Proceedings of the British Academy, **80**, 305–317

Eugénie Jane Andrina Henderson 1914–1989

EUGÉNIE HENDERSON was born on October 2nd 1914 at Newcastle, where she spent her early years. She took pride in being a 'Geordie', and she claimed some skill in the local dialect. Her father, William Henderson, was a civil engineer and, *inter alia*, made himself responsible for the construction of the Singapore docks between the two wars. He was also a respected amateur football player in his local team.

After school in London, Miss Henderson enrolled in the English course at University College, London, graduating with first class honours. During her studies in English she took advantage of the regulations then in force to take brief courses in a number of European languages and in general phonetics. In this she attracted the attention of Daniel Jones, Professor of Phonetics in the University of London, who encouraged her work in phonetics and persuaded her to take an interest, which proved lifelong, in the languages of Southeast Asia. In 1938 she was appointed to a junior post in Jones's Department of Phonetics.

At the outbreak of war in 1939 the Department moved out of London, and she took up a temporary post in the Ministry of Economic Warfare. But as soon as the Japanese entered the war at the end of 1941, she was recalled to the University to undertake teaching in different types of Japanese in Professor J.R. Firth's Department of Phonetics and Linguistics at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Not unexpectedly the Service Departments had assumed that, should Japan become involved against England, they would have enough language experts in that field for operational purposes. This was by no means the case, and for the whole of the rest of the war the School became virtually a language teaching unit for the three services, with Japanese the principal, but not the only, language taught. For some, no doubt good, reason the Far East Department dealt

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with Army personnel and the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics took charge of students from the Navy and the Royal Air Force.

These courses were at first concentrated on Japanese phonetics for R.A.F. people who would be engaged in intercepting and recording Japanese radiotelephone messages between aircraft and other aircraft or ground stations. Rightly or wrongly it was assumed that the Japanese, proud of the uniqueness of their language, would make far more use of messages *en clair* than the armed services of other belligerents would be expected to do. These courses were considered urgent and only lasted about eight weeks, enrolment for them going on throughout the year, without regard for academic terms and vacations. Later 'translators' courses', lasting six months, were introduced for those intended to deal with captured documents and the cryptographic tasks of the Government Communications Centre, then located in Bletchley. Much of this course teaching was targeted on a probable year and a half of continuing war in the Far East after the defeat of Germany. Much of this latter work proved operationally unnecessary, but some of the trainees were important components of the forces of occupation, and a number continued with Oriental studies in civil life.

During the three war years 1942–5 Miss Henderson was one of the most active members of the departmental staff, together with her colleagues and former teacher Eileen Evans (later Mrs. Eileen Whitley). All service students who passed through the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics took some of her Japanese phonetics courses, and many recall with pleasure the stimulation of her teaching.

She had been a Lecturer in Phonetics on a temporary basis in 1942 at the start of her wartime work, and this was made permanent until 1946, when she became a Senior Lecturer. In 1953 she was appointed Reader in Phonetics in the University of London, and she became Professor of Phonetics in 1964 until her retirement in 1982.

Eugénie's services to the School and to the University were and remain outstanding. Her research and publication extended over general phonetic and phonological theory and studies in more than one language family and area. In this Memoir this part of her work will be considered below in greater detail.

She served on several important committees of the School and the University; and the revival of the Department of Southeast Asia after the war was largely in her care as far as the languages of the region were concerned. Lecturers in specific Southeast Asian languages were appointed straight from those holding first degrees in other subjects; there was scarcely any other source of young people to fill such positions. The School was then expanding rapidly under the favouring wind of the report

of the Scarbrough Commission, which had been set up just before the end of the war to review the provision of university teaching and research in the languages and cultures of the peoples of the Orient and of Africa (along with the languages of Eastern Europe). In one year four new Lecturer's posts in Southeast Asian languages were created and filled; and the expansion of universities in general and of the School in particular and the numbers of staff appointments made in the early postwar years seem almost incredible and unimaginable in today's stringent climate.

