

A REPLY TO HENRY PETERSEN

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1. The editors of ARIPUC have given me permission to reply briefly to Mr. Henry Petersen's phonetic and phonemic criticism of my paper English Stops After Initial /s/ (1969). I will therefore proceed to consider the objections which have been raised one by one.

2. H.P. claims that the phonetic surroundings of my test words are not identical. This is naturally correct if 'identical' is understood to mean 'exactly alike', 'agreeing in every way', but the environments are certainly greatly similar, as they should be. In all the phrases, the test words are placed post-initially and stressed. They are also preceded by an unstressed syllable ending in a vowel and followed by an unstressed syllable. Furthermore the phrases are constructed in such a way that any emphatic rendering of them is avoided, and their rhythmic-tonetic pattern is in all cases υ - $\upsilon\upsilon$ -(υ). That the presence or absence of a final unstressed syllable, as in The steam from the chimney and A sty to be cleaned respectively, should be relevant to the pronunciation of the post-initial word seems quite unlikely to me. In short, all the elementary precautions necessary in investigations of this type have been taken.

H.P. himself prefers the carrier frame 'I say _____ today', and in this case he is of the opinion that the surroundings qualify for the term 'identical'. However, this is certainly not true in the narrow sense of the word mentioned above, since there will always be variations, e.g. in stressing, from one pronunciation to the next. When I decided against one particular carrier frame it was because I wanted the test words to be pronounced as naturally as possible, rather than like words in quotation marks. When the recording of the phrases had been completed, my test persons told me that they did not know what words were being investigated, and this would obviously not have been the case under the alternative approach.

Clearly each of these two methods has its advantages, and I consider the one chosen in my particular investigation perfectly appropriate.

3. According to H.P. it is predictable that b, d, g are perceived in the truncated words, and he therefore considers the perceptory experiment virtually superfluous. I do not think that it is at all justifiable a priori to rule out other perceptions. H.P. bases his opinion on duration factors, but

he concedes himself that voicing is of some importance, and it is quite likely that a number of other factors could be relevant (release burst, transitions, and what not). When I excised the s-sounds I was by no means certain that the truncated words would be perceived the way they were.

4. Whereas H.P.'s phonetic objections do not invalidate my investigation I can at least understand his doubts as to the relevance of amputation experiments to phonological analysis. This approach is indeed somewhat reminiscent of Hjelmslev's proposal for "experimental commutation" (1937), which has been criticized by e.g. Fischer-Jørgensen (1949). I therefore agree that the tape cutting method is not applicable to phonemic analysis in any completely general sense. In this particular case, however, I can see no synchronic criteria by which to choose between the interpretation /sp-, st-, sk-/ and /sb-, sd-, sg-/ except phonetic similarity (I have discussed the symmetry argument advanced by Hockett (1955) in my paper). I am therefore here willing to "hug the phonetic ground" and propose the latter solution on the grounds of greater acoustic similarity, and also greater perceptory similarity, as demonstrated not only by the tape cutting experiment, but also by the test with the phrase Thanks, Stan, that'll be all, where the proper name was perceived as Dan in nearly half of the cases. It might be added that if /sp-, st-, sk-/ were chosen, one would have to accept overlapping manifestation of phonemes without gaining any compensatory advantages.

5. For these reasons it is my opinion that H.P.'s criticism of the phonetic part of my investigation can be refuted completely, and that my phonological conclusion, which like all such interpretations is certainly open to discussion, can in no way be dismissed.

References

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- Hjelmslev, L. (1937), "Neue Wege der Experimentalphonetik", Nordisk Tidsskrift for Tale og Stemme, p. 154-194.
- Hockett, C.F. (1955), A Manual of Phonology (Baltimore).