatical and lexical items as was required. With more time and more material, it would be possible to write phonological statements for the whole of the grammatical system and a good deal of the frequently occurring lexis.

The approach I am advocating in this study has one consequence which might not be immediately apparent, but which does expose a further weakness in the conventional analyses surveyed in Chapter One.

The methodology I have been implementing involves more than observing and accounting for regularities in the impressionistic records, it obliges the analyst to try and account for patterns across all tokens of the same item. Ultimately, those features which I observed, but could not account for in any other way were attributed to variability, e.g. the presence or absence of dental approximation in THAT following the preposition LIKE. Nevertheless, I was forced to try and accommodate the phonetics of every token.

In conventional analyses this is not the case. Here one is only required to account for the phonetics of non-
citation form tokens insofar as they are different from the phonetics of the citation form. In those cases where the phonetics of the non-citation form are similar to those of the citation form it is deemed sufficient to state that the rules proposed to account for the differences have not been applied. This in itself might not seem to be a serious weakness until one asks whether the phonetics of non-citation and citation form tokens are similar for the same reason. As one might expect I would argue that this is not the case. Good examples to illustrate this are certain tokens of the verbs HATE, HEAT and BOUGHT in Chapter Four (cf. (37m-q) on page 134). Part of the phonetics of the items in these examples combined alveolarity, plosion and voicelessness. This articulatory and phonatory activity was treated as being part of the phonetic correlates of the phonological item q at a particular place in structure. On asking the subject to utter the above items in isolation, one could again observe the combination of alveolarity, plosion and voicelessness finally. Now although one might want to attribute these features to the phonological element, q, in citation form utterance, the structural, interactional, and stylistic places of this item are very different to those in the naturally occurring material. The phonetics, then, are similar, but for different reason. This argument is essentially the same as that I presented in connection with Trudgill's (1974) phonological variables towards the end of Chapter Four, but this time in connec-
tion with the phonological treatment of non-citation form utterance in general.

6.3 Implications for other areas of linguistic endeavour

The methodology I have adopted in this study, together with the results of applying this methodology, i.e. the phonological statements, have far-reaching implications for areas of linguistic research which go beyond the immediate implications that my approach has for the phonetic and phonological study of non-citation form utterance. Any study which requires as its basis, or has as its aim, a sound phonetic and phonological description of a language variety cannot avoid having or making such a description based on data gathered from 'the most natural, the most frequent, and the most widespread occurrences of spoken language' (Abercrombie 1965a, 3), i.e. conversation.

Studies of the acquisition of phonology\(^{57}\) by children often require an adequate phonetic and phonological description of the language a child is acquiring: the adult model. All too often, it seems that analysts take for granted a prior phonological analysis of this model based purely on data gathered from citation form utterance

\(^{57}\text{e.g. e.g. Albright & Albright (1956), Ferguson (1973), Ingram (1977 & 1979), Moskowitz (1970), Smith (1973), Spencer (1986).}\)
and spoken prose. So, for instance, Smith (1973) has this to say about the English which he assumes his child to be acquiring:

'The father (my) English is **ESP** with some minor deviations from what is normally considered the "Received Pronunciation"... For A's mother, a medical doctor, English is the fourth language following Hindi, Bengali, and Marathi. She speaks "Standard Indian English" which, although phonetically widely different from ESP, is not structurally dissimilar.'

(Smith 1974, 7)

I would argue that proposing this as the model (and I am assuming here that Smith's 'Received Pronunciation' is in turn based on a work such as Gimson (1980)), could lead to a very misleading set of results. A good example of just how important the study of the model is in interpreting the phonetics which a child is producing is the production of certain grammatical items by the son (J) of the subject in this study.

At the beginning of certain grammatical items, such as those examined in Chapter Five J produces, among other things, a voiced, relatively dark, dental lateral. In other items, such as 'brother', 'with', 'other', he produces a period of voiced labiodental approximation. Had a description of the mother's speech been based on her

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59. The phonetic complexes described below have been a relatively stable part of this child's production for the past five years. At the time of writing, J was nine years and eight months.
citation form and spoken prose utterance one would have found that she produced a period of dental approximation, both initially in grammatical items, such as 'that', 'this' etc., and in other grammatical and lexical items, such as those listed above. In a monosystemic account\(^{60}\) one would be obliged to assign all these periods of dental approximation to the same phonological item: \(\hat{s}\). One would then have to state that J was producing two completely different sets of phonetics for the same phonological items in the adult model. But on the basis of the observations made and the phonological statement produced in Chapter Five, an analysis which was at pains to dislocate any phonetic similarities from phonological identity, I would have even been led to expect that J might produce different sets of phonetics in these different places because in my model I would have different phonological units having a different range of phonetic correlates. J would then be seen to have the same phonological entities as the model (capturing the similarities in his English with that of the model), but is implementing different strategies for exponing these phonological entities at the phonetic level (capturing the differences between his English and that of the model).