Newly appointed Lecturers in the Southeast Asia Department spent their first four years in the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics under the direct charge of Miss Henderson, with their own regular seminar over which she presided, before their first visit to their own language areas and subsequent membership of the Southeast Asian Department. From 1960 to 1966 she served as Acting Head of this latter department while retaining her senior position in her own. After the appointment of a separate Head of Southeast Asia she was Head of Phonetics and Linguistics until 1969, when she was succeeded by the present writer. During her years as Head of Southeast Asia a wider interest in the languages, cultures, and histories of the Southeast Asian area was promoted by the introduction of a first degree in Southeast Asian Studies, under her encouragement and guidance. She was made an Honorary Fellow of the School in 1985 and elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1986. A member of the Philological Society from 1945, she served on its Council and was Treasurer from 1966 to 1974, holding office during a period of financial difficulty for the Society. From 1984 to 1988 she was the Society's President and a Vice-president thereafter. She was also elected to the Chair of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain from 1977 to 1980.

Within the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics she saw herself all the time as a phonetician and phonologist. *Phonetics* was the title of her University appointment, and *The domain of phonetics* was the title of her Inaugural Lecture in 1965. But she always involved herself with phonetics as a part of a much wider general linguistics. In her younger days, during the 1930s and 1940s some phoneticians quite legitimately concerned themselves with articulatory and acoustic phonetics, transcriptions, and the extreme accuracy of recording and classifying the pronunciation of the words and sentences of languages, leaving grammar and semantics to others. There is nothing wrong with this, and such phoneticians strengthened the reputation for accuracy of audition and pronunciation for which Daniel Jones's department in University College was rightly famous. But this, for all her phonetic abilities, was not for Eugénie Henderson; phonetics and phonology made up a part, and a vital part, of linguistics, whether in general theoretical terms or in the description

of languages, and it was this understanding of her subject upon which she concentrated.

In this sense the highly situationally bound practical language teaching of the war years suited her own inclinations well, and she was entirely in sympathy with the linguistic philosophy of J. R. Firth, Head of the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics, expressed in such aphorisms as 'linguistics at all levels of analysis is concerned with meaningful human behaviour in society (Firth 1957:117). Henderson's Inaugural Lecture sets out clearly her own conception of her subject in her mid-career (1965a:4): 'Let me say at once that in my view there can be no question but that phonetics forms a part—an extremely important part—of the wider field of general linguistics'; (1965a:7): 'The phonetician cannot close his eyes to grammatical considerations if he wishes to give the most helpful account of the use made of phonic features in a given language'; and (1965a:9): 'the most useful work' in the field of acoustic phonetics) 'may be expected to result from teamwork between phoneticians and psychologists'. Later in the Lecture she set forth her interpretation of her subject as part of the teaching and research work of the School of Oriental and African Studies. This should embrace the languages of the Orient and Africa, though not exclusively. It should be complementary to the language teaching of other departments, not necessarily directed to the same aspects of the languages shared by the language departments. This, she said at the end of her Lecture (1965a:29): 'is worth the attempt, in order to maintain our somewhat perilous but exhilarating stance astride the two cultures' of the sciences and the humanities'.

In her research, seen in seminars and publications, her interests lay primarily, though not exclusively, in Southeast Asian languages and in general phonetics and phonology, at their peak of prominance in the years 1945–60. Though Japanese was the language of her war service, her interest in Thai and other Southeast Asian languages had begun under Daniel Jones's influence while she was still at University College.

