SOME PROBLEMS OF OVER-ALL PATTERNING

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When this paper was proposed, it was anticipated that the long-advertised Chomsky-Halle *The Sound Pattern of English* would be available for discussion. It is not. The discussion will therefore concentrate on the best-known and most successful attempt to establish an over-all phonological pattern accommodating the contrasts of all dialects of English, that of Trager and Smith in their *Outline of English Structure* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1951). All criticisms are data-oriented; except where otherwise specified, the data may be found in the collections of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, which scholars are welcome to examine at the University of Chicago, even as editorial work proceeds.

1. The Trager-Smith analysis sets up for English a system of nine vowel phonemes, symmetrically distributed:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} i & \dot{i} & \dot{u} \\ e & \partial & o \\ \ddot{æ} & a & \mathrm{ɔ} \end{array}$$

There are three semivowels /y, w, h/ and 21 other consonants /p, t, k, b, d, g, č, ǰ, m, n, ŋ, f, v, θ, ð, s, z, š, ž, r, l/, four levels of pitch, four degrees of stress, and five degrees of juncture (including "normal" or "close" transition, defined as the absence of juncture). Long vowels and diphthongs are analyzed as sequences of short vowel + semivowel, following earlier suggestions by Henry Sweet and Prince Trubetzkoy. This analysis has received distinguished exegesis, notably by A. A. Hill (1958) and W. Nelson Francis (1958), and has enjoyed widespread and successful use in a variety of teaching situations.

2. It was inevitable that there would be challenges to the claims of Trager and Smith that their system can accommodate all contrasts in all varieties of English. Without recapitulating all arguments in details, we may summarize the kinds of criticisms that have been made.

3. Little comparable data is provided (or is available elsewhere) on variations in the suprasegmentals (stress, pitch, juncture), whether or not these are to be considered

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phonemes. Yet many observers have noted informally that regional and social differences exist in details of intonation and stress and possibly in the system.

4. There is no provision for contrasts between clear and dark varieties of /l/ and /n/, though these contrasts exist in some Scots dialects and possibly in the United States.

5. As more dialects are examined, especially in the southeastern United States, new vowel and diphthong contrasts are discovered that cannot be accommodated in the Trager-Smith pattern; this is particularly true of length and centering glide, which are lumped together in this pattern as postvocalic actualizations of /h/. Even in the New York City area there may be a minimal contrast between *maw* "stomach" and *moa* "extinct flightless bird". Expansion to take care of all such contrasts leads ultimately to fairly minute phonetic recording, a travesty on the phonemic principle.

6. The pattern may represent structural differences that do not exist. From Pennsylvania south, the syllabic nucleus of *food, spoon* and the like (which is elsewhere treated as /uw/) is usually a high-central rounded long vowel or upgliding diphthong [ʉ; ʉʉ ʌ]. Trager and Smith would interpret this as /iw/; however in these same areas the syllabic nucleus of *put* (Trager's /u/), may also be a high-central or a fronted high-back rounded vowel, so that without multiplying entities one may suggest simply a difference in the phonetic quality of /uw/.

7. The pattern may not represent structural differences that do exist. Few middle-class Chicagoans have a high-central /ɨ/ in contrast with high-front /i/ and high-back /u/; in their speech, phonetic [ɨ] occurs only under weak stress, in complementary distribution with strong-stressed [ɪ]. Similarly, many dialects have phonetic [a] and [ɔ] and intermediate sounds, but only in complementary distribution. The contrasting structures of such dialects may be buried in the symmetry of the pattern.

8. On balance, of course, the Trager-Smith analysis is still very serviceable; in fact, it is probably as successful and comprehensive a design of this type as can be made. Its incompleteness is noted, chiefly to remind us to be wary of all other such designs, however ingeniously devised and elegantly presented. Such designs are convenient abstraction — fictions, if we will — to be ruthlessly tested against the stubborn facts of independently recorded data.

DISCUSSION

Vachek:

Prof. McDavid's criticism of Trager—Smith's overall pattern of American English vowels can be endorsed. It was led from the same methodological positions as is held by the authors of the pattern themselves. But the idea of the overall pattern can be attacked on a still broader, more general basis. As a matter of fact the idea of such a pattern appears to be linguistically quite unfounded, as only such elements may be patterned (i.e. attributed to the same phonemic pattern) as actually co-exist in the given idiom. An overall pattern can, of course have a sociolinguistic significance, but then one has to do with an inventory of items, not with a real system.