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Neutralization

The function of language is to transmit information from speakers to listeners. This book investigates an aspect of linguistic sound patterning that has traditionally been assumed to interfere with this function – neutralization, a conditioned limitation on the distribution of a language's contrastive values. The book provides in-depth, nuanced, and critical analyses of many theoretical approaches to neutralization in phonology, and argues for a strictly functional characterization of the term: neutralizing alternations are only function-negative to the extent that they derive homophones, and, most surprisingly, neutralization is often function-positive, by serving as an aid to parsing. Daniel Silverman encourages the reader to challenge received notions by carefully considering these functional consequences of neutralization. The book includes a glossary, discussion points, and lists of further reading to help advanced phonology students consolidate the main ideas and findings on neutralization.

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KEY TOPICS IN PHONOLOGY

'Key Topics in Phonology' focuses on the main topics of study in phonology today. It consists of accessible yet challenging accounts of the most important issues, concepts and phenomena to consider when examining the sound structure of language. Some topics have been the subject of phonological study for many years, and are re-examined in this series in the light of new developments in the field; others are issues of growing importance that have not so far been given a sustained treatment. Written by leading experts and designed to bridge the gap between textbooks and primary literature, the books in this series can either be used on courses and seminars, or as one-stop, succinct guides to a particular topic for individual students and researchers. Each book includes useful suggestions for further reading, discussion questions, and a helpful glossary.

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"If singing birds must sing, with no question of choice
Then living is our song, indeed our voice . . . " Paddy McAloon

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Preface

"OVERARCH"

"Neutralization" is a conditioned limitation on the distribution of a language's contrastive values.

The theses explored herein:

(1) Most cases of neutralizing alternation are heterophone-maintaining, and are consequently function-neutral in the sense that lexical semantic distinctness remains stable.
(2) Only in those rare instances when a neutralizing alternation is homophone-deriving might it be function-negative, in terms of potentially rendering lexical semantic content non-distinct.
(3) Indeed, neutralization is often function-positive, as it may serve as an aid to parsing the speech stream into its functional (morphemic and lexical) components.

In all, it is proposed that neutralization may proceed largely unchecked (thus increasing what I term phonological RHYME), until encountering a passive, usage-based pressure inhibiting excessive derived homophony (that is, until phonological REASON would be breached).

"UNDERGIRD"

The book considers neutralization from many different theoretical vantage points and schools of linguistic thought, from Kazan, to Prague, to London, to Boston, to Los Angeles, and beyond.

The book is divided into two parts. For the bulk of the book – RHYME – I observe, describe, and explain neutralization from many different theoretical perspectives, all the while building towards a discussion of neutralization's minor function-negative role. The shorter second

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part – REASON – also surveys approaches to neutralization, but from a very different perspective, emphasizing its function-positive role.

Throughout, special emphasis is placed on theoretical approaches that do *not* typically get thorough airings in today's classrooms. My reasons for this special emphasis are at least threefold:

(1) Students should have knowledge of their intellectual forebears' scholarship. By placing a strong emphasis on scholarship that young researchers might rarely have the time or the inclination to pursue, I hope to pique their intellectual curiosity.
(2) Students and others who read this volume are probably well versed in generative (rule-based, constraint-based) approaches to the issues, and thus my delving into depth therein would be largely redundant.
(3) The emphasis herein accords better with my own research interests, in particular with respect to searching for phonetic (formal) and semantic (functional) explanations for phonological patterns.

"BRICK AND MORTAR"

This is not a book for beginners. It assumes fairly extensive exposure to phonological theory, and it challenges readers to consider unfamiliar ways – both old and new – of analyzing phonological data. I don't hold back from presenting the "new"; less advanced readers may prefer to skip the Preamble until having gotten further into the book.

Regarding the discussion questions at the end of each chapter, loosely, these come in three varieties:

(1) Questions that are rather brazenly designed to lead readers towards answers consistent with the proposals advanced herein.
(2) Questions that are indeed open-ended, in the sense that I am unsure how to go about answering them myself, and for which I would greatly appreciate reader feedback.
(3) Questions that offer possibilities for research projects, including papers, theses, and even dissertations.

There is certainly overlap among these three categories.

The IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) is used throughout, and always appears in bold. It is used for phonetic transcriptions, and for representing *normative*, *typical*, or (perhaps) *idealized* pronunciations. Neither square brackets nor virgules are ever used.

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For corrections, updates, info on buying book rights for the inevitable Hollywood blockbuster (Steve baby? Marty my man?), and any other news related to the form or content of this book, please visit my website (www.seedyroad.com). You can also email me from there.

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Acknowledgments

This book was written in Santa Cruz over three summers: 2009, 2010, and 2011. At the time of my writing the words you are reading now, no one except me has read through the entire volume, and so here comes the scary part: sending it off to Cambridge University Press with who knows how many galling errors, gaping omissions, and glaring inconsistencies remaining. Still, many friends have read bits and pieces, and I wish to extend my sincere thanks to them. Really, there are so many people to thank: Michelle Arden for her inspiring scholarship, Jonathan Barnes for generously sharing his great book with me, Helen Barton for giving me this opportunity to write for Cambridge, Dan Everett for his warm friendship and his help with the Pirahã, Chris Golston for his hospitality and gener(ative)osity, Naomi Gurevich for her pioneering scholarship and her ability to make me laugh no matter the travail, Jongho Jun for his own scholarship and his insights into mine, Abby Kaplan for doing her best to make things simple for little me, Bob King for his gracious correspondence on functional load and I. B. Singer, Hahn Koo for his razor-sharp eye and astute level-headedness, Jean Léo Léonard for his enthusiastic moral support, Ken Lodge for so much I wouldn't know where to begin, Bruce Lyon for helping me hone the evolutionary metaphor, Jean-François Mondon for his homophonic erudition, Leendert Plug for the Firthian assist, Glyne Piggott for bringing me back to life after nine long years of . . . death, Péter Rácz for his lively commentary and killer questions, Girard Ramsay for his trans-oceanic telescopic vision, Koen Sebregts for his scintillating intellect and his forcing me to think inside the box, Donca Steriade for *still* being my teacher and allowing me free access to "Doncapedia", Patrycja Strycharczuk for great help with near-neutralization, Rory Turnbull for his very challenging and thoughtful commentary, Suzanne Urbanczyk for getting to the root of the problem (or, rather, the problem of the root), Andy Wedel for his steadfast partisanship, and Paul Willis for all his wonderful insights and all the great marathon geek sessions we've enjoyed.

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Nanuet, NY

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