In the School, during Firth's headship, of a young and expanding department phonetics and phonology were dominated by prosodic theory to an astonishing intensity. Firth expounded it, as he also expounded contextual semantics, with an almost religuous fevour, and this was followed with enthusiasm by his colleagues, several of whom cut their phonological eye-teeth on the development and application of its principles and methods. The vigorous and sometimes deliberately polemic support given to prosodic phonology in these years seems somewhat strange today, though it may be compared with the single-minded devotion bestowed on Chomsky and transformational grammar (as it then was) in the early 1960s. Prosodic theory continues to arouse interest at the present time, and linguists

continue to publish prosodically orientated phonological analyses. It is, moreover, to be seen underlying, though often without acknowledgement, some current generative approaches to phonology, especially in such fields as autosegmental and metrical phonology.

At the time Firth's theoretical outlook was new and revolutionary, though he always claimed its kinship with the thinking of Henry Sweet, the nineteenth-century Anglist and pioneer phonetician. As Firth's phonology was the main impetus behind Henderson's phonological work, it will be relevant to state the main principles here (but for a fuller account see Palmer 1970:ix–xvi).

Firth's theory was one of the first reactions against the two dominant versions of phonology during the 1940s and early 1950s, the conservative phonology of Daniel Jones, whose interpretation of the phoneme as the basic unit of phonological structure was sometimes rudely referred to as the 'Joneme', and the 'structuralist' phonemics widely accepted in America and elsewhere at the time. Intended to be the application of Bloomfield's principles, it was embodied in a number of once standard textbooks. Basic to it was the demand for the absolute 'autonomy' of phonemic analysis, to be exhaustively completed before any statements were made about morphology, syntax, or the lexicon, and grounded on the working out of a phonemic transcription of the language, giving rise to the necessary 'biunique' relationship between phonemic analysis and narrow transcription, established independently from all other analyic considerations

Prosodic analysis ran directly against these prevailing views in two respects, which perhaps we see more clearly today than in Firth's own time. Firstly, he rejected the 'autonomous' status of phonology. He envisaged linguistic analysis as being set out at a number of levels, movement between which (the use of data from one level to justify analysis at another) was not only permissible, but desirable. But essentially phonology was the interlink between grammar and lexicon on the one side, and phonetics on the other, substantially the later outlook of the generative grammarians (and others).

Secondly Firth intended to decouple phonological analysis from broad transcription, which had always been the matrix and the guide for phonemic phonology. A broad, or phonemic, transcription was a graphic necessity, but for Firth it was not the most revealing analysis of the parts played by the various sound differences in the phonological system and structure involved in words and sentences.

Instead of one basic unit, the phoneme, Firth insisted on two, the purely segmental phonematic (*not* phonemic) units and prosodies at various levels related to structures, whether grammatical or phonological. So one could set up word or morpheme prosodies as well as syllable prosodies, phrase prosodies, and sentence prosodies; and in consonance with this approach to

phonology there could be prosodies abstracted from separate word classes (e.g. verbs), separate types of morpheme (e.g. prefix, suffix), and lexically separate prosodies of loan words as against inherited and assimilated words where this would lead to a more revealing analysis. Prosodies could relate to their structures in two ways, by actual phonetic extension of a feature over more than one segment, as when a nasalized vowel always follows a preceding nasal consonant or when a syllable is marked by length, pitch (tone), or stress, and demarcatively when the occurrence of a sound feature, e.g. aspiration, though located at a certain place in a structure serves to delimit it by signalling initiality or finality.

This brief overview of Firth's prosodic phonology is relevant to this memoir because it was Henderson's phonology no less. Indeed, it has been maintained by teachers that as an introductory exemplification of prosodic theory Henderson's *Prosodies in Siamese* (1949) is one of the best texts available, far more explicit and accessible than the programmatic and obscure article by which Firth (1948) officially inaugurated his theory and its methodology (cp. Palmer 1970:xiii).

Palmer refers to Henderson's article as 'the neatest and, in some ways, the most convincing of all the articles' written in the framework of prosodic analysis. It will serve as an illustration of the theory and as an example of Henderson's phonological analysis; she saw it (Palmer 1970:27) as a working application of Firth's 'Sounds and prosodies' to a specific language.

