WRITING PHONOLOGICAL STATEMENTS FROM NATURALLY OCCURRING TALK: AN EXPERIMENT IN METHOD

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Thesis submitted for the degree of D.Phil

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November 1991
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to take this opportunity to thank the people who made the writing of this thesis possible.

I am indebted to John Kelly and John Local for initially arousing my interest in phonetics and phonology and for training my ears and my eyes. In particular I am most grateful to John Kelly for offering to supervise this thesis, and for his many helpful comments and suggestions.

I should also like to thank my sister, Judith, who unknowingly provided the data on which this thesis is based, and still allowed me to use it.

Finally, I should like to thank my wife, Gudu, for supporting me and putting up with me when my thesis and I were not on the best of terms.
DECLARATION

A small part of section 1.2.3 is used in Simpson (to appear). The Malayalam data used in section 2.3 appears in Local and Simpson (1988). Some of the data and analysis presented in Chapter Four are used in Simpson (forthcoming).
ABSTRACT

The phonetic and phonological study of non-citation form utterance has been carried out in a relatively uniform fashion. Regardless of the phonological framework being implemented, analysts have taken the phonetics and/or phonology of the citation form as the derivational starting point to account for the phonetic shape of items in non-citation form utterance. The phonetics of a non-citation form item are derived via a number of context-sensitive rewrite rules which successively change and delete segments in the input string until this string arrives at the string representing the non-citation form item.

In this study I show how this derivational approach is flawed and why it is desirable to do remove the citation form from all consideration when attempting to account for the phonetics of non-citation form utterance. I propose a set of procedures which allow the analyst to take data from the most frequently occurring and most complex type of non-citation form utterance, conversation, delimit manageable portions of this data, and finally arrive at a phonological statement which abstracts over patterns of phonetic similarities and differences which can be observed across many different tokens of the same item. The approach described represents a radical depa-
ture from that adopted in other works in two important respects: (a) there is no citation form phonetics, (b) the phonological account provided is essentially Firthian prosodic and therefore declarative in nature.
INTRODUCTION

This study is a contribution to a number of areas of phonetic and phonological research. First and foremost, it is a contribution to the phonetic and phonological description of non-citation form utterance¹. This area has of late attracted little attention, the main bulk of the work having been carried out in the seventies and early eighties².

In particular this study contributes to the phonetic and phonological description of conversational material and whereas a good deal of work on the social organisation of conversation has been carried out by sociologists³, phonetic and phonological treatments of various aspects of

¹My choice of this long and rather negative term will be explained in Chapter One.


conversations are still thin on the ground. Phoneticians and phonologists, indeed linguists in general, still have a long way to go to remedy the deficiency in the analysis of spoken language identified by Firth (1935) and Abercrombie (1965a):

'Neither linguists nor psychologists have begun the study of conversation, but it is here we shall find the key to a better understanding of what language really is and how it works.'

(Firth 1935, 71)

'Genuine spoken language, or 'conversation' in my sense of the term, has hardly been described at all in any language, whether from the phonetic, phonological, or grammatical point of view.'

(Abercrombie 1965a, 9)

Finally, this study exemplifies and emphasises the need to make and use detailed impressionistic records as the basis for writing phonological statements, a practice which has been so strongly advocated in Kelly and Local (1989).

The main aim of this study is to propose a set of procedures for writing a set of phonological statements from conversational material. In doing so I will refute the claim made most succinctly by Lass (1984):

'But the simplified version of structure we've been using does have a special analytical priority; the complicated and often messy things we consider here

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require it as a basis, and are largely incomprehensible without it. Variation and instability, the "dynamic" aspects of phonology are uninterpretable save against an invariant, stable background. This is true of connected speech at various tempi, various levels of formality, and socially conditioned variation, all of which interact.'

(Lass 1984, 294-5)

In Chapter One I will examine the ways in which analysts have typically gone about the task of accounting for the phonology of non-citation form utterance. I will ask why it is that the phonetics and phonology of the citation form have enjoyed priority in the fulfillment of this task. I will present a number of reasons why one might want to remove the citation form from all consideration in providing a phonological account of non-citation form utterance, and why I consider it necessary to confine my analysis to material gathered from one particular type of non-citation form utterance, i.e. conversation.

In Chapter Two I will examine the problems of writing phonological statements based solely on data from conversation. This will involve exploring conventional methods of arriving at a phonological description of a language, and I will show that many of these procedures are inapplicable to conversational material. Finally, I will propose a set of working procedures which enable the analyst to arrive at phonological statements from such material.

In Chapters Three, Four and Five I will apply the procedures proposed in Chapter Two to delimit, analyse and
arrive at phonological statements for certain portions of the naturally occurring talk of one speaker. In these chapters I will also show, where possible, how the results of my procedures compare with those of the works surveyed in Chapter One.

In Chapter Six I will look at the achievements of the approach I have proposed, examine its limitations and ask what some of the implications of the results of my methods are for other areas of linguistic endeavour.