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In memoriam David Stampe (1938-2020)

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David Stampe left us on June 23rd, ten days after his birthday. He had just turned 82. A great linguist and a marvelous human being is gone. We will miss his intelligent sense of humor, his deep sense of friendship. On his son John's page, among numerous comments of condolence, Jay Pollack says that David Stampe was a fascinating guy. Gigi Glover adds that he was amazingly kind, gentle, and humble. As John S. Chadwick puts it, his was a lovely soul. I cannot agree more.

I am sure that there is much more than I can tell in Stampe's human and academic history. From his always so enjoyable conversation I could only glimpse immense and deep experiences, a life where not one minute had been wasted. I met David Stampe and Patricia Donegan through Bernhard Hurch, whom I will always thank for that opportunity and for introducing me to Natural Phonology. I attended their talks and enjoyed their company in three conferences in Europe (Klagenfurt 1996, Gniezno 2008, Forlì 2008). In 2002 I had the wonderful opportunity to spend a few months in Hawaii as a pupil in David Stampe's and Patricia Donegan's courses, and receiver of their hospitality.

So this tribute will mainly be focused on that part of David Stampe that I got to know better. I am writing to pay homage to David Stampe, for making us think and learn about phonology, about language, and about ourselves as speakers and linguists.

David Stampe was the founder of Natural Phonology (NP), probably the most distinctive theory of phonology issued during the last third of the 20th century. The denomination *natural*, neatly justified by several arguments offered on the first pages of the seminal «The study of Natural Phonology» (Donegan & Stampe 1979), is

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ironically self-criticized thirty years later in a footnote of a work (Donegan & Stampe 2009: 7), which could perhaps be read as a historical updating of that 1979 paper. It is at any rate an inspiring model of honest intelligence fighting to understand and be understood without compromise in the face of a complex reality. Stampe believed that phonology is natural, not conventional like other components of language: phonology has a sense, an explanation, which will never come from «monolithic» perspectives (distinctiveness, economy). At this point, I cannot resist quoting here my favourite lines:

If one were the god of language, free to create any sort of system for mortals to adapt difficult sounds to their limited speech capacities, one would surely reject a system involving such atomistic responses to specific difficulties as these individual processes represent, and instead attempt to devise a unified, global system. However, nature has not managed to furnish such system. The pronunciations of children and of adult languages reveal themselves to be the result of numbers of substitutions which, however natural they may seem individually, have collective results which are perversely cross-purposeful. (Stampe 1979: 17)

David Stampe's Dissertation (Stampe 1979), originally written in 1972, is worth some room on its own.¹ It is, without any doubt, an obligatory reading or re-reading, not only in order to avoid oblivion and ignorance of very fundamental aspects of NP, but for anyone trying to have a deep understanding of phonology.

The *Afterthoughts* written as endnotes to the 1979 edition would deserve a thorough and systematic analysis of the relationship between their content and the original 1972 text: what they add, what they correct, what they specify, what they announce, etc. Some of them constitute condensed papers (like Afterthought 8, where the revolutionary work done by Donegan and Stampe on the syllable and the prosodic dimension of processes is resumed and linked to its first announcement in the Dissertation).

Reading the Dissertation is also necessary to obtain full benefit of the rest of his writings, even for the seminal Donegan and Stampe (1979) paper. This is, on its turn, another obligatory reading, of course. Together with the above mentioned Donegan & Stampe 2009.

If one wants to see the consistent rise of Stampe's fundamental ideas, there are other essential readings like (if one is lucky enough to have a copy of the manuscript) the delicious «Yes, Virginia, ...» (Stampe 1968). Or the at least chronologically fundamental paper written in 1969 «The acquisition of phonetic representation» (Stampe [1969]1979): pay attention to «phonetic» and to «acquisition», they are keys to the theory... but this is no place to go any further in that direction. «On chapter nine» (Stampe 1973) is also a must to understand important parts of the history of phonology, and how explanatory functions were lost; and «On the two levels of phonological representations» (Stampe 1985), or «On phonological representations» (Stampe 1987).

¹ David Stampe's dissertation (University of Chicago 1973) was circulated in 1972 as «How I spent my summer vacation» (Donegan & Stampe 2009: 39). The title gives evidence of his sense of humor; the date shows the delay in the expansion of stampean ideas.