She lists the sounds heard in the language in 'general phonetic terms' (Palmer 1970:28) as twenty-one consonants in syllable initial position, seven in final position, nine vowels, six of them with contrastive length, and sixteen diphthongs. In her analysis she sets up as phonematic units seven consonants and twelve vowels. To these belong only those features that are treated as strictly segmental in scope. The remaining features are assigned to prosodies of syllables and syllable parts, or to larger structures:

1 Prosodies of intonation (one of seven) superimposed on the lexical tones, and 'sentence prosodies' applicable to certain particles carrying general sentential functions.
2 Prosodies of phrases and polysyllabic words, such as loss of stress and tonal neutralization.
3 Prosodies of syllables as wholes: quantity, tone (one of five), stress, labiovelarization and yotization in diphthong formation.
4 Prosodies of syllable parts, marking initiality: plosion, affrication, friction, voicing, rhotacization, aspiration, lateralization, labialization; marking finality, unreleased closure.

As an example of this the syllable (and word) *khrai* with level tone, come, is analysed as:

1 Syllable prosodies: shortness, tone 1, yotization
2 Syllable part prosodies: plosion, aspiration, rhotacization (all prosodies of initiality
3 Phonematic units *k a ζ* (zero).

Table 1 (from Palmer 1970:51) provides further exemplification.

Though *Prosodies in Siamese* makes specific reference to Firth *Sounds and prosodies* (Firth 1948), her thoughts had already been turning in a prosodic direction in her research on the phonetics of Lushai (Henderson 1947–48), in which she identifies tone and length as syllable features and yotization and labiovelarization as features of syllable initiality and syllable finality.

Her attention was concentrated on phonetics and phonology, but she also produced a fuller linguistic analysis of a language of northwest Burma, Tiddim Chin (Henderson 1965b) as the product of a field visit among its speakers in 1954. Subtitled *A descriptive analysis of two texts*, it subjects its material to syntactic, morphological, and phonological description, the phonology in prosodic terms.

Tiddim Chin is not an isolating language like Vietnamese and Thai (Siamese), on which she spent so much time, but has a recognizable morphology of word structure. In her description she made the syllable the basic structure with 'placed' (phonematic) units characterizing or demarcating the whole structure (Henderson 1965b:19); tone, quantity, syllable initial features, and syllable final features. Intonation is superimposed on lexical

Table 1. Prosodic analysis of a passage of Thai.

Prosodies of Sentence	Sentence Tone C				
Prosodies of Polysyllables and Sentence Pieces		Contrast of 'neutral' tone and 5-tone system; Contrast of no-stress and stress		Contrast of 'neutral' tone and 5-tone system Contrast of no-stress and stress	
Prosodies of Syllables	Length	Shortness	Shortness	Shortness	Length
	Tone 3	'neutral' tone	Tone 1	'neutral' tone	Tone 1
	Labiovelarization	No-stress	Stress	No-stress	Stress
Prosodies of Syllable Parts	Plosion	Labialization			Plosion
Phonematic Units	*ζaζ*	*ζiζ*	*mon*	*naζ*	*ζeŋ*
Broad transcription	ʔa:u	wi-mon		na-ʔe:ŋ	
Translation	'Ah! There you are, Wimon'				

Adapted from Henderson 1949; Palmer 1970:51.

tone, as in Thai, and below sentence intonation she identified a specific intonation and other prosodic features relating to phrases and 'figures', sequences smaller than phrases but potentially larger than words (52). At the level of individual words certain distinctions, particularly of tone, separate verbs from nouns, and she treated these phonological distinctions under the grammatical headings of the word classes concerned. Likewise the syllable structures of prefixes are described under that grammatical heading (99).

Henderson was a phonetician and a phonologist, but her account of Tiddim Chin embraces all levels of description. After a brief chapter on spelling and pronunciation (9–14), the phonetic material is handled in two principal chapters, syllable structure (15–28) and the grammatical structure of the (unmarked) 'narrative' style (29–105), in which phonological categories are successively related to the syntactic and morphological analysis already made. A short chapter (106–17) points out some grammatical and phonological differences pertaining to the 'colloquial' style in parts of the texts. The book ends with a detailed word by word analysis of the texts themselves.

