**Word Phonology in a Systemic Functional Framework**

Paul Tench, Cardiff University, Wales

I have been anxious to explore the potential of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) at the level of word phonology for some time. So much work has been done in SFL on grammar and discourse, and related themes, and on intonation where I have enjoyed working in the past, but nothing has been done, as far as I know, on the phonology of words. I have wanted to explore the application of principles and practices of SFL at this level of phonology to see if they work. So, in my retirement, I’ve devoted some time to this, and, lo and behold, I think they do work – not so much in meaning, but in the structure of systems and functions. What I have presented is a different kind of description of phonology, and I have applied it not only to English but I also wanted to try it out on other languages as well, to German, Welsh and a completely different, non-European language, a Chadic language spoken in the north of Nigeria, Tera.

I have used the common features of phonemes in a hierarchical setting at a superficial level – no imagining of hypothetical underlying forms, which I find to be disconcertingly debatable – but actual practical data that the mind assembles into the mental phonology of a particular language or dialect. New words are coined with this mental phonology, and words from other languages are similarly incorporated, in time. There can be different phonologies for different parts of the grammar; the phonology of pronouns as distinct from nouns, or of loan words as distinct from native words, etc. Also there are no pretensions at universalism; each language must be described in its own terms, and that is also true of its phonology. Everybody has their own mental phonology, with their own phonetic output (idiolect), but it is constrained conventionally to aid social communication. And word phonology changes in time as one generation prefers a different pronunciation from another generation (diachronic phonology).

The basic function of word phonology is to provide distinct phonic shapes for all the lexical and grammatical items in a language (although it is true that generations of speakers have produced homonyms!) and for this reason it is integral to the make-up of language. As I like to say, there is no language without phonology; even dead languages had a phonology! Two practical points: I suggest that introductions to linguistics should not begin with phonetics and phonology as a separate level of language, but should begin with words – morphologically and then phonologically; and secondly, when we do teach pronunciation, a fuller awareness of phonology would be a bonus.

I have deliberately not given any examples to illustrate my claims, as it would make this introduction too long. You will have to read the book for them! And Tera is quite different from the other languages in this presentation of phonology!

Published by University of Toronto Press; ISBN 978-1-4875-6653-1: pp xii-189

Paul Tench