

Letters

To the Editor:

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May I be permitted to repeat once more comments expressed in many publications which have to do with one of the existing principles for the phonetic alphabet? They relate to the idea of symbolizing 'distinctive' sounds (*JIPA* 16: 25).

There are two sorts of 'w' (and 'k^w') in languages: one is 'more-rounded' than the vowels it is tautosyllabic with; and one is just 'rounded'. These develop differently. The latter (cf. Anglo-Saxon [w] and Latin [k^w]) get absorbed into a following rounded [o] or [u], whereas the 'more-rounded' variety do not – indeed, they become //v// following a tautosyllabic nucleus. All this has nothing to do with their distinctiveness – they aren't distinct in any language known to me, unless Swedish over-round vowels are taken into consideration.

Secondly, take consonantal (non-nuclear) diphthongs like English [t^s] or [d^z] and nuclear diphthongs like English [a^o] (= [a^u] in those 'Keltic' areas which have it). These UNITS (with offsets or releases) develop differently from bisegmental (usually heterosyllabic or, in the case of nuclei, at least bimoric) sequences like [t^s əz̩ ae]. While [a^u] and [a^o] are distinctive in some languages, they are hardly so in any variety of English. In any case they develop differently, since the latter may yield [a:] (monophthongization) or [ɔ:] (mutual assimilation or de-polarization), while [a^u] yields [o:]. Similarly, [a^e] yields [a:] or (oftener) [ɛ:], while [aⁱ] develops into [e:], and moreover develops (as [a^e] does not) an intrusive //y// before an immediately following nucleus. At all events, both develop differently from the corresponding bimoric sequences – just as diphthongal [t^s d^z] develop differently from their bisegmental relatives.

In short, if linguistics is ever to develop an explanatory-predictive 'theory', its notations must DISTINGUISH sounds concerning which different developmental predictions are to be made REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY ARE PHONOLOGICALLY 'DISTINCTIVE' OR NOT. In fact, phonological distinctiveness is irrelevant here. I suggest we need some other criterion in place of this one. I propose 'developmentally relevant' in place of 'distinctive'. PHONETICS – data in a certain level of abstraction or analysis – should be kept separate from, and as neutral as possible with respect to, PHONOLOGY – the analysis of sound systems, though not cut off: they must have many 'feeding relations' with one another if they are on the right course!

(Although one might have wished to see some harder evidence in support of Professor Bailey's claims about divergent sound development, his central comment questioning the suitability of the phonemic principle underlying the IPA alphabet is certain to receive close scrutiny and, no doubt, some sympathy at the 1989 Kiel meeting (see Ladefoged and Roach (1987) 'Revising the International Phonetic Alphabet: A plan'. *JIPA* 16, 22–29. —Ed.)