

Chapter 1 : Phonetics Lab 50th anniversary party

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This is not new. The inadequacy of height and backness has been well known but largely disregarded for at least 85 years, since Russell, The vowel, its physiological mechanism as shown by X-ray, Columbus, Ohio, and definitely for 50 years, since Fant, The Acoustic Theory of Speech Production, The Hague, Mouton. This post summarizes the main milestones in phonetic theory for these two features since A. Bell introduced them in, Visible Speech, London, Methuen: Three of his new concepts a continuous space between front and back, the new class of central vowels, and small increments of vowel timbre by small tongue movements in any direction were creatively innovative. But he had no arguments, there were no new observations to build on. He knew the throat-tongue-lip model, that had existed since antiquity Wood: Kennedy, revised and reprinted several times until He also knew about the vowel tone discovered about years previously, the target of the single resonance theory, and finally identified as F2 when more resonances had been recognized. But his proposed tongue height and backness, along with constrictions located between the hard palate and the velum, were hypotheses. There was no method for observing or recording tongue positions at that time apart from peeping between the lips and probing with a straw. Negation began once vowel profiles were X-rayed and tongue positions made visible, from around onwards. The story of these two tongue features is intimately connected with advances in the theory of speech acoustics. Bell had tied his model into the single resonance theory with height and backness determining what he called a configurative aperture suitably located along the palate in order to terminate the buccal cavity for a given vowel timbre, but he offered no explanation for how tongue height affected the timbre, nor did Sweet, and nor did Jones in any edition of, The Pronunciation of English, London, Cambridge University Press or, An Outline of English Phonetics, Leipzig, Teubner; later editions Heffer. Roudet, La classification des voyelles de M. Bell, Vowel theories, American Journal of Otolaryngology 1, July soon confirmed two resonances for all vowels, and formulated a double resonance theory with height controlling an assumed throat resonance. Lloyd, Speech sounds, their nature and causation, Phonetische Studien affirmed the double resonance theory and discovered a third that he assigned to a cavity between the lips and teeth. For a few decades height and backness seemed to fit nicely with the double resonance theory until the s, when the newly introduced spectrograph revealed numerous formants for which there were no additional cavities available. Yet it was already hypostatized and was not to be questioned. X-ray studies were giving an incomprehensibly confusing picture of vowel production to anyone whose belief in height and backness was literal rather than pragmatic. However, Wood examined 38 sets of X-rayed profiles of vowel production from 15 languages, published from to, and summarized this confusion: However, Wood also found that area functions for every vowel in all the same 38 sets showed without exception that only four constriction locations were being used: Area functions for Home Counties Southern British English vowels left and Cairo Arabic right, demonstrating the four constriction locations. The Arabic vowels are all allophones of three phonemes: From Wood, A radiographic analysis of constriction locations for vowels, Journal of Phonetics 7: The model vocal tract corresponds to a larger adult male speaker. Based on the nomograms of Stevens and House, Development of a quantitative description of vowel articulation, Journal of the Acoustical Society of America Examples of typical vowel timbres have been added. Adapted from Wood

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1 PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY IN THE LAST 50 YEARS Peter Ladefoged Dept. Linguistics, UCLA, Los Angeles, USA oldfogey@calendrierdelascience.com [Paper presented at: From Sound to Sense: 50+ Years of Discoveries in Speech.

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