

Titel: Notes, [MTG] 125-2370

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Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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D.M. Beach: The Phonetics of the Hottentot Language (Cambridge, 1938,
W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., pp. XV + 329).

This book is the work of an extremely fine practical phonetician, a man who has been trained, and who has further trained himself, to observe and record minute shades of quality, quantity, and pitch, and a man, moreover, who is not betrayed by the complexity of his material into forgetting the main task of the linguist: to give a clear account of the fundamental structure of the language.

The greater part of the book is taken up by a careful and detailed description of the phonetics and tonetics of the two main dialects of Hottentot, Nama and Korana including Griqua. In addition to this, there are chapters on comparative tonetics, the phonetic history of Hottentot roots, and orthography. Finally, three appendices: a study, by Dr. H. Vedder, of the phonetic structure of Hottentot roots; a sample of Griqua-Afrikaans; and a list of the "personnel of the research".

In his introductory chapters Beach sets out his technique and his method. The principal means of investigation has been, of course, the "ear-method", writing down from dictation or from phonograph records; but the findings obtained in this way have been supplemented and controlled by extensive use of palatography and kymography. The general impression left on the reader is that Beach has handled his technique competently, and that his phonetic

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and tonetic results are dependable - an impression which is further strengthened by the fact that the author carefully explains what he considers to be the limitations of his work, and outlines a programme for a continuation: he has not had the time or the opportunity to finish his analysis of length, stress, and, particularly, pitch. It is to be hoped that he will soon be enabled to go back to this important task; the enthusiasm and the capability to which this first instalment bears witness, has linked forever the name of Beach to the study of Hottentot, and has won him the right to complete the task he has set himself.

In this day when, more than ever before, the foundations of linguistics and phonetics are in the melting-pot, the description of a language is a peculiarly difficult undertaking. Analysis and description presuppose a theory, but the practical linguist, who is concerned with the specific problems of a particular language or group of languages, is hard put to it to choose among the bewildering multitude of more or less different theories presented to him by an ever increasing number of general linguists in violent disagreement among themselves. It is small wonder that, faced with this situation, Beach has chosen to ignore completely the theoretical discussions of the last ten years. His own theory of language does not emerge clearly, perhaps because he has not yet worked out one that satisfies him; but he has succeeded in presenting his material in such a way that it can be used without difficulty by linguists of other persuasions. And that, after all, is the best that can be said of any description

of a language.

The Hottentot speech-chain is divided into the following units: the sentence, the breath-group (both defined as delimited by pauses, of which further information would be desirable), the "root" (a somewhat surprising term for what the Prague School call a morpheme, and what Hjelmslev and I have called a *cenia*¹), the syllable, and the phone. The "word" is rightly discarded as a unit of no phonetic value for Hottentot, but for the sake of convenience the current division into words is indicated by hyphens between "roots" which make up one "word".

The syllable is defined, "roughly", as "a part of the chain of speech which receives a single beat in the rhythmic system", and we are told that "in Hottentot .. the phonetic and (especially) the tonetic structure of the language reveals a very definite system of syllable division, at any rate for slow and careful speech". But no such rhythmic principle emerges from what is said later; on the contrary, the syllable is taken for granted and used to define phonemes as syllabic or not. In the opinion of the reviewer, there are no grounds for the establishment of a syllable other than the "root". There can be no doubt that Beach is right in fixing on the "root" as the tone unit; it is true that this has been definitely established only for the "strong roots" (i.e. stems), but the tonetic behaviour of the "weak roots" (formants), as it can be studied in the excellent though not very plentiful texts printed in the book, makes it evident

that they are to be treated in the same way. As it is also evident that the Hottentot tones are not modulations (i.e. prosodemes capable of characterizing a complete utterance) but accents (prosodemes capable of characterizing only a unit smaller than a complete utterance), it follows that the "root" is the Hottentot syllable, the syllable being defined as a unit whose characteristic is one minimal accentual unit¹. From this point of view, the structure of the Hottentot "roots" is a matter of the greatest interest and importance to the science of linguistics, because it affords clear examples, which are otherwise extremely rare, of syllables comprising two vowels with a consonant in between.

"Roots" are divided into phones according to the following principles: a consonantal unit occurring either initially or between two vowels in a "root", is considered a single phone; a vocalic continuum, on the other hand, is considered two phones "if the tongue-position changes materially from beginning to end". Vowels and consonants thus receive completely different treatments, and of this extraordinary procedure no justification whatever is given either by the author or by the facts as presented to the reader. This must be seen in connexion with the fact that instead of deriving the phone deductively from the phoneme, Beach derives the phoneme inductively from the phone. But any division of the speech-chain that is not based upon significant differences. must be arbitrary. as

most phoneticians now agree, because the phonic chain is in itself amorphous.

