

UDK 811.111'342:061.3(497.11)"2008"

2009

BRIAN MOTT
Universitat de Barcelona, Spain

BIMEP 2008

BIMEP 2008 (*I Belgrade International Meeting of English Phoneticians*) took place on the 27th and 28th of March 2008 in the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade and was organized by a group of teachers and student assistants from the English Department under the capable supervision of Dr Biljana Čubrović.

The comfortable size of the conference – about thirty papers were given over the two days in all – allowed participants to converse and socialize easily with the other delegates, which made for a consistently congenial atmosphere throughout the proceedings. Another advantage of the small size of the meeting was that there were no parallel sessions, which, when too numerous, can mar the atmosphere of a conference as delegates desperately shuffle between talks that have often been assigned to rooms in different parts of a building, or are in completely different locations and, in the end, only manage to get to know a limited number of people. The sessions were assigned to only two different rooms in the central Faculty of Philology building, so everybody was able to find their way around almost immediately. Moreover, the many helpful members of staff and students around the Faculty, no doubt proud to see their university used as the venue for an international event, made sure that nobody got lost and the sessions were able to operate within the designated time limits. The fact that Belgrade University, like many of the older seats of learning of its kind, is situated right in the heart of the city, meant that there was always time to visit the numerous bookshops on Knez Mihailova Street, a pedestrian thoroughfare right outside the backdoor leading to the English Department of the University.

A wide range of nationalities were represented at the conference: there were representatives of countries as far apart as Japan, Iran and Switzerland, not to mention local delegates from various parts of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The papers were also very varied, covering a breadth of interests, taking in not only practical considerations of pronunciation of relevance to teaching, but more abstract issues of a phonological kind. For example, while Maja Marković (Serbia) considered the different strategies that can be applied for acquiring L2 vowels, and Takehiko Makino (Japan) outlined vowel substitution patterns in Japanese speakers' English, Csaba Csides (Hungary) gave a paper on a radical offspring of Government Phonology, called "strict CV-phonology", in which he claimed that consonantal positions alternate with vocalic positions in the phonological string, and that a parallel analysis can be applied to vowel-reduction and vowel-zero alternation in English. In the same session as C. Csides, Alastair Wilson (Switzerland) took us to north-east England to familiarize us with some of the phonetic and phonological features of the speech of Darlington, County Durham,

which has long been neglected owing to the attention devoted to its more powerful neighbour Geordie, spoken in the Newcastle area.

Other topics which were dealt with were contrastive linguistics, use of British versus American English in Serbia, the phonological features of advertising slogans, and English lexical stress and intonation. Miloš D. Đurić (Serbia) presented some acoustic properties of English and French vowels, while Erzsebet Balogh (Hungary), starting from the relatively marginal status of dental fricatives in the world's languages (she mentioned in particular Czech, Russian, French and German), discussed how Hungarian secondary-school learners of English replace these problematic segments with native sounds when reading an English text, and then proceeded to compare her findings with the results of previous studies on the same issue. Klementina Juranič Petek's paper on the English of Slovenian learners afforded interesting data for the uninitiated on the differences between the Slavonic languages, referring as it did to the final vocalization and devoicing characteristic of Slovenian, but not found, in Serbian, for example. The comparative incidence of British and American English in Serbia, with particular reference to pronunciation tendencies, was reported on by Jelena Grubor and Darko Hinić (Serbia). Mirna Vidaković (Serbia) reported on her investigation into the phonological characteristics of advertising slogans in English and the problems related to their translation into Serbian, referring to alliteration, assonance, rhyme and sound symbolism. Contributions on the prosody of English were provided by Biljana Čubrović (Serbia) and Ken-Ichi Kadooka (Japan). The latter underlined the complexity of English tunes compared to those of other languages like Japanese, which does not have the English compound melodies (fall-rise and rise-fall). Dr Čubrović analysed the accentual patterns of recent French loanwords in English and laid emphasis on the variety of resolutions of French stress that one finds in English. In the second part of her paper, she pointed out the differences in stress patterns observed between American and British English in assigning stress to French loanwords, and attempted to account for the stress differences that exist in different accents of English.

During the conference, two plenaries were given: one on Thursday 27th and one on Friday 28th. On Thursday, we were privileged to hear Professor Tvrtko Prčić from the University of Novi Sad deliver a lecture on the pronunciation and spelling of English proper names in Serbian. Probably the most surprising thing for speakers of some languages other than Serbian was the fact that foreign names are transliterated in these languages, as well as being given a pronunciation more consonant with the local phonology, and are inflected for case like native names. On Friday, Dr Jane Setter of the University of Reading lectured on prosodic research into rhythm and intonation, with particular reference to Hong Kong English and Russian learner English on the one hand, and Chinese and Arab learner English on the other.

Apart from the speakers mentioned above, there were other excellent contributors, and the standard of content and delivery throughout the conference was high. To complete the event, a dinner was provided on Thursday evening, round the corner from the Faculty of Philology at Aeroklub, and Primož Jakopin (Slovenia) generously took photos of everybody, which he later put on the web. The whole thing ended with a snack after the last talk on Friday evening. I am sure that all those who attended are looking forward to the next BIMEP meeting.