However his solo works are not enough to study David Stampe's phonology. This tribute to our professor would be incomplete if it would not mention the essential complicity of Patricia Donegan, his colleague, his wife, his inspiration, his coauthor from the late 70's on. Even if it were possible to completely separate academic from personal life (something that only ignorance of one or the other may allow), it would be impossible to imagine David Stampe without Patricia Donegan.

Patricia [Miller] Donegan is already present well before their joint productions are published. Evidence is easy to find. Stampe (1972: 579) himself acknowledged that her theory of vowel systems «is the basis for the explanations» he proposed.

Apart from the already mentioned joint publications, they together authored great pieces of phonological thinking on prosody, like their impressive paper «The syllable in phonological and prosodic structure» (Donegan & Stampe 1978), an ontological treatise on the syllable that nobody interested in understanding the syllable should miss. Along that same path of prosody (so tightly captured as the main ground of living phonology at least since Donegan & Stampe 1979), it is with Donegan that Stampe developed his ideas on prosodic typology (Donegan & Stampe 1983, 2004). This groundbreaking «branch» of the NP theory (he said they would not have come up with their proposal, had their background not been the NP commitment with explanation) has been highly successful also among researchers outside NP, like the leading Basque etymologist and director of this journal Joseba Lakarra (see, among others, Lakarra 2006, 2013).

Although Stampe's published writings are relatively few, often not so long either, the task of reading them is not light: they are synthetic, dense, full of deep ideas. Paradoxical as this may sound in this era so heavily conditioned by quantitative criteria, one never has enough time to read enough Stampe. But we should do it and not miss something essential, his ways of reasoning, his choices and theoretical priorities, his words, his terminological sophistication, the *attitude* with which he faces phonology. I dare to say that that is precisely the kind of thing that is too often ignored by phonologists and phoneticians both outside and inside NP in these hasty times.

One may think that older texts may be outdated, that they belong to another era, that, for instance, confrontation with the structuralist view of phonology (or with the first proposals of the generativist school) belongs to the past, to the time when these papers and books were first published. But my experience in conferences, courses and workshops on experimental phonetics, on language acquisition, pathology, etc. shows that the structuralist paradigm and conceptualization are still very common references.

It is in fact not rare that scholars identify the framework of NP with some version of Generative Phonology. Phoneticians, phonologists, psycholinguists working on language acquisition, and other specialists often have very partial views of NP. What Richard Wojcik (2009b) said more than ten years ago is still too often true: «most linguists are generative linguists, and it is not unusual for scholars to see the work of others in terms of how well it relates to their own». Indeed Wojcik launched in 2009 a blog out of his concern about the misunderstandings and scarce knowledge of NP, as

[...] an outlet for what some of us take to be a very revolutionary theory of phonology. Ironically, Natural Phonology can also be described as reactionary, because it

is something of a throwback to Jan Niecisław Ignacy Baudouin de Courtenay's original concept of phonological theory. (Wojcik 2009a)

The blog has never been extremely active, but it still is an illuminating showcase for anyone interested in NP's theoretical bases and developments. Stampe's own voice can be found commenting on several important ideas like the nature of phonemic representations (under Wojcik 2009b). David Stampe asks why, develops ideas, finds inconsistencies and wants to understand, he proposes explanations and he intensely tries to convince with solid arguments, where the mental nature of phonology has a place of its own in the phonetics-phonology interplay (I highly recommend his comment to Nathan's post of February 18, 2009 trying to clear up some issues of Donegan & Stampe 2009).

Someone once told me that NP did not sound as much as linguistics but rather as some kind of philosophy. That is the sign of our time, understanding and ideas are considered to be outside phonology. For what I know, David Stampe did not fight back: he was so deeply interested in understanding, so involved in it that caring about theoretical rivalries was simply out of scope for him. He did not have the time for that. After teaching at The Ohio State University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he had finally found happiness and freedom in Hawaii with Patricia (he taught at the University of Hawaii at Manoa). He needed his days to enjoy life, his family, his friends, to play music and understand prosody.

That attitude of sincere interest may be part of the clue to his general behavior towards other human beings, for his social compromise and authentic sense of friendship. A wise man is gone. His departure is a great loss not only for phonology and thought: phonologists, other linguists and many other people who had the privilege to know him will miss an important part of their lives.

We will always be in debt for all of that. Thank you, David: you gave us plenty of homework simply rereading what you wrote, so little (they say), so immense (we say): *pauca sed bona*.

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