Henderson by no means confined herself to the typology of isolating languages nor to the area of Southeast Asia. In 1949 and 1970 she published two articles on the phonetics of Caucasian languages, whose structures, with their high morphological complexity, are about as far removed as possible from languages like Thai and Vietnamese. Her second article (1970) in this field is now one of the classic texts on the instrumental analysis of the phonetics of languages of this type.

Most of her work took the form of articles in a wide range of journals, but in addition to her *Tiddim Chin* she edited and introduced a selection of Sweet's many writings (Henderson 1971). Like Firth she saw in Sweet's work a significant anticipation of prosodic theory in his contrast between analysis and synthesis, the former foreseeing the later phonemes of Daniel Jones and others, and the latter taking in the sorts of features subsequently to be treated as prosodies (Sweet 1906:44). One may notice the use of Sweet's term *synthesis* in the subtitle of her article on Siamese (Henderson 1948). She entitled her selection of texts from Sweet *The essential foundation*, using Sweet's own words (Sweet 1871:v), and this book serves excellently as a presentation of his many works on phonetics and on other aspects of general linguistics within a moderate compass (329 pages). Later (1981) she edited jointly with R.E. Asher a festschrift for Professor D. Abercrombie, which took up his particular interest in the historical development of phonetics in its title *Towards a history of phonetics* a topic in which she also had an interest.

Eugénie Henderson travelled widely on the Continent of Europe, in in

America, the Far East, and in her own specialist area of Southeast Asia, and she achieved an international reputation in the quality and value of her published work. Towards the end of her professional life she was honoured with an invitation, gladly accepted and fulfilled, to address the Plenary Session on phonology at the Thirteenth International Congress of Linguists in Tokyo in 1982. Her paper was published in the *Proceedings* of the Congress in 1983.

Professor Henderson retired in 1989, but retirement for her did not mean a diminution of her research. One may take note of the continued work on her projected dictionary of Karen (another language of Burma). This was unfinished at her death, but it is hoped that colleagues in the School will be able to see it through to completion and publication.

She was an invigorating teacher. In the matter of holding the attention of a class and of maintaining her stance perhaps she gained something from her experiences in the last full year of the war, when, huddled in corridors to avoid injury from broken windows during flying bomb attacks, she had to shout down her colleagues holding their own classes at the same time. In her interpretation of her professorial duties she regularly gave an introductory course on phonetics and phonology for first-year students throughout the academic session, covering a wide survey of principles and methods. One recalls such vivid techniques as bringing into the classroom a three-dimensional model of a chemical compound to illustrate distinctive feature theory.

She had many students under her supervision during her years as a teacher, mostly Ph.D. candidates from Southeast Asia, working on one or other aspects of their own languages. They were successful, and they remembered her and the years spent under her care with affection, on several occasions making sure of seeing her again on a visit to their own countries. Hers was not just academic supervision, but personal help and friendship; her students visited her home in Hertfordshire with its extensive garden, and she recalled with amusement one Thai girl, brought up on English literature, including Wordsworth's *Daffodils*, who could scarcely contain her excitement on seeing masses of them in bloom in her lawn. While she lived in the country, as Head of Department she gave a garden party each summer to her departmental colleagues.

Her academic career was marked not only by her research and teaching, but by an abiding administrative efficiency on committees and as Treasurer of the Philological Society, displaying in all matters a consistent sense of values and general commonsense. Later in her life it is no secret that she was approached with the prospect of being head of an Oxford or Cambridge college, a post that she would have filled with acclaim but which at the time for personal reasons she felt she must decline.

