Auto-segmental and metrical phonology

John Goldsmith
Colchester, VT: Basil Blackwell, 199X

Janet Pierrehumbert
Northwestern University, Department of Linguistics, 2016 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60201, U.S.A.

Received

Both phonetics and phonology deal with the sound structure of human language. Phonetics deals with the physical reality of speech and phonology, with the apparently categorical representation of sound structure which is manipulated in the mind in constructing words and sentences. The two fields are profoundly interrelated. Phonetics concentrates on those aspects of speech which function contrastively in language; for this reason, resonances of the vocal tract are taken to be more important than mucous viscosity in the vocal tract. In almost any phonetics experiment, phonological assumptions have explicitly or implicitly guided the construction of the stimuli or tasks, the decision of what to measure, and the analysis of the data. Similarly, phonologists understand that phonological categories are founded in our articulatory and psychoacoustic capabilities, and that their phonological behaviour deeply reflects their phonetic nature. In view of the theoretical ties between phonetics and phonology, many researchers feel that the academic disciplines of phonetic and phonology should be closer than they now are, and they may even undertake to read up in their sister discipline.

Auto-segmental and Metrical Phonology represents the effort of one of the founders of auto-segmental theory to integrate the different strands of phonological research which arose in the wake of Chomsky & Halle (1968). This effort is extremely welcome. Auto-segmental Phonology, Metrical Phonology, and Lexical Phonology all addressed different deficiencies of The Sound Pattern of English, and in their early years concentrated on different types of phenomena, often in different language groups. As a result, through most of the 1980s, it was unclear to what extent they conflicted with each other and to what extent they complemented each other. It is time for the field to integrate the insights of a now large and wide-ranging body of research.

The book’s greatest success is as an essay on the present state of phonology, directed towards active researchers in this field. Goldsmith is a highly original phonologist, with broad interests, and many thought provoking insights. I found the discussions of syllable structure and of Lexical Phonology particularly refreshing. The references are also very valuable. The book is particularly strong in providing references for descriptive studies of various languages, and in identifying the antecedents of present theory in the works of the American and British structuralists.