

Titel: BREV TIL: Morris Swadesh FRA: Louis Hjelmslev (1937-04-26)

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Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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8 Knud Rasmussensvej
Aarhus
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Dear Dr. Swadesh,

Some time ago you were kind enough to send me a post-card acknowledging receipt of my paper On the Principles of Phonematics. I should very much like to give you an answer to your remarks, but unfortunately I have been so busy that I could not answer until now.

Your question was this: "As to your conception of prosodies, I wonder if you would be prepared to class English h, j, and, in Southern British, r as prosodies since they occur only in syllabic initial. Likewise ŋ because it occurs only in syllabic final."

If in a language some marginal elements are not capable of being both final and initial (in the syllable as defined by me), I am prepared to class them as prosodies, whatever their number may be. I am quite aware that there are languages which, according to my definition, have no consonants at all but only marginal prosodies. This is the case of every language which only admits open syllables. In a language admitting closed syllables, the marginal elements which are not capable of being both final and initial and which have no relations (cf. my paper p. 53) with consonants are defined by me as prosodies (the ~~same~~ ^{latter} condition, which was not mentioned in my paper, is a consequence of the principle that there can be no relations between consonants and prosodies; it is of course only important for some languages). In Modern French there are ^{three} ~~four~~ marginal prosodies, viz. b, p^x and ʒ. The other French marginal elements are consonants; in the last syllable before a

"ŋ"

pause a final consonant is latent; in the position before a vowel it is not latent; consonants of this type are p, k, t, m, n, ŋ, x. z, l is a consonant which ordinarily is not latent. Besides, q, z, ʃ, ʒ and ʒ are consonants because they have relations to consonants (to t, k, y, z, k respectively).

As to English, h is a prosody! English h, i, and x are not; they are semi-vowels (which is to my opinion a special sort of vowels). You will easily understand this for i and u (i. e., i and u). The question of x is much more complicated, and you will excuse me that I do not enter into the details of my argument here. It is not necessary for the moment, for even if you prefer to consider English x a purely marginal element (that is to say in other terms, if you prefer to consider Engl. ɤ a vowel different from x, while I identify them), it is easy to show that English (even Southern British) x can occur in syllabic final. English x in marginal position behaves exactly like the French consonants mentioned above: it is latent (in British usage) at the end of the last syllable before a pause; in the position before a vowel it is not latent. Finally, y is not a single element but the group ɤk. Urdall has shown this briefly for Danish y (Proceedings 54); for English, this view can only be maintained if x is accepted to be a (semi-)vowel: the group ɤk is ordinarily pronounced [ɤ]. but-it is pronounced [ɤg] before an x in word-final (that is why, according to my opinion, g is pronounced in the comparative "longer" but not in the agent-accusative "longer" and in the forms "long" and "longing"; the comparative is explained by me as longer, while "long" is long, "long-

¹ Likewise Danish h, see Urdall, Proceedings of the Second Intern. Congr. of Phon. Sc. 54.

ing" is longing, and the ~~agent~~-noun "longer" is longVr. V symbolizing a syncretism of vowels).

I am sorry that I must necessarily be very brief. It is quite clear to me that a complete revision of our conceptions is necessary even for so well-known (that is, seemingly well-known) languages as English and French, and it takes a lot of space and time to make this revision. I have been working a good deal with English from my point of view. I shall be glad to discuss it with you whenever you want. But I do not think I shall publish anything about it very soon, because Uldall is preparing a dissertation on English conematics, and I shall have to wait for his results.

Very sincerely yours,