NETPhon: Network for Education and Training in Phonetics

Report on Workshop 2: Teaching and Assessment Methods

UCL 27th April 1995

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The second discussion forum on the teaching of phonetics to future speech and language therapists was held on the day following the first workshop and at the same venue, University College, London. The programme of the day's activities is on a separate sheet (**see enclosure 1**).

The day began with a presentation by **Myszka Guzkowska** (UCL) on innovations in teaching and learning. This outlined different styles of learning. The motivation of the students was identified as particularly important. The teaching styles which might best develop and utilise that motivation were considered to be those which fostered independent and experiential learning. It was suggested that students would benefit from learning how to learn early in course and being encouraged to exploit these skills singly and in groups as the course progressed. The issue of integration of theory in vocational courses was addressed. The example of some medical education which relies heavily on the presentation and discussion of problems was given.

Sara Howard (Sheffield) illustrated the value of such an approach in her outline of the development of the Clinical Practical Phonetics course (**see enclosure 2**). The 24 one hour sessions introduce issues in the auditory phonetic analysis of disordered speech which are then put into practice in case studies on eight videos of both children and adults with communication problems. A main aim of the course was to impress upon students the relevance of an understanding of phonetics theory and thereby to make phonetics interesting and alive. Students are not asked to make narrow transcriptions for the sake of doing so but to use phonetic knowledge to make sense of problems. Small groups are used and the discursive format encourages confidence and enthusiasm in the students. The final assessment of this course also uses video taped material.

Michael Ashby, John Maidment and Evelyn Abberton (UCL) presented the approach to teaching phonetic listening skills which they have developed (**see enclosure 3**). They have recognised that the standard approach in which the learning of symbols was important was anxiety provoking for students, labour intensive in the marking and providing feedback, and tended to lead students to believe that symbols were all important. In their new approach critical analytical listening is emphasised by asking students to listen out for a single phonetic feature in a small number of speech samples. The UCL team have found this approach can be a good indicator of a student's active listening ability.

The final presentation of the morning by **Sally Bates** (Edinburgh) and **Jocelynne Watson** (QMC) came from their work on the examination of disordered vowel systems in children (**see enclosure 4**). They have developed a proposal for a short course based around their Vowel Assessment for Systems of English (VASE). The

principle objectives of the course is to brain work. Students are provided with practice in transcription of vowels and introduced to the systematicity of vowel errors, individual vowel vulnerability and the distinction between delayed and deviant error patterns.

After lunch **Ginny Wilson** (UCL) and **Mark Huckvale** (UCL) introduced their 60 hour course in acoustic phonetics (**see enclosure 5**). They highlighted the precourse reading, the integration of theory with laboratory work and the importance of hands-on experimentation. Students are taken through analyses of increasing sophistication and are guided by laboratory sheets which decrease in prescriptiveness throughout the year. They stressed that students are not only learning about acoustic phonetics but are becoming aware of other issues of relevance for clinical work and for research.

Don Friend (St Andrews) introduced his own English Phonemic Alphabet Mac-based computer teaching package (**see enclosure 6**). This was designed primarily for learners of English as a foreign/second language, for TEFL teachers and trainees and for students of linguistics who need to be able to understand the principles of broad phonetic transcription. He showed that the programme has a step by step approach which facilitates sound to symbol matching at the level of single sounds and single words, and draws the user's attention to the same sound different spelling phenomena in English.

Martin Duckworth (Plymouth) and **Helen Pandeli** (Cardiff) described the changes over time of one practical phonetics course. It had begun by introducing more clinically relevant topics into the first year in order to help students be come more motivated to develop appropriate critical listening skills. Changes to the student base necessitated removing this applied element from year 1. The problems of motivating students who could see little use for learning phonetic transcription skills were described. A video produced to support the Year 1 course was briefly presented. Clinical videos are also used in the Year 2 Clinical Phonetics course. These were not organised as systematically as in Sheffield but the aims were very similar: to increase critical listening skills, to provide an opportunity to practice the type of transcription skills needed in clinics, to facilitate an understanding of transcription depth, speech variability and the problems of transcription reliability. They also enhanced students' confidence when they realised that no 'right' answer is guaranteed.

The discussion session became a general question and answer session preceding the final three papers.

Janet Beck (QMC) gave the final review of current practice in teaching phonetics (**see enclosure 7**). This was structured around attempts to overcome fears of exploring/examining the physical mechanism of speech and the fear of the technical analysis of speech. Janet uses the approach she became familiar with from Edinburgh which encourages the examination of the vocal organs of self and others to overcome

the physical fear. The fear acoustics and instrumentation was felt to be tackled less well but Janet outlined a model she had used in teaching school children about speech which introduced machines at an early stage. This may be the way forward with the SLT student. A final concern with integration of phonetics with other parts of the syllabus was discussed. The most effective integration seems to have been effected by the teaching of practical phonetics by the same person who also teaches aspects of speech pathology. There was some loss of close integration with phonology and other aspect of linguistics but it emphasised the value of having at least some parts of the phonetics course bought by staff with a knowledge of speech pathology.

Unfortunately Sophie Lord was ill so we were unable to have a second report (Sue Pethers on day 1 being the 1st) on the use of phonetics in clinical practice.

Allen Hirson (City) rounded off the day's session by reviewing his approach to the teaching of acoustics (**see enclosure 8**). He showed how he began by attempting to discover the links between acoustics and the other areas of knowledge introduced to speech and language therapy students. He has addressed the issue of making the study of acoustics accessible to students by carefully considering what types of experiment illuminate an issue in the simplest and clearest way. In some cases this has meant the use of instrumentation while in others more 'traditional' demonstrations could be retained.

My own feeling after the presentations was that very serious consideration had been paid by all the phonetics teachers to the issues introduced in the first talk. Motivation, self directed learning, experiential learning and learning which aimed to develop a real understanding of phonetics principle had been the focus - directly or indirectly - of all of the day's presentations. The original title of the workshop had been 'Innovations in the teaching of phonetics' but it was unclear what was meant by innovation. I feel the day demonstrated very clearly that there is a great deal of effective innovation in the teaching of phonetics and that the opportunity to share these enables all of us to enrich our teaching.

The day may also be recalled as the occasion when the term dyslalia as a term to describe speech disorders with an articulatory component reappeared. This occurred as the discussion sessions wrestled with attempting to tease apart phonetic and phonological problems. The issue of phonological and phonetic transcription has also been the subject of a vigorous debate conducted by e-mail following this day of discussions. This, and the debate on transcribing intonation shows how powerful a tool the e-mail connection can be. As NETphon brings its findings on to the Internet this promises to bring even more debate, development and sharing of ideas which is just what the programme was designed to do.

Martin Duckworth, Workshop Convenor
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