

Foreword to the special section

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This special section of Volume 7 of the *Yearbook of the Poznań Linguistic Meeting* comprises contributions presented at the thematic session titled “Modern phonetics and phonological representation: a new outlook on an old controversy”, convened by Ewelina Wojtkowiak and Katarzyna Dziubalska-Kołodziej (Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań) at the 49th Poznań Linguistic Meeting (PLM2019).

As has been observed, irrespective of which units are used – distinctive features (e.g. Chomsky & Halle 1968), elements (e.g. Backley 2011), or articulatory gestures (e.g. Browman & Goldstein 1992), to name a few – phonological representations in general possess a certain level of abstraction in which phonetic detail is oftentimes disregarded. The dissonance between representation and realisation has been the topic of a heated debate for quite some time. In fact, it can be traced back to Trubetzkoy ([1939] 1962: 10), who saw phonetics and phonology as two separate disciplines which study two completely different phenomena and as such should be kept strictly apart. Some phonologists argue that phonetics “is relatively uninteresting” and as such “has no place in linguistics proper” (cf. Pierrehumbert 1990 for an overview; also: Gussmann 2004). In turn, phoneticians argue that phonological representations are not subject to enough scientific research to tell us anything about the sound structure of languages and as such are “an uninteresting subfield of humanities”.

Despite the claims disregarding the necessity of conducting phonetic studies in order to validate phonological assumptions, acoustic experiments have been shown to shed new light on some of the impressionistic conjectures made by phonologists and improve phonological analyses of various processes. As noted by Ohala (1990), if phonological representations fail to refer to phonetic research, they may fail to accurately encapsulate linguistic phenomena. While some progress in this respect has been made in recent years, “phonetics as a motivating force for phonology remains controversial” (Dziubalska-Kołodziej 2012).

This workshop invited all papers that investigate the issue relating to the extent to which phonetic detail should affect our decisions about phonological representations, with respect to current phonological models. The session brought together a number of quality talks, out of which two have been turned into papers included in the present section.

The paper by Christian Uffmann (Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf) zooms in on the merger of vowels /u:/ and /ɔ:/ before tautosyllabic /l/ in London English. He argues in favour of a model which includes abstract, phonological representations in conjunction with a rich and autonomous phonetics. In the model, minimal, privative feature specification and phonetic variation of unspecified properties allows us to interpret the relationship between abstract, phonological representations and gradient sociolinguistic patterns. His analysis is supported by data from 10 speakers of London English and 10 speakers from the Home Counties.

The contribution by Jolanta Sypiańska (Uniwersytet Szczeciński) aims at providing evidence for equivalence classification postulated by Flege's Speech Learning Model. She explores the production of the English vowel schwa by Polish and Romanian learners of English. The results point to greater accuracy of new sound production, in accordance with SLM's predictions and providing evidence in support of interlanguage in the bilinguals' speech.

We believe that these two papers – which present two different takes at incorporating phonetic research into phonological analyses – re-voke interest in the discussions on the phonetics-phonology interface.

We would like to thank the authors who so generously contributed their papers to this edition as well as all participants who took part in the thematic session at PLM2019.

We hope to see you in Poznań again soon!

Ewelina Wojtkowiak and Katarzyna Dziubalska-Kołaczyk

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