

PLM 2019: Modern phonetics and phonological representation: a new outlook on an old controversy.

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Irrespective of which units are used – distinctive features (e.g. Chomsky and Halle 1968), elements (e.g. Backley 2011), or articulatory gestures (e.g. Browman and Goldstein 1992), to name a few – phonological representations in general possess a certain level of abstraction in which phonetic detail is oftentimes disregarded. The dissonance between representation and realisation has been the topic of a heated debate for quite some time. In fact, it can be traced back to Trubetzkoy, who saw phonetics and phonology as two separate disciplines which study two completely different phenomena and as such should be kept strictly apart ([1939] 1962: 10). Some phonologists argue that phonetics “is relatively uninteresting” and as such “has no place in linguistics proper” (cf. Pierrehumbert 1990 for an overview; also: Gussmann 2004). In turn, phoneticians argue that phonological representations are not subject to enough scientific research to tell us anything about the sound structure of languages and as such is “an uninteresting subfield of humanities” (Pierrehumbert 1990: 375). Problems with these disagreements between the two sides of this issue arise when we cross-check phonological accounts with empirical data. For instance, Polish has been described as a language in which word-final obstruents undergo devoicing (Gussmann 2007), a claim which has been taken for granted. Phonetic research, however, provides evidence that Polish native speakers seem to be surprisingly accurate in perceiving the contrast between underlyingly voiceless and voiced obstruents in this position and, while less robust, the contrast is also by and large maintained in their productions (Schwartz et al. 2018). Studies on cross-linguistic influence show that L1 productions change under the influence of one’s L2 and Lns (e.g. Chang 2012, Sypiańska 2016). Therefore, if phonological representations fail to refer to phonetic research, they may fail to accurately encapsulate linguistic phenomena (cf. Ohala 1990). While some progress in this respect has been made, “phonetics as a motivating force for phonology remains controversial” (Dziubalska-Kołaczyk 2012).

This workshop invites all papers that investigate the issue relating to the extent to which phonetic detail should affect our decisions about phonological representations, with respect to current phonological models. They may present original empirical studies that have been conducted to test phonological hypotheses, discuss some ideas as to how we can refine our phonological representations, but do not have to be limited to those issues.

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