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A reader for Nordic phoneticians

Kirsten Gregersen & Hans Basbøll (eds.): *Nordic Prosody IV. Papers from a symposium*. Odense University Studies in Linguistics Vol. 7. Odense: Odense University Press. 1986. 192 p.

If an innocent scholar - unfamiliar both with current phonetic research in Scandinavia and the special traditions of scientific and cultural cooperation among the Nordic countries - happens to catch sight of the title **Nordic prosody IV**, he/she will presumably have the impression that this label corresponds to a specific token, which is likely to be the common prosodic features that characterize the Nordic languages, and that this constitutes an area that is sufficiently intricate and unexplored as to deserve several volumes of learned work. What our innocent reader has found, however, is the practical result (one in a long series) of a long tradition of contacts and cooperation among Nordic phoneticians, on one hand, and between dynamic Nordic phonetic scholars and the relevant Internordic institutions for the financing of common Nordic cultural and scientific activities, on the other. By managing this, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish and Icelandic phoneticians have set a good example to many other categories of researchers in these countries.

Now, of course, there is no such thing as a set of prosodic properties common to the languages spoken in the North of Europe, not even a set of common prosodic features that could be thought of as specifically characterizing the Scandinavian languages of today. What is true, however, is that the languages of the Nordic countries *do* present features of great interest to the international phonetician, features such as the Norwegian and Swedish tonemes 1 and 2, the **stød** of the Danes, and the intricate patterns of consonant and vowel length in Finnish.

From the above, it can be deduced that the contributions of this volume have been written by representatives of the species "phoneticians". Stating that prosody is one of the main areas of study of phoneticians, however, is not tantamount to saying that prosody is the exclusive domain of phoneticians, nor that a phonetician's training would be indispensable for a scholar to take an interest in prosodic research. As **Jørgen Rischel**

(professor of Phonetics at Copenhagen University) convincingly points out in the initial paper of this volume, "prosodic phenomena have complex interrelations with most if not all aspects of linguistic structure" (p.12), on one hand, and "there is a lack of cooperation between experts on discourse syntax, phonology, phonetics, semantics-pragmatics, and lexicon, who might jointly contribute to a really empirical study of spoken language" (p.10), on the other. May one add to the list of experts, to whom prosody - in its capacity of being a major component not only of spoken language but of human comunicative behaviour in general - may present a non-negligible interest, the following categories: psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and medical scholars (not exclusively logopaedicians). Prosody, in fact, could be thought of as nothing less than one out of three major "channels" for human primary (i.e., non-written) communication, the other two being the verbal (i.e., the truly "linguistic") and the kinesic (body language) channels.

If this - in very abstract terms - is what the study of prosody *could* be, then what about the current prevailing areas of interest of prosodic research today? One such area, which has been inherited from the sixties and still remains an issue of vivid discussion, is the part played by prosodic features such as stress and tone in **phonological** description and explanation. Another, more concrete, domain of concern is the **phonetic** manifestations and nature of prosodic "basics", such as stress, accent, tone, intonation, and segment duration. Much research on prosody has been motivated by the needs for implementing well-functioning automatic **text-to-speech** transmission systems, an area in which substantial progress has been made in the past decade. More recently, the efforts to create operable systems for **speech recognition** are becoming an increasing factor of influence in the orientation of phonetic studies in general and prosody in particular. New developments in artificial intelligence and neuro-sciences dealing with man's capacity of creating associative perceptive networks are a contributing factor to this concern. Finally, there is an increasing interest taken in the prosody of **natural speech,** as opposed to the predominant study of data that consist in context-free read-aloud utterances produced in artificial communicative settings and recorded in laboratories. Nina Grønnum Thorsen's case study (p.71-79) is typical of what could be designated as an incipient phase of this shift in phonetic research.

When the present lines are published, the Fifth Symposium on Nordic Prosody will already have been celebrated in Turku, Finland (August

1989). It will be most interesting to see to what extent the last-mentioned, more recent trends will impose themselves at this meeting. In the present volume, which consists of papers read at the 1986 Middelfart symposium, much emphasis is still given to prosodic "basics". However, a broad gamut of interests and scopes is included, with articles representing both theory-oriented and problem-oriented research, as well as studies with a clearly "applied" character.

Among the seventeen papers included, two are oriented towards overall theoretical aspects. One is the earlier mentioned contribution by Jørgen Rischel on levels of prosodic representation and categories (p.3-30), the first part of which consists of reflections (attractively holistic and marked by a very Danish attitude of self-irony and scepticism) on the interlocking of various linguistic levels in the description of prosody, and on the objectives and perspectives of phonetic research in general. The paper's second part is a summary of Rischel's earlier work on stress in Danish phonology. The other predominantly theory-oriented contribution is **Robert Bannert**'s heavily technical though by no means unconvincing model of prosody's conjointly independent and interdependent temporal and tonal components (p.31-40).