In a Memoir such as this, one must concentrate on her public and academic life, but some account of her private and family life must be included if one is to give a proper perspective of her and of her personality. She was a member of the first generation of women scholars who sought to combine their profession with their duties of family care. The generation preceding hers had seen women into professions traditionally occupied by men, in universities, for example, as students and then as teachers. These had on the whole remained unmarried. Henderson faced the problem of the necessarily double life of the professional wife and mother. Her family was by modern standards a large one, four sons, and a daughter who tragically died while still a child. As a mother she was loving and well loved, managing to satisfy her obligations fully at home and at the University. It was noticeable that when she was a Head of Department women colleagues found it more embarrassing to plead 'benefit of clergy' to be excused academic engagements for family reasons with her than with male heads.

Though she insisted on the right of women scholars to make progress in the academic world on an equality with men, and her own success in her career makes this manifest, she was never a 'feminist' in the political or social sense, deliberately eschewing male pronouns and the like. Amusingly in the opening paragraph of her Inaugural Lecture, on the place and the duties of a professor of phonetics, the pronouns *he* and *his*, referring to her own position, occur no less than twelve times in all. She was rather surprised that this should be pointed out to her after the lecture was finished.

In fact she combined a number of roles, each of which might have satisfied one person. Apart from her academic and her family life she was an accomplished pianist continuing to practise and attain to higher grades throughout her life. She also regularly attended theatres and concerts, and she enjoyed, and produced, good cooking and good wine. For a time she ran a small home dairy farm, referring to herself in this role as a 'cow keeper'. While she invited students and colleagues to her home, in general she kept the two sides of her life apart, not normally discussing private and family matters among colleagues nor turning her house into just an extension of her room in the School. Perhaps typically, she had two names for herself among those with whom she was on first name terms; to us, her colleagues, she was 'Eugénie', at home and among friends she was 'Gene'.

As a scholar and as a supervisor of graduates she was meticulous and exacting, but in her general bearing she was delightfully free of self-importance and she could never be accused of 'pulling rank'. The photograph attached to this Memoir, taken while she was at the height of her university career, nicely portrays her levity and slight cynicism about herself. Some anecdotes in this connection are illustrative of this. When she

had retired and was living in Hampstead, she had to shelve and classify her numerous academic books. These shelves were labelled by such headings as *syntax*, *phonology*, *historical linguistics*, and so on; a shelf of unclassified books bore the title *rhubarb*. On one occasion during a lunchtime conversation, when someone insisted on acting 'on principle', she interjected 'I do so distrust people who act on principle'. At another time she took part in a series of public lectures on linguistics, dealing herself with phonetics and phonology; each contributor was asked to supply brief personal details, including 'hobbies'. She wrote 'Bringing up a family of four sons'.

Her charm and her unceasing energy, undimmed by age and by certain health problems, made her sudden death a great shock to all who knew her and had worked with her. Such was her bearing right to the last that one thought (and perhaps she thought) that she could never die. I myself recall her company at the British Academy summer dinner, which she thoroughly enjoyed; the conversation turned to the venue for the 1992 International Congress of Linguists, with Canada and Australia as possible host countries (in the event Canada was chosen). Henderson at once put in: 'I do hope Australia is chosen; I have always wanted an excuse to go there'.

As a conversationalist she was unique. She could hardly open her mouth without saying something interesting, provocative, or stimulating. When we were having lunch together on the day of the Academy dinner, I happened to mention the (then) recent film of *Little Dorrit*. Immediately she said: 'I am sure the most intersting difference between the book and the film is the different lights in which Clennam is presented'; this was typical.

Her death on July 27th, 1989, was sudden and unexpected. It was a shock to her family and to all her colleagues and friends. But it was painless and therefore happy; prolonged invalidism was something she could not easily face. The funeral took place on July 31st in Hampstead, and a Memorial Service was held for her in the University Church of Christ the King on October 20th. A friend to all who knew her, she has left us with a sense of affection and admiration, and of great loss.

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A complete bibliography of Professor Henderson's publications may be found in *Southeast Asian linguistics* (Davidson 1989:5–9).

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