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\(^{60}\)As used in most studies of phonological acquisition, cf. however, Waterson (1970, 1971a, 1971b, 1987) for a polysystemic account.
6.4 Limitations

The procedures I have proposed here do have at least two limitations. The first of these is purely practical. Providing an adequate account of the behaviour of one grammatical item required the finding and impressionistic recording of a number of tokens of that item. This enterprise then is very time-consuming. For many, this may represent too little return on so much work. After all, much work on phonology today involves an analyst surveying material from a number of languages, and not just the analysis of a small part of the grammatical system of one.

The second limitation is one of practicability. Although, as I mentioned above, it would be possible to subject the whole of the grammatical system, together with commonly occurring lexical items to the procedures I have proposed, there would be a good deal of the lexis, e.g. many learned words which could not be analysed as rigorously (if at all) as the types of items I analysed in the empirical chapters of this study. This is simply because it would be impossible to collect enough tokens, if any, of many items. Any claim that, given enough time and material, it could be done would be a strong candidate for one of Abercrombie's (1965d) 'pseudo-procedures'. Indeed, it would be in the less frequently used parts of the lexis

\textsuperscript{61}E.g. Lieber (1987), Goldsmith (1990).
where it would be necessary to employ the controlled
elicitation techniques such as the reading of word-lists
and running texts. This would be the only way of explor-
ing a speaker's use of large areas of the lexicon which
would seldom be present in everyday talk. The phonologi-
cal description of a particular variety of English, or of
the talk of one speaker, would then rely on material drawn
from two completely different activities, i.e. conversa-
tion and text-reading. It would also be necessary to keep
the analyses of the material from the two sources apart.
There are two main reasons for doing this. First, the two
activities involve the speaker carrying out different
interactional and linguistic tasks. Secondly, one would
expect the phonetic patterns observable in the production
of items from certain parts of the lexis, e.g. learned
words, loan words, place names, to be different from
those found in other parts of the lexis and grammar\textsuperscript{62}, and
one would therefore require a different statement (or
statements) even if all the material had been taken from
the same source.

6.5 Phonology of conversation: different in nature or
degree

Having analysed the phonetic material gathered from
text reading and conversation, Shockey (1974) reaches the

\textsuperscript{62}See Henderson (1951).
following conclusions:

'This study suggests that except for one phonological process which we are made aware of in elementary school, $\mathcal{G} \rightarrow \mathcal{N} / \_ \_ #$ (dropping the $g$), and which, perhaps because of this educational experience, two of my subjects are able to suppress at will when reading, the phonological differences between reading and conversational speech are more quantitative than qualitative. A given rule may apply more or less frequently in a given style than in another, but a different set of speech patterns is not brought into use... The processes outlined above which show noticeable differences in frequency of application in the same direction for all three speakers are monophthongization of vowel plus schwa and flap deletion. In both of the cases, the process was more widespread in conversational style.'

(Shockey 1974, 66-67)

Shockey is making a very strong claim here, that the phonology of conversation differs largely from the phonology of reading aloud only in degree. I would argue that Shockey's approach to accounting for the phonetics of the two activities could do little else but reach such a conclusion. She is using a set of rules (processes) which derive the phonetics of both activities from those of the citation form utterance. In the phonetics of both activities she has found examples of the processes she has proposed, e.g. monophthongization and flap deletion. As I said in Chapter One, and illustrated most clearly using my own material in Chapter Four, such rules/processes run

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*emphasis my own.*

203
the risk of being more than a set of constructs which account for the differences in the phonetics of citation form and non-citation form utterance, they can make up a good deal of the tools and expectations that the analyst brings to her/his material. If one only has recourse to such rules/processes and finds phonetic patterns which exemplify them, one is bound to conclude that the phonology of two non-citation form activities, in this case reading aloud and conversation, differ quantitatively rather than qualitatively.

I have not looked at the phonetic patterns in my subject's reading, but I would predict that these patterns would be qualitatively different from those I have observed and accounted for in this study. I would predict that, in reading, she would not produce the great articulatory and phonatory complexity attendant upon the beginning of the pronominal items THIS and THAT. Also, that the vast range of possibilities for the prepositions TO, OF and FOR in different syntactic, rhythmic and interactional environments in naturally occurring talk would be much smaller and, crucially, different in her reading. Finally, I would predict that patterns observable in the phonetics of reading aloud would be less systematic than those I have observed in naturally occurring talk, for the very reason that reading aloud involves a learned activity whose rhythmic, syntactic and interactional (none?) structure, together with the whole process of execution
are very different from those involved in naturally occurring talk.

6.6 Conclusion

The approach to the phonetic and phonological analysis of conversational material which I am advocating in this study represents a radical departure from the type of analysis of non-citation form utterance adopted in the works cited in Chapter One. These differences begin with a different set of delimitative procedures and continue through to the phonological statement at the end of the analysis. The procedures involved are both laborious and time-consuming, but I would argue that one can only arrive at a satisfactory phonological account of the talk of one speaker by attempting to observe and systematise as much of the detailed phonatory and articulatory activity which one finds in the most frequent, most natural and most complex linguistic activity in which speakers can be involved: conversation.