Beach's phoneme definition is a modification of, but no improvement on, that of Daniel Jones. "By phoneme", he says, "is meant a group of related phones (one or more) which can be represented unambiguously in a phonetic transcription by a single symbol. One phone can be represented unambiguously by the same symbol as another if it never occurs in the same position as the other in the chain of speech". This is not only putting the cart before the horse, but it is a definition which, if literally applied, would lead to an infinite number of phonemes, because it fails to take into account the overlapping of free variants, as studied particularly by E. Zwirner and K. Zwirner². Fortunately, this oversight has had no influence on the result of the phonemic analysis.

Because of the admirably clear presentation of the phonetic facts, it is possible to re-do the linguistic analysis and so to reduce the inventory of phonemes from 42 (32 consonants and 10 vowels) to 25 (13 consonants and 12 vowels) for Nama. The 20 clicks can be shown to consist each of a click phoneme (one of the four "types of influx") plus one or more other consonant phonemes (one of the five "types of efflux"), viz. k, h, ʔ, ŋ, or the group kx, all of which, except possibly ŋ, occur also in other combinations. Note that the triplex groups consisting of a click plus kx conform to Hjelmslev's law of complex groups³: all of the four clicks occur in duplex

groups followed by k, and k occurs in a duplex group followed by x. The two affricates, kx and ts, can be regarded as groups consisting, respectively, of the phonemes k and x and the phonemes t and s, all of which occur separately. Finally, m and n must be classified as vowels, not consonants, since, according to Beach, they are able to be the only constituents of a "root" characterized by tone, i.e. of a syllable. If it proves possible to identify the nasality of the vowels \tilde{i} , \tilde{a} , \tilde{o} , and \tilde{u} with that which occurs in click groups, and which has been written above with the symbol η , the number of vowel phonemes can be further reduced from 12 to 8, because the nasal vowels can then be regarded as ~~gɪsɪpɪksɪs~~ sequences consisting of the corresponding oral vowel phonemes plus the consonant η . The complete inventory of phonemes is then, according to the present analysis: (1) consonants: p, t, k, ʔ, s, x, h, r, ɣ, ʃ, ʒ, ʂ; (2) vowels: i, e, a, o, u, ə, m, n, (\tilde{i} , \tilde{a} , \tilde{o} , \tilde{u}). Similar reductions are possible in the Korana inventory of phonemes.

The Hottentot tones seem to be particularly chaotic and difficult to reduce to order. Beach has wisely chosen to attack the problem by first investigating the tones of the "strong roots" (stem syllables) as pronounced in isolation, and then comparing with those the tones of the same syllables in connected speech; the "weak roots" (formants) cannot be isolated and therefore do not

lend themselves to the same treatment. The result of the analysis is that in Nama all stem syllables in isolation are pronounced with one of six "inherent tones" (four in Korana), which are considered representatives of as many tonemes. But as soon as other "roots", weak or strong, are added, extensive changes of tone set in, so that, for instance, a syllable which in isolation has a low-rising tone, occurs in connected speech both with low-rising, level, and low-falling tones. The rules governing these changes have not yet been fully worked out, nor can this be done without a considerable amount of additional material. It is clear, however, that the changes cannot be explained simply as variations within the toneme: each syllable is evidently capable of being characterized by more than one toneme, and there must thus be some kind of tonetic declension, an inflexion of each syllable for tone, parallel to, but not necessarily expressing, the inflexion of nouns for case etc. What is not yet clear is whether this inflexion belongs purely to the plane of expression, i.e. is determined only by influence (direction) from the tones of neighboring syllables, or whether it is (also) of a grammatical nature, as seems to be the case e.g. in Efik⁴. It will have to be investigated also whether all syllables of a given "inherent tone" are subjected to the same changes under the same tonetic and/or grammatical conditions: it might be that the Hottentot syllables divide into more than the six, respectively four, tonetic declensions already established. It would seem that the "inherent tones" of both Nama and Korana could be reduced from respectively six and four simplex tonemes to duplex

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groups composed of members of three tonemes: a high, a mid, and a low; but whether this is feasible can only be known when more material is available and a definitive study of the tonetic inflexions can be made.

In the Introduction Beach expresses a hope that his description of Hottentot may be found useful to comparative philology, the standardization of Hottentot pronunciation, spelling reform, and learning to speak Hottentot; no one who reads his book, can fail to realise that it will be of the greatest service not only in the fields envisaged by its author, but also, and particularly, to our knowledge of language in general.

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Footnotes.

1. For an account of the theory of glossematics see L. Hjelmslev, *Ueber die Beziehungen der Phonetik zur Sprachwissenschaft. Archiv für vergleichende Phonetik, Bd. II, 1938.*
2. Cf. especially *Grundfragen der Phonometrie. Phonometrische Forschungen, A.1, Berlin, 1936.*
3. *Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Phonetic Sciences, Cambridge, 1936, p. 53.*
4. Cf. Ida C. Ward: *The Phonetic and Tonal Structure of Efik, Cambridge, 1933.*