A prevailing concern in Scandinavian research on prosody in the seventies and eighties has been the description of tonal features, such as sentence or phrase accent, Swedish and Norwegian tonemes, or intonation patterns related to e.g. sentence type. This concern is largely represented in the present volume: more than one third of the papers deal with tonal features. **Marianne Haslev** (p.81-90) is suggesting improvements in the description of Norwegian tonemes, and **Björn Granström** and **Kjell Gustafson** (p.181-190) are proposing rules for the actualization of Norwegian tonemes in a text-to-speech system. These synthesis rules are interesting, and symptomatic of a shift in emphasis from the acoustic to the auditive perspective, in so far as they let the ear (and the brain) of the listener do the job of ensuring the correct identification of the tonemes. Knowing that we hear what we expect to hear, the acoustic signal could just as well be intelligently simplified rather than over-elaborated. The contributions made by **Torsten Fretheim** and **Arne Kjell Foldvik** (p.51-60) and by **Antti Iivonen** (p.115-126) are both concerned with the interrelationship of intonation and information structure, in Norwegian and Finnish, respectively. **Nina Grønnum Thorsen,** as mentioned above, offers a tentative presentation of the stress and intonation pattern in read-aloud coherent Danish texts (p.71-79). **Gösta Bruce,** finally, follows up earlier research on Swedish focal/sentence accent (p.41-50).

Five papers are directly concerned with aspects of rhythm and temporality. Among these, **Anders Eriksson**'s contribution on rhythm in recited poetry (p.127-135) stands out as particularly interesting from a theoretical point of view, with a bearing on much more than the restricted domain of poetry. His findings on the perceptual though non-physical reality of rhythmic regularity once again confirm the acoustic-to-auditive shift in phonetic science. Also **Eva Strangert**'s model of speech rhythm (p.91-104) has interesting theoretical implications, and **Kjell Gustafson**'s proposal for graphic representation of prosodic segments (p.105-114), far from being only a technical sophistication, is an interesting approach to a psychologically realistic method of representing rhythm. **Rolf Carlson** and **Björn Granström** (p.171- 180) suggest improvements on rules for Swedish segment durations on the basis of data drawn on read-aloud coherent sentences, and **David House** and **Eva Gårding** (p.61-70) follow up earlier work (strictly empirical in its spirit, with important though implicit theoretical implications) on rhythmic grouping and prosodic phrasing in three Swedish dialects as compared with Standard Helsinki Finnish and Standard Copenhagen Danish.

Apart from the above-quoted introductory paper by Jørgen Rischel, only the Icelander **Kristján Arnason** is concerned with the core-phonological issue of stress assignment (p.137- 146). The remaining articles in this volume have a clear-cut "applied" orientation. On one hand, the papers presented by **Maria Kroes-Hecht** (p.147-152) and **Christian Hecht** (p.153-160) deal with the highly important and largely neglected issue of how to include prosody in the teaching of foreign languages (in this case, German to Scandinavian students). Regrettably, only one contribution goes beyond the strictly linguistic perspective on prosody, namely, a neatly presented and convincing study on pauses and word (de)formation in the narrative speech of Finnish aphasics, written by **Jussi Niemi** and **Päivi Koivuselkä-Sallinen** (p.161-169). More work of this kind would be needed to show how important the prosodic parameters are in real life.

Few people would deny the interest and value of celebrating symposia of the kind represented in this book. What remains an issue open to discussion, however, is to what extent it is desirable to simply group papers together in one volume, especially when their scopes are so different. If the purpose is to offer an opportunity for scholars to have their work published, or if it is to give a fairly coherent group of researchers feed-back on the state of their discipline, then this kind of collection is a somewhat square-built, perhaps, but efficient vehicle. If, on the other hand, the over-

all aim is to inform a wider public about an area of research, to which they may not hitherto have paid due attention, then a book of the present type must be seen as not fully adequate. Such a simple thing as the absence of abstracts drawn on the different papers adds to this impression. What may be more serious is the absence of introductions or other elements that contribute to create coherence. Finally, as has already been hinted at, it would be valuable and enriching, if future symposia (and the resultant paper collections) could become somewhat more interdisciplinary, and to a little lesser degree the game preserve of phoneticians - given the importance of the topic, and in the interest of phoneticians themselves.

An international conference on

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