

EUGÉNIE J.A. HENDERSON: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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This introduction is not the place for a biography or even a full-length appreciation of Eugénie Henderson's scholarly career. Although she formally retired on 3 September 1982, from her post in the School of Oriental and African Studies and in the University of London as Professor of Phonetics, no one of her many friends and colleagues, nor she herself, surely, regards her retirement from teaching as the final conclusion of her active participation in linguistic studies and research. But the contributions from the international world of scholarship to this volume of studies, like those in the volume published in 1979 by Chulalongkorn University (Thongkum 1979), testify to the esteem and affection in which she is held by the now large community of her colleagues, former students, and friends.

Eugénie Henderson's involvement in the School of Oriental and African Studies began in 1942, when she was appointed to a lectureship in phonetics. This appointment, like those of a number of her contemporaries, was part of the immediate response by the armed services to the requirements created by the Japanese entry into the Second World War. The Department of Phonetics and Linguistics, under the headship of Professor J.R. Firth, was almost wholly given over between 1942 and 1945 to Japanese language courses for Royal Air Force and Royal Navy personnel, including some highly specialized courses in Japanese phonetics for specific intelligence purposes. Eugénie Henderson's part in the development, administration and teaching of these courses was probably second only to that of Firth himself.¹

Some of its continuing framework of teaching in the Department had its origin in the forced response of its staff to wartime conditions (cf. Firth 1945), and the impetus behind its expansion was maintained after the war by the University of London's implementation of the Scarbrough Report (1947), which recommended a strong development of Oriental and African studies -- linguistic, cultural and historical -- a development which, naturally, was concentrated in the School dedicated to such studies.

The post-war expansion of linguistic work in the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics covered languages from several different areas of the Far East, the Middle East, and Africa. While still a postgraduate student under Professor Daniel Jones at University College London in 1937, Eugénie Henderson had begun the study of Thai, which laid the foundation

of her lifelong connection with the languages, peoples and cultures of South East-Asia.

Her studies in Thai were reinforced after 1945 with studies, mainly through informants in London, in other South-East Asian languages, including Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Mon. In 1946 the Department of South-East Asia and the Islands was re-established, and significantly enlarged soon afterwards, with lectureships in Thai, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Mon; during their first years of appointment, the lecturers appointed to these posts were attached to the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics and came directly under the supervision of Eugénie Henderson. The 'pro-seminar' that she organized as a forum for the presentation and discussion of their research became a model for the later postgraduate seminar of the Department.

In 1953 she was appointed Reader and, in 1964, Professor of Phonetics in the University of London.

Eugénie Henderson's involvement in South-East Asian languages was further strengthened by her service, after the retirement of Professor D.G.E. Hall, as Acting Head of the Department of South East Asia and the Islands, from 1960 until 1966, during a crucial period in the consolidation of that Department. At the same time she continued to play a full part as a senior member of the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics and, from 1966 until 1970, after the retirement of Professor N.C. Scott, she was Head of this Department.

Throughout the years 1945 to 1981 Eugénie Henderson involved herself in the subject of general linguistics as a whole. Since 1954 she has been a member of the Council of the Philological Society, serving as the Society's Treasurer from 1965 to 1974, and from 1977 to 1980 she was Chairman of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain.

Though her studies of the languages of South-East Asia were mainly conducted in this country, she has made two fairly extensive visits to that part of the world. In 1954 she visited Burma as a Visiting Professor of Rangoon University and engaged in fieldwork on Bwe Karen and Chin, this latter research resulting in the publication of her book *Tiddim Chin* (Henderson 1965a), while in 1975 she taught in Thailand, in a summer institute organized by the Thailand Research Project in Bangkok.

Eugénie Henderson's publications have been mainly concerned with the phonetics and phonology of South-East Asian languages, in some cases breaking entirely new ground and also applying the theory of prosodic phonology, developed by Firth during the 1940s and early 1950s, to different language material. Her 1948 'Prosodies in Siamese: a study in synthesis' (see Henderson 1970a) has for long been recognized as one of the most

thorough and revealing studies in prosodic analysis that we have, and is regularly recommended to students embarking on this aspect of phonological theory, especially since its republication in 1970 in Palmer's *Prosodic analysis*.

A glance at her bibliography, however, shows that South-East Asian languages by no means exhaust her fields of interest. She has contributed papers on typological and historical topics at international congresses (e.g. Henderson 1965b, *Indo-Pacific linguistic studies Pt.II*), and has published phonetic studies of Ossetic (e.g. Henderson 1949) and of other Caucasian languages. In this latter area, her article 'Acoustic features of certain consonants and consonant clusters in Kabardian' (Henderson 1970b), though quite brief, has become something of a classic in the literature of experimental phonetics.

British phoneticians look back with pride on the great nineteenth-century phonetician and Anglist Henry Sweet, and Firth himself often claimed that his prosodic theory was, in part, a development of ideas latent in Sweet's own work. Sweet's writings were voluminous, and in 1971 Eugénie Henderson performed a valuable service to anyone concerned with the history of phonetics and phonology by selecting and making available the most important passages from his books and articles in a single book, *The indispensable foundation: a selection from the writings of Henry Sweet* (Henderson 1971).

It was also the happiest of circumstances that in the month in which she retired Professor Henderson was honoured by the world community of linguists in speaking as an invited *rapporteur*, at the Plenary Session on Phonetics and Phonology, on the present state and the prospects of this branch of linguistics, at the Thirteenth International Congress of Linguists in Tokyo in September 1982. In this year she was also elected a Fellow of University College London and, in 1984, President of the Philological Society.

NOTE

1. The exigencies of wartime language teaching left an indelible and ultimately treasured impression on those of us who were involved in it. I have a vivid personal memory from 1944 of Eugénie Henderson and myself shouting each other down while endeavouring to conduct simultaneous classes in Japanese pronunciation and Japanese grammar as we sheltered with our students (all service personnel) in the corridor of our departmental territory, to avoid the worst effects of *Vergeltungswaffen I*, affectionately known as 'doodlebugs'.

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